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3 February, 2021

Chair Witt and Members
House Committee on Agriculture
and Natural Resources
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2785 (Grant Program for State Meat Processing Facilities)

Dear Chair Witt and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2785. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that has worked with Oregonians for more than 45 years to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choices. We created our Food Systems Program in 2015 to expand our work with partner organizations throughout the state who are working together to build and strengthen robust and healthy food systems across Oregon.

Several producers have already provided testimony regarding the difficulty, uncertainty, and extra costs they face in trying to make their products available for market. Other testimony, and recent headlines from the news, have described the fragility of the existing meat processing system and the susceptibility to shock from disturbances like COVID 19 and food safety incidents.

None of this is new. I have been working with farmers in southern Oregon and across the state for nearly 20 years, during which the lack of adequate meat processing capacity has been a constant theme in conversations about barriers to establishing and expanding successful meat production operations. Food systems advocates have tied the lack of sufficient processing capacity and the bottlenecks that occasionally show up to reduced opportunities and increased costs for direct to consumer sales and smaller retail market sales, a decrease in the resilience of regional food systems to withstand shocks, and a stifling of rural economic development.

During the 2020 Special Session, the Legislature took a first step in addressing these problems by passing HB 4206, authorizing the Oregon Department of Agriculture to begin the process of establishing a state meat inspection program. The work of creating that program is underway. However, the program cannot succeed without licensed facilities and trained staff to do the work. The grant program contemplated under HB 2785 will provide resources to begin to get those things established. Along with the other work necessary to get the state inspection

program up and running, this funding is part of a package that offers a rare “win-win” opportunity to accomplish multiple goals with one program.

We urge you to support HB 2785, with amendments such as those described by Ms. Thistlewaite of the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network to provide appropriate focus to the program. Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Holmes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Holmes
Food Systems Program Director
1000 Friends of Oregon

