

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

My name is Mae Pettit, and I am a People's Farmers' Market community member from Portland. I am writing to strongly support **HB 2979**, and urge continued investment in Oregon's **farmers markets**, which serve as critical infrastructure for local economies, small farms, and food access programs.

The **Farmers Market Climate Resilience Grant Fund** and **SNAP support grants** have been lifelines, helping markets upgrade infrastructure, implement cooling and smoke mitigation strategies, and expand SNAP/Double Up Food Bucks programs. But demand **far exceeds available funding**—grant requests would have required more than double the resources OFMA has to distribute. Without renewed investment, farmers markets will struggle to continue serving their communities.

These programs impact me personally because I'm someone who has relied on the accessibility of healthy, whole foods from the earth, which I cannot usually afford. Being someone who experiences health issues means that I need farmers to get the food that nourishes my body and keeps me and my community healthy and strong. On a broader scale, the existence of farmers markets throughout Portland is a tangible way we can decrease healthy, whole food deserts and bridge the socio-economic segregation that still exists in our communities. Creating more barriers and accessibility issues for Portland residents would be detrimental to the communities our local farms and farmers serve. Not only would a lack of funding impact local residents it would also impact those who visit our city and invest their time and money into our communities through their participation in farmers markets. Its not merely a place to get food, it is a cultural hub where adults and children alike can have basic human needs met through connecting with one another and our food sources. In addition, being educated, or re-educated, on the importance of sustainability practices, investing in our communities, supporting small-businesses and supporting those who put in the back-breaking work to feed us whole foods.

- How important is SNAP/DUFB to your market? The reality of the world we live in today is that our food access is dependent on our income. Most families are forced to buy highly processed foods because the prices of whole, nutritious foods have been commodified in such a way that they seem like a luxury rather than a necessity. Because SNAP/DUFB helps to offset the expense of making better choices when we go to our local farmers' market, we can ensure healthier communities, a stronger work force and more well-nourished bodies. Farmers markets are a place where people of differing socio-economic status can connect.

This connection strengthens our communities, fostering a rich tapestry of relationships, that moves us toward more equity in food access.

I personally work in the food service industry and can barely afford to eat the food I serve, let alone the ever-increasing cost of clean, nutritious foods that come from the predominant grocery stores in Portland. This funding enables me to make better choices and is a way of my city showing me I am valued in this community, and I deserve the same dignity, respect and access as someone who is of higher economic status. Investment in this program is an investment in our communities and the workforce that serves them.

- How important is keeping the market open, in times of extreme weather and climate change? Food is a necessity for community members all year round and, as winter is the slowest season for many of us, it is also an important time to continue to support our networks of farmers, gardeners and makers. As our weather continues to shift due to climate change, it is no longer as predictable and reliable as it once was. Without access to spaces that enable our local farmers to sell their food could ruin a farm, or small business, in a matter of months. Not only that, but the community's need for food does not subside in extreme weather and the unpredictability of climate change. There is, and will always be, a demand for food. Humans have generated a variety of farming practices that enable us to keep up with that demand, however, if the market closes for long periods due to the *possibility* of bad weather the small-scale systems break down and become more challenging to regenerate. The ripple effect continues with an increase of barriers imposed on those the markets serve, those who rely on our local farms, not just financially, but emotionally, mentally and physically.
- How important is it to you to support local farms and farmers? It is *extremely* important to me that I support, and have a connection with, the people who grow my food. Supporting small means that we have a variety of clean food sources rather than a monopoly. When we have multiple, small, local sources of food we can address the potential for contaminants with greater success. If one crop of 50 is contaminated, we can still be supplied by an alternative farm. If there is a few mega-farms that are compromised, our food becomes an epidemic. Local farms and farmers matter to me because I want to eat from the land of which I live. I believe in investing in our local, and surrounding, communities and members that serve us on such a basic level. Whether I'm connecting with them directly, or trusting my co-op to build the relationship, trust and transparency about where our food comes from is vital. Not only because I want clean, healthy, whole food, but also because the

connection to the humans that work together to sustain this exchange is just as important as the food itself. Without local farms and farmers, the cost of food would skyrocket, creating a bigger disparity in food access.

OFMA and Farmers Market Fund 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 markets strong, our farmers supported, and our communities fed.**

**Thank you,**

Mae Pettit

PEOPLE'S FARMERS' MARKET