



Oregon Farmers Markets Association  
595 15<sup>th</sup> St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

TO: Oregon House of Representatives  
Attn: Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

February 4, 2021

Dear Chair Witt and members of the committee,

As the Executive Director of the Oregon Farmers Market Association, I am writing to voice support for HB 2785 and its amendment which would move the state meat inspection program authorized by this body in 2020 forward and establish grant funding for improvement and building new meat processing facilities across the state.

OFMA represents over 115 farmers market locations in Oregon, supporting an estimated 6,700+ vendors. OFMA's mission is to support local agriculture and healthy communities by strengthening and promoting Oregon's farmers markets.

Farmers markets often serve as business incubators where new farms can come face to face with their customers and build the trust and relationships that become hallmarks of their community centric approach. These new businesses (representing 27% of total market vendors in 2019) are a crucial part of the local food system and a boon to local economies, especially during COVID 19. Although our preliminary data from our 2020 census of Oregon's farmers markets shows drops in sales at the larger, more urban (more tourism focused) markets, the pandemic raised the sales of small markets (10-24 vendors) and those in Central and Eastern Oregon. The smaller, more rural communities where many of these markets are housed rely on these vendors not only for a resilient food supply in their area, but for the a boost to their economy overall.

One of the most integral parts of any farmers market is the vendors selling meat directly from the farm to the consumer. But meat vendors cannot bring their product to market to sell by the cut without processing it in a USDA inspected (or in the future, OR State inspection equivalent) facility. Farmers markets are attractive options for many farmers because of the low overhead costs needed and the higher profit margin garnered from going straight to the consumer. Without these inspected processing options, meat producers are not allowed to sell their meat in retail cuts and therefore cannot participate in the traditional

farmers market economy. Many of our markets and vendors expressed that although the demand for local food and the support for these markets in their communities is strong, the lack of processing options contributed to an overall dip in numbers of market vendors in 2020.

The pandemic showed the cracks in a system that has always been a bottleneck and favored larger producers. Processing appointments were hard to come by and often cancelled due to reduced capacity (to account for COVID safety protocols), even when a farmer made the appointments 6 months to year ahead of time. Anecdotally, we heard from some farmers market regulars that they had to cull their herd because of cancelled appointments (like farmer Gus Liszka from Naked Acres Farm in Beavercreek) or reduce the number of markets they attended and delay expanding their farm business (like Farmers Neil and Justina Moffett from Anchor Ranch in Scio).

OFMA urges the committee to support HB 2785 and the amendment allowing because not only does it expand inspection options for processing facilities in Oregon with the state program, but the grant funding this bill contains will alleviate the pressure on processors and bring new opportunities to Oregon's farms and rural communities. Farmers markets were a \$33 Million dollar industry in Oregon during 2020 despite the pandemic. In the 2017 study from OSU "Economic Impact of Local Food Producers in Central Oregon," it is shown that local producers, even in Oregon's more rural regions have a higher economic multiplier effect and are better for the local economy than their non-local counterparts. This is corroborated in many other studies from around the state and country that show that in addition to this multiplier effect for the dollars spent with farmers market vendors, markets also have "spillover effects" that boost the business of many mainstreet staples like restaurants and independent stores in small town centers.

HB 2785, and especially its amendment regarding the grant funding for new and expanded processing facilities, is vital for the success of Oregon's small farms and farmers markets. This direct to consumer, community oriented business model has become central to the family farming communities of our state. Without this expanded processing capacity, Oregon's farms and the economies of its rural communities will suffer.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Crane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly Crane, Executive Director