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Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 13, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz and members of the Committee,

Hello, my name is Lola Milholland. I'm the CEO and co-founder of Umi Organic, a noodle company based in Portland, Oregon that makes organic whole grain yakisoba noodles served in public schools around the state. I'm writing in full support of SB 5515, which appropriates moneys from the General Fund to the Department of Education for the Farm to School Grant Program.

I write as a beneficiary of this program. In 2019, my company first made and sold yakisoba noodles to Portland Public Schools. Since then, we've sold to over two dozen districts around the state, leveraged our school customers to get placement in large distributors, and built a steady pipeline of ingredients from Oregon suppliers. Across five years, including through the pandemic, we've sold over 200,000 pounds of yakisoba noodles to Oregon schools. I am in business *because* of this grant program!

As a small regional business committed to organic ingredients, Umi Organic can't compete on price with large corporations that have economies of scale and a different suite of ethics. Lynne Shore, nutrition service director in Oregon's Willamina district, told me she budgets around \$1.88 for food and \$2.11 for labor and benefits per meal. That's very little to work with! But Oregon districts can afford our product due to the state grant program.

In turn, we buy local flour, circulating the money we receive locally. In a regional food system, food travels shorter distances and guzzles less gas. And when the combination of Covid and the war in Ukraine contracted global flour supplies, we could still source our ingredients directly, ensuring there was food for families who depend on school meals.

Higher level data from Oregon State University shows this economic reverberation in action: For each job created by school districts purchasing local foods, successive rounds of economic

activity create another .8 jobs. For every dollar the state invests in the procurement grant policy, another \$1.20 is created in Oregon's state gross domestic product for a total of \$2.20. These are smart, powerful investments.

But economics are not the only reason to fund this program in full. Others include the pride companies feel feeding kids in their communities (I attest to this from personal experience!); the excitement and energy nutrition directors bring to their jobs when they get to build relationships with local producers and share the best of our state with kids; and the expanded appetites and nourishment kids get when food tastes great, represents their cultures, and feeds into the health of their communities.

I encourage you to fund the full \$12 million. In light of the more than \$6 million cut in federal funding for local foods by the USDA, we need to do everything we can to bolster public school meals. Thank you so much for your public service and for taking the time to read our testimonies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lola Milholland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lola Milholland
CEO, Umi Organic