



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

For the record, my name is Rachael Ward and I am a farmers market shopper in Eugene. I am also the Board President of the Oregon Farmers Markets Association (OFMA) and Executive Director of Farmers Market Fund (FMF). I am grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 3124 and especially on the importance of components 4-7 and 4-8.

Supporting HB3124 is personally meaningful to me because I have seen the impact of drought in Lane County, where we have more small farmers per capita than anywhere else in the country. Our local Lane County Farmers Market has suffered due to drought, wildfires, and smoke that prevent farmers from traveling to market, affect the amount of crops they are able to harvest, and discourage shoppers from coming to support local farmers due to poor air quality. Our small farmers are innovators and are adapting the best they can to our changing climate, but they need your funding and support to make it happen!

From the perspective of OFMA and FMF, I know that when small farmers and farmers markets suffer, the effects ripple outward. Crop damage during drought affects the availability of fresh produce for all shoppers, and especially those using SNAP and the Double Up Food Bucks program. FMF's ability to grow and sustain our Double Up program, which matches the value of SNAP benefits for the purchase of produce, depends on thriving, resilient small farms and farmers markets.

I want to call your attention to components 4-7 and 4-8, which provide support to small farmers and the community food system in the face of the ongoing drought and related natural disasters. It is so important that the state prioritizes these community assets when thinking about drought resilience and planning for Oregon's changing water reality. Component 4-7 creates a separate fund for small farmers to gain drought resilience through the Oregon Community Food Systems Network. A majority of farmers selling at the farmers markets OFMA and FMF support are considered small farmers. 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
- The OCFSN funds are grants, which are more accessible to small farms than the forgivable loans in the ODAP program.
- 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 which 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 COVID pandemic) when the centralized food system fails they provide safe, reliable access to crucial, nutritionally dense food for our communities. We saw the importance of having a local safety net of food available by the huge spike in customers at farmers markets in 2020 and 2021.
- Farmers markets have millions of visitors each year and generate an estimated \$60M of sales each year according to OFMA's data.
- Food Hubs and farmers markets can serve as business incubators for small and new farms to help them reach new customers, establish their brand, and grow into reliable sources of local food for their communities.
- 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 a good investment to prioritize community food systems and make Oregon more resilient. Please support HB 3124 and prioritize components 4-7 and 4-8.

Sincerely,

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

Rachael Ward
Executive Director, Farmers Market Fund
Board President, Oregon Farmers Markets Association
Serving the entire state of Oregon