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February 1, 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 Carrie Juchau and I am the Executive Director of the Josephine County Farm Collective Food Hub located in Grants Pass, Oregon. I am writing today to support HB 2979 and express 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; especially farmers markets and food hubs. These community institutions provide essential services and outreach that connect communities to local agricultural producers in rural Oregon.

Josephine County, in particular, is severely impacted by a lack of resources that normally provide access to local food, nutritional educational programs and small farm economic development. We are the only county in the state of Oregon without an OSU Extension Service or agricultural support resources from a Soil and Water District that ordinarily support economic development, education and disaster/resiliency programs. Our food bank closes often when severe weather or wildfire conditions displace families and food is needed the most. Our homeless camps are constantly closing leaving people unsheltered during severe weather with nowhere to go, and funding for our long-term warming/cooling shelter has become unavailable.

Many residents in Southern Oregon rural areas are required to drive over 45 miles to the nearest grocery store and the #2 barrier to accessing healthy food is a lack of transportation. Despite limited food subsidies available, residents are unable to use them because they cannot drive to a grocery store or farmers market. Food hubs provide a centralized point where local producers drop off freshly harvested produce, meats, nuts, grains, etc. which are then aggregately distributed to families in need. We are authorized to accept federal and state food subsidies and deliver to resident homes ensuring access to healthy dietary options.

This bill personally impacts our food hub, over 40 small agricultural food producers and thousands of community residents depending on our services in a severely underserved, rural area of Southern Oregon where both producers and consumers are rurally isolated.

The Josephine County Farm Collective food hub fills the voids with services that connect rural areas through increased agricultural sales outlets, online marketplaces, shared infrastructure, access to local food, and provides educational nutrition assistance programs that spread these fresh Oregon grown fruits, vegetables, and meats to people who might not otherwise be able to get them.

The pandemic demonstrated how disrupted traditional food systems leave rural areas without food and supplies, and a dire need to strengthen the resiliency of a local food system. We need to make sure that these vital small businesses can withstand natural disasters, severe storms, and unpredictable weather with proactive plans rather than reactive repetitive setbacks.

- Food Hub/ Shared Kitchen Operators Provide:
  - New infrastructure that allows us to create a larger market for local producers with expanded services.
  - New infrastructure allows me to extend sourcing and sales opportunities into more regional markets within Oregon.
  - Healthy food and educational programming responding to increased demand from customers lacking access to any other source.
  - Educational programming for producers that focus on resiliency and sustainable plans in the face of disasters.
  - Over \$80,000 during the last two years reinvested into our own economy through food donations to food banks, pop up food pantries, direct deliveries to families in need and 13 other community based organizations.
  - Assurances that producers receive a living wage for the food that they produce.
  - Shared infrastructure such as cold storage, dry storage, distribution of product, packhouse staff, administrative support, and coordinated bulk purchasing to reduce costs.

It is time for Oregon to renew its commitment to our small farms and local food system. They keep our communities fed and insulated from the fluctuations of the centralized food supply chain. They are a vital part of our collective wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and the future of food. We are Neighbors Feeding Neighbors and growing strength through this economic support and resiliency planning. Please support HB 2979.

Thank you,

*Carrie Juchau*

Carrie Juchau  
Executive Director  
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Grants Pass, OR