



Testimony Regarding Impacts of COVID-19 on Agriculture Markets

House Interim Committee On Agriculture and Land Use

Submitted by:

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Chair Rep. Clem, Vice-Chair McLain, Vice-Chair Post, Rep. Boshart Davis, Rep. Helm, Rep. Brock Smith, and Rep. Williams:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the **Oregon Farmers Markets Association (OFMA)** and the **Farmers Market Fund (FMF)** regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on Oregon's farmers markets. Farmers markets contribute significantly to Oregon's economy, supporting thousands of family farmers, ranchers, and food businesses.

Before COVID-19, in 2019, there were **106 farmers markets operating in 127 locations** in communities across the state, serving **42M shoppers**. Their **6,700 vendors** were responsible for a cumulative **\$63M in sales**. **1,800 (27%) of these were new or beginning vendors**, with less than 3 yrs. vending experience, illustrating how important these markets are for incubating Oregon's newest crop of farmers and food business entrepreneurs,

This year, COVID-19 is putting all that at risk. Although the Oregon Department of Agriculture has been very supportive, deeming farmers markets "essential businesses," thus exempting them from shutting down at any point so far, their businesses have been seriously impacted. Under the guidance of the Oregon Farmers Markets Association and with the support of state officials, the state's 100+ **farmers markets have reacted quickly, ensuring they remain safe and healthy places for communities to purchase their food.** Markets have changed their physical layout to facilitate social distancing, cancelled programs like music and kids' activities which might encourage lingering, and required vendors and market staff to wear masks, per ODA requirements. Many markets are limiting entry to a certain number of shoppers at a time, and some have even created drive-through markets and/or online storefronts to facilitate low-contact shopping for their most vulnerable customers.

Although Oregon's farmers markets have pivoted so quickly and innovatively, they still face losses that may affect their long-term viability. According to recent national Farmers Market Coalition survey data, **"74% of its respondents reported decreased income while 93% report added costs** including the purchase of PPE for market staff, rental of additional handwashing stations, new software or services, and additional staff to rearrange market layouts and monitor customer traffic." Rebecca Landis, who has been the manager of the Corvallis-Albany Farmers Markets since 1998 explains, *"Before the pandemic, it wasn't easy to run farmers' markets — or to sell as a vendor in a farmers' market. Most customers didn't have any reason to note how things came together. The market just magically appeared... **Now farmers' markets, like much of life now, are much more complicated for everyone.** We're asking a lot from our customers as well as our vendors — all for the cause of preserving our local food system."*

Even before COVID-19, one in eight Oregonians were food insecure. For those with limited income, purchasing fresh produce can be cost-prohibitive. Given the widespread unemployment due to COVID-19, a growing number of Oregonians are becoming eligible for SNAP (previously food stamps). According to DHS, total Oregon SNAP allotments increased 62% from March 2020 to April 2020. Farmers Market Fund's key program, Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB), provides shoppers using SNAP a \$1 for \$1 match at local farmers markets, so they can purchase twice as many local fruits and vegetables. The Double Up program is a triple win: families can bring home more fresh produce, small farmers get an economic boost, and local economies thrive. **In 2019, the Oregon Legislative invested \$1.5 million of one-time funds to support the expansion of DUFB across the state. As Oregon is gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic, programs like DUFB are more important than ever.**

FMF and OFMA are working together, with state officials, to support markets as they respond to COVID-19: helping navigate new regulations, launching innovative new programs and making sure SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks users aren't left out.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, sharing the perspective of the farmers market community. As Rebecca Landis, Corvallis-Albany Farmers Market Manager explains, *"... **we cannot give up no matter how hard it gets.** This is a teachable moment for our communities — if you want to support your local economy and protect your access to food, prioritize some of your money to spend with a local farmer."*

Sincerely,



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Oregon Farmers Markets Association



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