



and the Oregon Food Bank Network

Serving Oregon and
Clark County, WA

Testimony in support of House Bill 2992
Senate Health Care and Human Services
Submitted by Phillip Kennedy-Wong, Policy Advocate
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Mission:

*To eliminate
hunger and its
root causes. . .
because no
one should
be hungry.*

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Oregon Food Bank supports House Bill 2992. Fresh fruits and vegetables are key to a nutritious diet, especially for pregnant mothers, infants, and seniors. This bill allows Oregon to administer the Farm Direct Nutrition Program if Congress fails to re-authorize key provisions of the Farm Bill. This was the case in 2012. A one-year extension was passed as part of the fiscal cliff agreement, but this left the Farm Direct Nutrition Program without funding for three months. Because state funding is contingent on federal authorization of the program, this meant Oregon seniors with low incomes lost not only federal assistance, but also state assistance through the program.

Next to having your own garden, which is not possible for everyone, the most available source of locally grown produce for consumers is farmers markets. Locally grown produce spend more time in the field, thus benefiting from longer ripening periods and more nutrients. Whereas out-of-state and overseas products may be harvested prematurely in order to survive lengthy transit times without spoiling. Because of the growing popularity and availability, it can be very convenient for Oregonians to now shop for their produce at farmers markets and roadside stands.

For vulnerable Oregonians, such as pregnant mothers, infants, and seniors, access to fresh local produce is critical to supporting their health. Oregon Food Bank continues to increase the emphasis on the nutritional quality of the food it distributes. It expects to distribute almost 8.5 million pounds of fresh produce in 2013—four times more than just four years ago.

This shows why Farm Direct Nutrition Program is a great resource. The program provides vouchers that can be spent at approved farmers markets and farm stands across the state. Those vouchers bring fresh, Oregon produce to WIC participants and low-income seniors. The nutritional benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables are even more important to seniors with low incomes, as they are already more vulnerable to ill health.

The Farm Direct Nutrition Program has the additional benefit of supporting Oregon farmers. Last year, the program provided nearly \$1.9 million to Oregon growers. At Oregon Food Bank, we recognize that a strong Oregon agricultural sector means jobs, food security, and a stronger base of critical fresh food donations for our network.

Oregon's emergency food system is stretched to the breaking point. The food bank network is on pace to distribute a record 80 million pounds of food for a third consecutive year to over 900 local social services across Oregon and into the mouths of individuals and families experiencing hunger. Over one-third is households with children. About 17 percent are people over the age of 55 years. Food banking alone is not enough.

Thank you for your consideration.