

02/04/2025

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

My name is Dustin Rymph, and I work for a nonprofit in the Oakridge-Westfir area. I am registering my firm support for Oregon HB 2979. I have been involved with the local Oakridge Community Farmers Market since its inception. As part of a graduate school internship, I completed an analysis of the Oakridge local food system. My conclusion at the time, and my current belief, is that the success of this community oriented farmers market would not be successful without the support of a local food hub and, especially, the acceptance of SNAP benefits. The Oakridge area is in the 95th percentile for poverty statewide. In addition, the grocery prices for fresh produce at local grocery stores can be as much as twice the cost as they would be at some grocery stores in Eugene, a 45 minute drive.

The amount of unpaid volunteer effort it's taken to coordinate these benefits and this market is incalculable. I have watched volunteers from the Westfir-Oakridge Local Food Hub, along with the local Food Box, pour their blood, sweat, and tears into this endeavor. I fear that without support, the incredible progress made toward a successful farmers market- a prospect that many called impossible just a few years ago- would start to fall apart. I have no lack of faith in the commitment of local organizers and farmers (who I also worked for last year). However, a food system that works for the local community and improves social, mental, and physical health, will always be a labor of love. Leveraging matching funding from HB 2979 can help to sustain and bolster the infrastructure and workforce needed to uphold our local food system for years beyond the expiration of these funds.

In sincere gratitude,

Dustin Rymph

Oakridge-Westfir Local Food Hub/Oakridge Community Farmers Market

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