

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

For the record, my name is Ashley Rose Williams and I am a previous farmers market manager, former SNAP recipient and Oregon Farmers Market Association Board member in Gresham, OR. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 3124 and 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. It is vital 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. 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
- 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 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.
- 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.

This is deeply meaningful to me as a previous market manager and operator of six Portland area markets and OFMA board member. I have received dozens of calls from farmers who were unable to attend market days due to a lack of crops, caused by drought and unprecedented heatwaves. I have worked with upwards of 30 farms, all of which have communicated their challenges in keeping crops healthy under these unprecedented circumstances. Shutting down a market due to these conditions has devastating and lasting implications.

- It impacts shoppers' ability to access fresh foods
- Lost products for vendors who prepped for the market
- Market staff who relies on hourly wages
- As well as the surrounding communities. Many markets operate as community hubs for business districts. Small brick and mortar businesses are also affected by market closures as there is significantly less foot traffic in the business district.
- If market closures are frequent or permanent dozens of small business can irreparably harmed

Losing a full day or a full season's pay due to market closures is incredibly difficult for everyone involved. Making funds available to Oregon farmers and farmers markets, would help keep markets open by providing drought resistant infrastructure, systematic upgrades, and funds to pay staff.

Furthermore, as a former WIC and SNAP recipient, who depended on Double Up Food Bucks being available at farmers markets, I empathize with market shoppers who are frustrated and disheartened when markets have to close due to extreme weather and farmer absences. I heavily relied on markets for produce and expanding my access to SNAP eligible foods. These components would ensure that markets are more resilient for market staff, vendors, farmers, and shoppers alike.

It is a good investment to prioritize community food systems and make Oregon more resilient. Please enthusiastically support HB 3124 and prioritize components 4-7 and 4-8.

Sincerely,

Ashley Rose Williams