

Dear Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Wildfire,

My name is Lacey; I'm the manager of a small non-profit farmers market in SW Portland. I am writing to express my strong support for **HB 2979**, and to urge continued investment in Oregon's farmers markets, which serve as critical infrastructure for local economies, small farms, and food access programs.

Farms and farmers markets alike are experiencing both extreme weather and economic challenges. Heat waves, wildfires, droughts, and storms disrupt operations and threaten vendors' livelihoods. The rising costs of small business and farm operation cripple vendors at the same time that shoppers find their spending power diminished. Farmers markets, especially outdoor and year-round markets, face the challenge of remaining open safely and attracting shoppers to support vendors under these conditions. The funding proposed under HB 2979 provides critical support for responding to these challenges and ensuring that markets remain open, accessible, and sustainable for our communities and our regional food systems.

The **Farmers Market Climate Resilience Grant Fund** and **SNAP support grants** have been lifelines for farmers markets across the state, helping with infrastructure upgrades and heat/smoke/freeze mitigation strategies, as well as expanding SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks programs for our food insecure community members. But demand for these grants far exceeds available funding—grant requests would have required more than double the resources OFMA has to distribute. Without renewed investment through HB 2979, farmers markets will struggle to continue serving our communities of vendors and shoppers.

In the last three and a half years of working at Hillsdale Farmers' Market (HFM), I have seen our SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks usage decline consistently; extended pandemic food assistance programs have been phased out, rising prices have tightened family budgets, and our SNAP shoppers are finding it harder to spend their limited dollars at farmers markets. In the past two years, HFM has leveraged Double Up Food Bucks Growth Grants - funded by HB2979 - to directly reach out to lower-income neighbors, increase visible market signage and decrease stigma around SNAP usage, in an effort to connect SNAP shoppers with our food access programs and the fresh produce our farmers bring to market.

The 2024 Climate Resilient Farmers Markets Grant - also supported by HB 2979 - has enabled us to purchase equipment to establish a year-round shelter tent for shoppers in our market, offering a place to shelter from the elements, whether those are rain, snow, or extreme heat. We've purchased water jugs, a misting system for summer markets, and hand warmers for our winter vendors. All of these pieces add up to a more tolerable and enjoyable market experience for both vendors and shoppers, and have noticeably increased our vendor and shopper satisfaction.

Oregon Farmers Markets Association (OFMA) and Farmers Market Fund (FMF) can leverage state funds to match federal funding, strengthening our farmers markets and local food systems. We cannot afford to fall behind.

Please support HB 2979 to keep our state's farmers markets strong, our small farmers supported, and our communities fed.

Thank you,

Lacey Waldon
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