



La Grande

SCHOOL DISTRICT

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February 27, 2019

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Panike and I'm the Business Director for La Grande School District located in Union County. As a huge supporter of the Farm to School Program, I'm writing to ask for your support of HB 2579 and the 2 Amendments in order to expand funding for this very worthwhile cause.

Over the past four years our District has used the Farm to School grant funds to support the local agricultural community and to bring regionally and locally grown and processed foods into our school buildings. I have direct oversight of our food service program and I'm keenly aware that locally grown and processed foods are more expensive when compared to the corporate delivery channels, but the local purchases are better for the kids, the local community and the great State of Oregon. Please understand that our food service program operates on narrow margins and cannot afford the higher costs of local produce without this assistance.

For example, the final per pound price for local ground beef is approximately double the cost that we pay for precooked "beef crumbles" through food service corporations, so I am left wondering "how do they provide these products at those costs?" To try and control our costs and understand the process better, I have personally negotiated the purchase of livestock (hamburger cows) from local ranchers and then watched the cows be inspected by the USDA and processed at the local butcher in Elgin. Regardless of these efforts, I still came up with a similar cost differential when compared to the precooked frozen alternative.

Other examples of how these funds have been used by our District include fresh asparagus grown in the Vale & Nyssa area, salmon from the Oregon Coast, cold water shrimp from the Oregon Coast, fresh raspberries & strawberries from the Hermiston area, garden produce grown in our High School's Plant Science green houses and student's locally grown beef and hogs purchased from the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show (at the floor price), also USDA inspected and processed in Elgin.

As a new FoodCorps site for 2018/19, our District is also now anxious to participate in the educational grant portion of the Farm to School program, which would be new for us. Since night time frost is common in the Grande Ronde Valley from October 1 to the middle of May, we are hopeful that greenhouses can be procured through the grant process which would allow our elementary students to raise fresh produce throughout the school year.

Please feel free to contact me if you need any additional information or supporting documents for the information I have provided.

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OPPORTUNITY & EXCELLENCE

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