

## Testimony in Support of HB2979

April 23, 2025

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

My name is Michael Hale and I am a first-generation rancher from Wallowa County operating on leased private land. I am writing today to support HB 2979 and urge you to continue this investment in our regional food system with funding to support Oregon's farmers, ranchers, food hubs, and farmers markets. These small businesses and their stakeholders bring economic opportunity to rural Oregon and connect us to urban markets. This funding helps ensure vital food businesses can withstand the natural disasters, worsening storms, and unpredictable weather that have been increasing in recent years.

This personally impacts me because my ranch has been directly affected by increasingly unpredictable weather events including wildfires, flash floods and drought. Food Systems Resilience Programs like HB 2979 bring greatly needed funding opportunities to ranching operations like mine which provide value-added meat products through direct marketing to a regional customer base.

The impacts of increasingly frequent, unpredictable and severe weather events are costly, in dollars, time, energy and stress. Having programs like HB 2979 which provide funding for smaller ranches and farms to plan and implement resiliency projects is a key resource in helping us adapt and continue to serve our customers and contribute to the local economy. An example of a resiliency project that this funding is helping me with on my ranch is improving soil health through the addition of organic matter and improved rotational grazing.

My soil health project requires purchase of materials for additional solar electric fencing and portable livestock watering, and equipment to spread manure and efficiently mow weeds. I recently received a small Farmer Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant to help cover the cost of a ground-driven manure spreader. This funding makes it possible for me to proceed with the soil health project. My ranch is still recovering from a severe wildfire in 2022 with costly repairs to boundary fences and other critical infrastructure making it hard to fund resiliency projects that other programs cannot help me with.

Local and regional food options are a vital part of our wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and the future of food. Please support HB 2979.

Thank you,

Michael Hale

Joseph, Oregon