

## Testimony in Support of HB2979

February 4, 2025

My name is Michael Hale and I am a first-generation rancher from Wallowa County operating on leased private land. I am writing today to support HB 2979 and tell you how crucial it is that we continue our investment in the local food system by supporting small farms and ranches and the outlets that they depend on. These small businesses and their stakeholders bring economic opportunity to rural Oregon and connect us to urban markets. We need to make sure that these vital small businesses can withstand the natural disasters, worsening storms, and unpredictable weather that has been increasing in recent years.

This personally impacts me because my ranch has been affected by increasingly unpredictable weather including wildfires, flash floods and drought. Programs like HB 2979 bring greatly needed funding opportunities to ranching operations like mine which provide value-added meat products through direct marketing to a regional customer base. The impacts of increasingly frequent, unpredictable and severe weather events are costly, in dollars, time, energy and stress. Having programs like HB 2979 which provide funding for smaller ranches and farms to plan and implement resiliency projects is a key resource in helping us adapt and continue to serve our customers and contribute to the local economy.

An example of a resiliency project that this funding could help me with on my ranch is improving soil health through the addition of organic matter and improved rotational grazing. Access to funding like HB 2979 could help cover the costs to implement this type of soil health project, including materials for solar electric fencing and portable livestock watering, and equipment to spread manure and efficiently mow weeds. My ranch is still recovering from a severe wildfire in 2022 with costly repairs to boundary fences and other critical infrastructure making it hard to fund resiliency projects that other programs cannot help with.

We need Oregon to renew its commitment to our small farms and local food system. Investment in a more regionalized food system helps keep our communities fed and minimizes the negative effects of fluctuations of the dominant food supply chains. These local and regional food options are a vital part of our wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and the future of food. Please support HB 2979.

Thank you,

Michael Hale

Joseph, Oregon