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Nutrition and Health Screening (WIC) Program  
Kate Brown, Governor

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**TO:** The Honorable Sara Gelser, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services

**FROM:** Sue Woodbury, Nutrition and Health Screening Section Manager  
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Public Health Division  
Oregon Health Authority

**SUBJECT:** SB 1029: Appropriates general funds for the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program

Chair Gelser and members of the committee; I am Sue Woodbury, the Nutrition and Health Screening Section Manager for the Oregon Health Authority.

I am here today to provide information on the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program for WIC families and seniors.

For the past 20 years WIC has administered the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program which provides vouchers to WIC families and income eligible seniors to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs from farmers markets and farm stands from June to October. Seniors receive \$24 total for the season and WIC participants receive \$20.

And while \$20 or even \$24 for the season may not seem like very much, a study by the Economic Research Service found the difference in weekly spending on fruits and vegetables between higher income and lower income families averaged about \$1.43 per week. If you divide the \$24 over the 18 weeks that make up the height of the season, that gives \$1.33 per week. This is a small but significant step towards making access to healthy foods a reality for all Oregonians regardless of income. This same study also found that small increases in income, such as would occur with minor increases in minimum wage or cost of living adjustments for social security would go towards other more urgent household expenses, not fruits and vegetables. The Farm Direct program addresses this reality through vouchers that provide a budget just for buying fresh produce. And access to fresh fruits and vegetables helps young children learn healthy eating habits.

Eighty percent of older adults have at least one chronic health condition and 50% have at least two. Research has demonstrated that substances in fruits and vegetables, carotenoids and lycopene being examples, can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, premenopausal breast cancer, and the progression of prostate cancer. Currently, 73% of adults do not consume 5 fruits and vegetables per day. Furthermore, 19% of low incomes families buy no fruits and vegetables in a given week. The Oregon Farm Direct Program plays an important role in preventing and slowing the progression of the most common chronic diseases and causes of death in Oregon. A more robust Farm Direct Program can be a permanent part of Oregon's commitment to prevention versus much more costly treatment of disease.

Oregon currently ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in food insecurity. Food Insecurity essentially means that families cannot afford all the food they need and don't always know where their next meal will come from. Nearly one in six households (16.1 percent) in Oregon were food insecure between 2013-15. Single mothers in Oregon are even more at risk with 44.1% being food insecure compared to 33.8% nationally. About three in five families who experience food insecurity aren't regularly skipping meals, but may use strategies like purchasing cheaper but less nutritious food to stretch the food budget or relying on food assistance at the end of the month. Purchasing cheaper food often means not purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables.

Beyond the potential health and food security impacts for program participants, the Farm Direct Nutrition Program supports Oregon's family farmers and local agriculture. Recipients of these vouchers provide a ready supply of willing shoppers for farmers markets and farm stands. This in turn increases connections between those who grow the food and those who eat the food, and provides opportunity for nutrition education. Many farmers who participate in the program tell us that talking with the seniors and WIC families who participate in the program every year is a highlight.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.