

February 1, 2021

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Kester. I am a Board Member of the Astoria Co+op grocery store located in Astoria, Oregon. 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 farmer's markets, farm share programs, and grocery stores across the state, shoppers will receive a dollar to spend on Oregon-grown fruits and vegetables.

This program is important to me because it helps our most vulnerable citizens gain access to healthy and nutritious produce which is necessary to maintain health, wellness and strengthened immunity. This supplementation through nutritious and unprocessed produce is increasingly important during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Astoria Co+op was one of the first grocery stores in Oregon to offer this benefit to their shoppers and is the only grocery store in the lower Columbia region to offer this program. Since January 1, 2020, the Astoria Co+op has been able to provide \$13,000 of produce to SNAP shoppers and is a clear indication of the success of this program!

The Astoria Co+op offers a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and other fresh produce. The co-op partners with and procures some of its produce from local North Coast farmers. This relationship and partnership works to strengthen the economic health of these small, rural communities. The support of local farmers helps these small agricultural businesses succeed by having access to a large grocery store that can make bulk purchases and provide a consistent source of revenue.

The pandemic has had devastating impacts in so many facets of the North Coast economy. As of this writing Clatsop County has recorded 744 cases of Covid-19 since March 2020 which means the county has been in the Extreme Risk category several times in the past 11 months. This has resulted in the closure of many small businesses either temporarily or permanently since the beginning of the pandemic. There have been negative impacts to tourism, a key industry for the North Coast. In 2018, tourists spent nearly \$580 million in Clatsop County, but due to fears of the spread of the virus to vulnerable communities, tourism has been discouraged and those revenue dollars have evaporated. These impacts have left many families without secure employment and in some cases long-term unemployment. It can be surmised that there will be an increased need of SNAP benefits by significant numbers of struggling families in North Coast communities.

For these reasons, it is clear that our community and our economy will do nothing but benefit from the continuation and expansion of the Double Up Food Bucks Oregon program.

Thank you for the consideration of these comments and for your service.

Erin Kester, Astoria Co+op Board Member  
Astoria, Oregon