



Oregon Farmers Markets Association
595 15th St NE, Salem, OR 97301
Info@oregonfarmersmarkets.org

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

January 1, 2018

Dear Senator Merkley,

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Farmers Markets Association, our 99 member markets and hundreds of vendors across the state to **strongly urge your support for funding for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)** and other important Farm Bill programs such as SNAP, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program (FINI). These programs, along with, WIC FMNP allow the farmers markets, and the small farm operators in your state to continue to grow, flourish and innovate – but they seem to be in perennial danger of being reduced or eliminated, as evidenced by the President’s budget proposal back in May.

Farmers markets are important to Oregon, and so are the federal programs that support them. In fact, in every county of every congressional district in Oregon there is a farmers market with hardworking vendors who depend on them for their livelihoods and FMPP is a critical resource for innovation and advancement of those markets. For example, in Clatskanie, Oregon, a \$90K FMPP grant was awarded in 2015 to promote the consumption of locally grown produce at their farmers market. Data shows that this small infusion of funds over several years allowed for nearly 50 food tastings and cooking demos, and ultimately resulted in a 30% increase in overall market revenue. It also succeeded in reversing the food to non-food sales ratio from 38:62 to 77:23, with shoppers spending three-fourths of their shopping money on fresh food grown by local farmers! This FMPP-funded project increased the viability of this market, turned it into a real community food source and bolstered the earning potential of the farmers and food business owners that vend there

In addition to the farmers, many community members also depend on these markets for food access. For example, farmers markets often help fill gaps in the rural food deserts that cover vast swaths of

Oregon outside the I-5 corridor, providing nutritious, local food options to underserved areas. Low income individuals are able to buy fresh, healthy foods at their area farmers markets by utilizing programs such as SNAP and WIC. In fact, a hugely successful FINI grant received recently in Oregon by the Farmer Market Fund helped nearly 50 markets across the state launch a Double-Up Food Bucks drive, where SNAP benefits were matched dollar-to-dollar at farmers markets, encouraging recipients to spend their dollars there. The results speak for themselves, with a 40% uptick in SNAP transactions at participating farmers markets and an impressive 92% of SNAP customers surveyed reporting buying more fruits & vegetables because of this incentive program.

We urge you and the rest of the Oregon Congressional Delegation to **support funding for the these programs as part of the appropriation process** and by supporting the Local Food and Regional Market Supply Act (H.B. 3941/S. 1947) This bill proposes restructuring and increasing funding for FMPP, expanding the Senior FMNP program to include low-income veterans and other proposals that would stimulate local and regional agricultural economies. We are depending on your leadership, on behalf of Oregon's farmers markets, to ensure that the FMPP and other local foods programs retain funding in the upcoming Farm Bill budgeting process.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if there is any information we can provide you with.

Sincerely,

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

Spencer Masterson, OFMA Board Chair