

Testimony for Public Hearing
House Committee On Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water
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HB 2723 Relating to urban agriculture; prescribing an effective date.

Zenger Farm is a working urban farm located in SE Portland, Oregon. We model, promote and educate about sustainable food systems, environmental stewardship, community development and access to good food for all. Every year, over 10,000 people visit the farm on field trips, to participate in summer camp or cooking workshops, or to get their hands dirty volunteering.

Zenger farm is located on 17 acres, 10 acres of which is protected wetland and 3 acres are in mixed vegetable production. In 2015, we will provide vegetables for 80 families in our neighborhood, half of whom will pay with their SNAP benefits. We will also train nine beginning farmers every year in all aspects of running a small farm business.

Zenger Farm also operates the Lents International Farmers Market. One aspect of the mission of this market is to provide a sales outlet for beginning and immigrant farmers, many of whom farm in urban areas. Our goal is to incubate these small farm businesses, helping them to grow their business and launch into larger markets. We are able to do this while providing affordable food for SNAP customers, who in 2014 spent \$18,000 at the market. WE increased the purchasing power of those SANP customers by providing an additional \$14,000 in match funds for them to spend at the market.

But there are many more benefits besides the financial aspects of urban farming. Urban farming provides green space, often in lower-income neighborhoods. Urban farming can be an oasis in a food desert, providing affordable, fresh produce in neighborhoods without access to healthy foods. Urban farming provides an opportunity for urban residents, especially children, to learn about agriculture and how food is produced. Urban farming is also an incredible training ground for beginning farmers who often do not have access to land.

Urban farming provides many intangible benefits but generally remains a low-margin occupation. This bill would reduce the costs of farming in urban areas, which is often more expensive than rural farmland. So many of these intangible benefits are difficult to measure and quantify: What economic benefit do you put on exposing children to agriculture? How do you quantify the benefit of a children seeing a diverse (in age, gender and race) farm crew and those children being able to see themselves farming when they grow up? How important is it to preserve a few islands of agriculture in a sea of development so that Oregonians can remain in touch with the agriculture that feeds them?

Given the many benefits of urban agriculture, Zenger Farm urges you to assist urban farmers by voting for HB 2723.