

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

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For more information, contact: Margie MacDonald or Kevin Dowling, 406.252.9672

Local Foods Leaders Call on the U.S. Senate to Fix Food Safety Bills

Billings, Mont. – Western Organization of Resource Council (WORC) leaders are calling on the U.S. Senate to amend the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (S. 510), which was voted out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Nov. 18.

“Food safety should not come at the expense of food choice, by putting unrealistic and inappropriate burdens on the producers of fresh, wholesome, and nourishing local food such as direct market farmers and the emerging small businesses that are repopulating rural communities,” said Gus Wahner, an Eastern Oregon farmers market producer and chair of WORC’s Local Foods Campaign Team.

In 2002 Congress passed legislation requiring all food facilities to register with the Food and Drug Administration as part of the bioterrorism prevention response. The current proposed legislation goes beyond these measures. “Now all of those facilities, regardless of how small, would be required to comply with an extensive and expensive amount of paperwork, record keeping, biological testing, and hazardous food planning,” Wahner explained. “These steps are appropriate for food processors and distributors handling food products that will be commingled and distributed widely. At the local level, state and county health and sanitation laws around food are already in place, well developed and perfectly sufficient to protect public health. Federal regulations and inspections at this level are superfluous.”

Exempted from the facilities definition are processors who are adding value in private residences or farms that add value and consume the product on-site, retail food establishments like restaurants, and non-profit food providers. All others, including small businesses that are adding value to products on farms in non-residential buildings, will be subject to the new regulations.

“In addition, farms that sell their produce direct to consumers will be governed by federal produce standards affecting farming and harvesting practices under the proposed new law,” Wahner continued.

Janet Marie, La Grande Farmers Market manager, pointed to extensive guidelines already in place for Oregon Farmers Markets, which can be found on the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s website. “Our vendors provide fresh, delicious and wholesome produce and the public is happy to have this option to buy local and support local businesses and growers,” Marie

stated. “We would hate to see these small farms put out of business by new federal rules and requirements.”

In Oregon, contact Oregon Rural Action, Andrea Malmberg, at 541-975-2411, or visit www.oregonrural.org.

In Montana, contact Northern Plains Resource Council, Svein Newman, at 406.248.1154 or svein@northernplains.org.

In North Dakota, contact Dakota Resource Council, Lynn Wolff at 701.298.8685 or lynn@drcinfo.com.

In South Dakota, contact Dakota Rural Action, Heidi Kolbeck-Urlacher at 605.697.5204 or heidiku@dakotarural.org

In Wyoming contact, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Bill Bensel at 307.672.5809 or bill@powderriverbasin.org.

In Colorado, contact Western Colorado Congress, Heather Tischbein at 970.256.7650 or heather@wccongress.org.