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## **Testimony in Support of SB 1029**

Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

Submitted by Ashley Audycki

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Senate members of the committee; I am Ashley Audycki, a community food organizer in Coos County and the Market Manager of the Coos Bay Farmers Market.

I am here today to share the importance the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program has within communities through providing food assistance for seniors and WIC families.

While the localized food movement is growing, there are concerns about the lack of access for those who are hungry. A recent study published about county health rankings lists the food environment index for Oregon counties on a range of 3.0 to 8.6 on a scale of 10. The food environment index comprises of two variables of limited access to healthy foods and food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> These numbers can be greatly improved by assisting the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program that encourages program participants to purchase local produce at farm stands and farmers markets.

As a Farmers Market Manager, I have seen the positive benefits that the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program brings to a community. Weekly from June to October, I am often giving tours throughout the market of the various farm vendors that participate in this program. I am happy to see program participants engage with farmers and establish relationships with each market. One market day in particular, I assisted a grandmother who brought her young grandchildren with her. It was the height of blueberry season and she was able to utilize the Senior Farm Direct Nutrition voucher to purchase a pint of blueberries that I saw such great joy displayed on her face as she shared some with her grandchildren. Opportunities for engagement towards local foods such as these are increased through empowering programs that puts the purchasing power to the consumer.

Not only do consumers benefit from the voucher program but farmers as well. Several farmers at the Coos Bay Farmers Market have commented on the additional revenue as essential for their business. The vouchers dictate that the only items to be purchased are fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs which benefits farmers who often have to compete with grocery stores especially in our rural communities. Coos Bay and other rural communities have limited avenues for local farmers to sell their goods outside of farmers markets and farm stands. Within our market, there are a few farmers that have started weekly specials geared towards the \$4 voucher amount in forms of salad, salsa, and pasta sauce kits. The importance of empowering program participants to engage and live healthy has been forthright through the development of the Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program.

Supporting further growth of the Farm Direct Nutrition Programs assists with creating access for families and seniors to local foods as well as beneficial income for the farming community. Limitations on the program would directly affect the progress being made in rural communities such as Coos Bay.

Let's stand together and allow farm fresh foods be within access our Oregon communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. *County Health Rankings 2017*.