

Submitter: Lola Milholland
On Behalf Of: Umi Organic
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On
Natural Resources
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5502

March 13, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative Levy 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 the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget.

In 2019, my company began making and selling 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.

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. Oregon districts can afford our product due to the state farm to school grant program. In turn, we buy local flour, circulating the money we receive locally.

Selling to schools is very different than selling to other customers. They speak a different language that originates in the federal nutrition standards. They need specific pack sizes and forms. Everything they buy must meet specific standards and be easy to prepare in an oven. Even distribution to schools is a very specific challenge. For all these reasons, local producers working on small budgets are at a disadvantage when competing for school contracts. But there are so many reasons to invest in our local businesses and their capacity to sell to schools.

Higher level data from Oregon State University shows the economic reverberation of farm to school 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.

Economics are not the only reason to fund this grant program that helps local producers serve schools needs. 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 ask that you support this grant program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget at \$1 million. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lola Milholland
CEO, Umi Organic