



567 Walker Ave
Ashland, OR 97520

INFO@ROGUEFOODUNITES.ORG

February 19, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Human Services Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of Rogue Food Unites, I am writing to request an additional investment of \$25M into the public health modernization budget to build resilient and healthy communities.

Rogue Food Unites (RFU) was founded in 2020 in response to the dual disasters of the Labor Day Fires and the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Jackson County residents. Between September 2020 and June 2023, RFU provided over 1.6 million meals to fire affected communities. In January 2024, RFU distributed 1,000 provision boxes and recirculated \$73,977.20 through the affected communities by contracting with local restaurants to provide 3,740 meals to individuals affected by the ice storms along the I-5 corridor. Since September 2020, Rogue Food Unites has recirculated over \$30M through local restaurants and farms, ensuring that community members facing hardships can access fresh, locally sourced meals while helping sustain the regional economy.

Our organization represents one of the 195 community-based organizations that receives Public Health Modernization funding through the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). OHA funding has been a critical source of support for two of our key programs, the Neighbor's Unite: No Cost, No Barrier Farmers' Market and our community disaster preparedness training and education.

With the help of OHA funds, we serve approximately 2,000 individuals across 600 households at three locations in Jackson County through our Farmers' Market program weekly. On average, 50% of households served have at least one child under the age of 18; 42% have at least one household member who is 60 or older; and 29% of households have at least one person who identifies with having a disability.

Our goal with the Farmers' Market program is to provide our community with both comfort and nutrition, helping mitigate the negative health outcomes associated with limited access to nutritious food. This support is especially vital for people who are excluded from or intimidated by accessing traditional food resources. To ensure accessibility, RFU does not require any paperwork, ID, proof of loss or impact from disasters, or any other documentation to participate in our programs. Markets are intentionally located along bus routes and at three distinct locations, ensuring we reach diverse communities, including rural populations.

Rogue Food Unites is a tax-exempt 501 c 3 organization per IRS guidelines, EIN #85-3168023.



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Every week, our markets see more patrons that we can fully support. We serve around 200 families per market, and often hear from patrons that the need is great within their families and communities. The depth of need for supportive programs combatting food insecurity is demonstrated by our community's dedication to showing up, even at the end of markets when supplies are running low and patrons know they may not go home with much.

Through testimonials, patrons attest to the value of resources, and that providing our community with locally grown organic food is an effective public health strategy.

“Rogue Food Unites provides me with the type of healthy, nutritious foods I aspire to eat but could not afford on my own. I am a severe diabetic and sincerely believe the quality organic vegetables I receive from them are helping to prolong my life. They have introduced some new items to me and in addition to the food they share preparation tips and recipes that help me live a healthier life.”

“RFU helps those who have been most affected - our community members who are elderly, unhoused, economically insecure, including those with underlying health issues, with particular care for culturally specific needs.”

Beyond providing food, our markets are a source of community for patrons, connecting neighbors and making our communities more resilient. The markets are also making the Southern Oregon food system more resilient as a whole, by prioritizing local purchasing for the large volumes of food we distribute.

OHA funds have also supported our efforts to prepare our patrons and their families for wildfires and other emergencies that might impact our region. Many of our patrons were directly impacted by the Almeda Fires, and it is critical that our communities are prepared for the next disaster. Our staff trained in disaster preparedness through Oregon's Office of Resilience and Emergency Management's Be 2 Weeks Ready Program engage directly with patrons at the Farmers' Markets, offering emergency preparedness education and resources. **Within three markets, RFU has helped 375 households access resources to better prepare for potential disasters.**

OHA's Current Public Health Modernization Budget is \$110M General Fund and represents essential funding for Local Public Health Authorities, Tribal, OHA, and community-based organizations like ours who are working in partnership with the State.

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We are requesting an additional investment of \$25M into the public health modernization budget. The additional \$2M proposed in the Governor's recommended budget does not provide the level of funding that is truly needed to address the unmet public health needs that exist in our state.

With this additional funding, RFU and other CBO's like us, working to strengthen public health, will be able to better reach people who are in critical need of resources and continue building resilient communities. Setting a community up for success in disaster response must include everybody. With additional and continued support, this goal becomes achievable.

Thank you for your consideration of this important investment into Oregon's public health capacity, and for the opportunity to share the work we are doing in communities across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amber Ferguson".

Amber Ferguson
Executive Director