

Submitter: Halle Riddlebarger  
On Behalf Of: Medford Food Co-op  
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2979

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

My name is Halle Riddlebarger and I'm writing on behalf of Medford Food Co-op. Medford Food Co-op is a local community-owned grocery store located in Medford, Oregon. The Co-op is cooperatively-owned by almost 5,000 community members. We feature organic produce from local farmers and a variety of local and regional products, from fresh produce to bulk goods to beer and wine. We exist to cultivate a thriving local food economy, and a vibrant, inclusive community.

We are writing today to support HB 2979 and to 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, especially farmers markets and food hubs. These community institutions not only bring economic opportunity into rural Oregon, they connect urban and rural areas through agricultural marketplaces, provide access to local food, and tap into nutrition assistance programs that spread these fresh Oregon grown fruits, vegetables, and meats to people who might not otherwise be able to get them. 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.

Medford Food Co-op owners and shoppers prioritize community food systems and believe food hubs and farmers markets are essential businesses providing safe and reliable access to nutritionally dense food for our communities. In addition to stimulating local economies, farmers markets and food hubs incubate and grow small farm businesses and help them reach new customers. Small farms and local community food systems are good for rural economies: generating jobs, income, and cycling more dollars through the local economy than commodity farms.

Medford Food Co-op supports HB2979 because climate resilience and planning is vital for our region, and small farmers need support and access to resources as we continue to weather drought, recover from the devastating wildfires, and prepare for an unknown future. We have seen the negative effects of climate change on our local food system in recent years, and we believe 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. Please support HB 2979.

Thank you,

Halle Riddlebarger  
Outreach Manager  
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Medford, Oregon