



2023 Board of Directors

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Dear Chair Helm, Vice-chairs Hartman and Owens, and members of the committee:

Thank you all for taking the time to make Oregon's community food system a priority with House Bill 3124. Over the past decade we have experience first-hand how climate change is altering our food system.

My name is Jason Skipton, I have been the executive director with Growing Gardens for nearly 7 years and have been experienced the direct affects that climate change has had in our community and organization. At **Growing Gardens**, an Oregon nonprofit with over 27 years of experience, we work across the state of Oregon to ensure that children, families and individuals who are currently incarcerated have access to healthy and culturally nourishing foods to increase the overall health and wellness of our communities. **Growing Gardens is in full support of House Bill 3124** especially on the importance of components 4-7 and 4-8.

Components 4-7 and 4-8 provide support to small farmers and the community food system in the face of the ongoing drought and related natural disasters. Component 4-7 creates a separate fund for small farmers to gain drought resilience through the Oregon Community Food Systems Network. The OCFSN has proven its ability to run this kind of program and its members are trusted resources for new, small, and diverse farmers that do not traditionally take advantage of ODA programs. This is distinct from the ODA drought relief and resilience fund because:

- The OCFSN fund prioritized BIPOC farmers and was only open to small farms with under \$300,000 of revenue
- OCFSN is using a network of trusted organizations to reach farmers who do not see themselves in or have good relationships with ODA programs.
- OCFSN's application process was less burdensome paperwork wise and involved more one on one attention from the grant administrator, so it was open to more new and first time farmers.

Component 4-8 creates resilience for our community food system sales outlets that will allow them to keep benefiting farmers and feeding communities even in the face of drought related disasters. We need to prioritize our community food systems because:

- Farmers markets are essential businesses and in times of crisis (like the pandemic) when the centralized food system fails they provide safe, reliable access to crucial, nutritionally dense food for our communities.
- Farmers markets have millions of visitors each year and generate an estimated \$60M of sales each year according to OFMA's data.
- Local and community food systems are good for rural economies. Encouraging this type of farming and these outlets supports the farms that, according to a study from OSU, create more jobs per \$1M in sales, put more money directly into the local economy, and generate more economic activity for other local businesses than commodity farms.

It is imperative to take action today to ensure we have a thriving food system that can weather these dramatic climate impacts. At Growing Gardens, we have collaborated with local farmers to purchase produce from them to deliver directly to our community, building a bridge that links farmers, food and community.

It is a needed investment to prioritize community food systems and make Oregon more community food resilient.

This is why we urge your yege vote on **HB 3124**. Thank you for your time and your leadership.

Sincerely,
Jason Skipton
Executive Director
[Growing Gardens](http://www.growing-gardens.org)

We help people grow their own food!

)th Ave., Portland OR 97206 (p) 503.284.8420 (f) 503.280.0603 www.growing-gardens.org