

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Nichols. My brother and I own and run Stoneboat Farm, a small vegetable farm north of Hillsboro. We employ about seven people and provide more than 750 families with vegetables through the year through our CSA and Farmers' markets. I am writing to request your support for SB 440 & 555.

SB 555 and SB 440 support the expansion of Double Up Food Bucks Oregon, a SNAP incentive program with a proven record of success. For every dollar spent on SNAP-eligible foods at participating farmers markets, farm share programs, and grocery stores across the state, shoppers will receive a dollar to spend on Oregon-grown fruits and vegetables.

SB 555 and SB 440 will be good for families. Last year's DUBF program really helped us financially but that isn't the reason we are happy to take SNAP and DUBF benefits. We are thrilled that these programs open up our CSA to many more folks than we would be able to feed otherwise. Besides the two dozen or so families that got CSA shares from us in the summer or winter with their benefits, we have many shoppers at the markets using food assistance - far more than ever before. I have seen more new and more diverse faces than I have ever seen in years of doing farmers' markets. It has been the mission of our farm to feed everyone we can while still paying a fair wage to our employees and DUBF is a central piece to that. Moreover, I can assure you that many, many folks support the basic idea behind this program. Besides a record number of CSA sign ups this year, we had a lot of people buying shares for others in need, voluntarily paying fifty dollars for a pumpkin when we had a fundraiser to pay for more reduced cost winter CSAs, or otherwise offering to get food to those in need. The state assistance helped this private charity go a lot farther.

SB 555 and SB 440 will be good for farmers. When COVID-19 started causing shutdowns last winter our farm went through a big change. In 2019 we had sold about 60% of our vegetables to the restaurant industry and it seemed that that aspect of our business would dry up. By the time grocery stores were running out of food however, we saw a huge interest in our CSA program and record sales at the farmers' markets. Though it involved inventing a new crop plan in March, trying to get a hold of seeds that were disappearing, and trying to handle more sign ups in a week than we normally got in a month, we were able to switch to sell 90% of our crops through our CSAs and markets. Double Up Food Bucks (DUBF) played an important role in just getting us CSA sign ups and dollars at the market. We frequently bring in 150 dollars in Double Up Food Bucks cards per week from our markets. The CSA matches over the year amounted to over three thousand dollars. All in all, just the direct DUBF money paid for the extra person we needed at the market and extra costs associated with bagging and complying with COVID regulations and best practices at our markets. But that is not all that DUBF brought in - all of those funds are match funds so we also received an equal amount or more in SNAP funds from the folks buying from us. And a large number of our customers using DUBF buy other items with cash while at our markets picking up a CSA or shopping with their benefits. In a year with excess and unpredictable costs, having this significant revenue stream made a difference in the bottom line: how many people we could hire and how much we could pay.

SB 555 and SB 440 are good for local economies and local communities. If there is anything that I have learned from running a farm business during a pandemic it is that our local communities and local economies will get us through this crisis and the next crisis (well I've learned that and also "don't have a baby right before a pandemic"). I see my CSA members

every week and I had a pretty good chance to see into many of their lives. People were worried, overworked, and a bit scared but they were also doubling down on any community they could be a part of. Our farm was sustained financially and emotionally through this crisis by this upwelling of care and generosity.

By passing and funding SB 555 and SB 440 we will keep money circulating in the economy - I know that folks use all of their benefits and a huge portion of that is used right in the local economy. If it is used at the farmers' market or on a CSA, almost all of that stays right here to help build up Oregon. But more than the millions of dollars circulating in our community, it is the generosity and care that circulate and build us up. When I was a farm intern years ago and far from my family a mentor of mine told me that, though he was sure the world as we knew it was ending, he was also sure that what we could take with us were the communities we built now. He was certainly right on one account.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service. I appreciate your willingness to serve in this difficult time and your willingness to bring Oregonians together build a better and more caring state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Nichols', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Aaron Nichols
Co-owner and manager, Stoneboat Farm
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