



March 7, 2023

Suzie Dahl  
Director of Land Development Services  
Columbia County  
445 Port Avenue  
St. Helens, OR 97051

Dear Director Dahl:

I am writing in support of the more than 50 small businesses that OFMA estimates operate in Columbia County under the regulation of The Home Baker Bill (amended by SB 643 in 2023 to be the Cottage Food Law). This allows for home-based entrepreneurs to create certain baked and confection products and sell them to their communities. I would like to urge your consideration of a revised license fee structure for small businesses that is more equitable and accessible for the small and emerging businesses that operate in Columbia County.

Our work at the Oregon Farmers Market Association (OFMA) is to support and promote the 140 farmers markets across the state. Farmers markets are recognized as powerful engines for small business development and the local food economy. With low fees, simple paperwork and general accessibility, farmers markets are uniquely equipped to offer small business owners a stable and sustainable start. Farmers, ranchers and food producers that sell directly to their customers are more likely to survive as small business owners and carry a lighter debt-load than their commodity-cropping and wholesale model counterparts, additionally the revenue they receive stays predominantly within the local economy.<sup>1</sup>

The farmers markets in Columbia County have long been reliable sources of nutritious food, economic enrichment and connection within their communities. The markets work to promote the success of their vendors and to provide their community with fresh, local food to eat. Most of these markets spend a portion of their resources to provide SNAP and DUFBA food assistance programs for free, vastly improving access to fresh and nutritious foods to your Columbia County communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Key, N. . 'Local Foods and Farm Business Survival and Growth' (2017, Mar 7)  
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2016/march/local-foods-and-farm-business-survival-and-growth/>

Within the markets that OFMA supports across the state of Oregon, more than 5,500 small businesses operate and generate more than \$60M in revenue<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, the makeup of business owners that earn their income at farmers markets is in stark contrast to commercially operated farm and food businesses, where the vast majority of business owners are white men over the age of 65. In contrast, OFMA found that 65% of business owners operating at a farmers market identified as women<sup>3</sup> and we urge your consideration of this information in decision making. The majority of the small businesses that are likely impacted by this disproportionate County fee are women-owned and operated.

At farmers markets, brands are built, products are tested and refined, capital is raised and skills are learned. Helping farmers markets themselves become better at incubating businesses during their early years is a strategic way to shore up a critical access point in the food-business entrepreneurial pipeline. **Fair and measured county fees for food producers that are in alignment with State Law are critical to the success of small businesses operating within farmers markets.**

We recommend that the Land Use Division find a licensing structure that recognizes the unique role these small producers play and consider a fair fee structure that is not excessive and restrictive for small businesses that are operating in compliance with State Law.

We are available to help with further research and stakeholder conversations. OFMA is confident in a solution that supports Columbia County as a continued place of entrepreneurship and growth.

Sincerely,



Ashley Hess  
Executive Director, Oregon Farmers Markets Association

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<sup>2</sup>Oregon Farmers Markets Association. '2021 Annual Census Report' (2022, April 15)  
<https://www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org/collecting-market-data>

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, B., Engstrom, P., Jablonski, A., Onate, S., Pena, W., Simons, I.. 'Oregon Farmers Markets Association Vendor Valuation Survey Project Report' (2023, Spring) *The University of California Davis*