

Testimony for HB 2921 before the House Committee on Health Care, March 25, 2013
Rebecca Landis on behalf of the Oregon Farmers' Markets Association

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2961. We hope you'll be able to send it on with a do pass to await the May revenue forecast.

I have had the privilege of managing farmers' markets since 1995, just before Oregon began offering coupons for participants in the Women, Infants & Children program to spend in farmers' markets. A few years later we added the Senior component, and the Farm Direct Nutrition Program was extended to farm stands.

While I spend a lot of time and energy on growing SNAP in Oregon farmers' markets, it's worth stopping to appreciate some special qualities of the WIC FDNP, a modestly sized program that educates as it feeds.

The FDNPs are the only state/federal nutrition programs that focus solely on fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs. And they are the only such programs aimed at sales to farm direct growers, who spend those additional revenues right in their local communities.

Farmers who accept WIC FDNP are not the sort of farmers who are accustomed to cushy payments under the federal Farm Bill. A segment of them might be income eligible for nutrition assistance.

We see multi-generation family groups using vouchers in farmers' markets, and I'm sure that is also true at farm stands. Without FDNP, many families might never be introduced to the benefits of buying fresh produce direct from the grower.

Some families stretch their vouchers over weeks or months, while others buy in quantity to save money on preserving foods. Either way, I am thrilled to see kids learning how to manage food budgets and enhance the quality of family meals.

When I get calls from clients seeking to use their FDNP, I find it's an opportunity to make sure WIC and Senior participants are aware that they can use their Oregon Trail card at farmers' market. Eligibility is not the same, but there is some overlap.

The state WIC program operates FDNP in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Through the years both agencies have worked hard to improve the program and make the connection to the Senior FDNP as seamless as possible.

Markets in Oregon were especially honored when the state WIC program chose to use part of a federal breastfeeding bonus to supplement allotments for the 2012 season.