

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 30, 2010

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Gus Wahner, farmer, (541) 571-2300; Margie MacDonald, WORC staff (406) 252-9672; or Kevin Dowling WORC staff, (406) 252-9672

Senate Food Safety Bill Protects Local Food Systems

Billings, Mont. – Members of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), a network of grassroots community organizations, heralded the inclusion of an amendment by Sen. Jon Tester (MT) and Sen. Kay Hagan (NC) in the Food Safety Modernization Act, S. 510, passed by the Senate this morning.

The Tester-Hagan amendment applies a multi-prong test to limit applicability of complicated new federal regulations. For small processors the screens include geography, scale and the demonstration of local or state food safety oversight. In the case of fresh produce, when small farms market directly to end users within a limited geographic range, they will not be subject to federal farming regulations.

“The Senate’s acceptance of the Tester-Hagan amendment is a victory for small farmers and food producers, and the consumers who enjoy fresh, local farm produce and locally processed food products, like jams and jellies,” said Gus Wahner of WORC. “Food safety is a priority we all share, but one size does not fit all when it comes to imposing federal regulations on small local food businesses, including farmers market vendors, who are already effectively regulated by state and local regulations and the Food and Drug Administration.” Wahner, a farmer, sells his vegetables in farmers markets in Eastern Oregon.

A November 17 letter to U.S. Senators, signed by WORC and other consumer and farm and ranch groups, farmers markets, and cooperative markets, pointed out that, without the Tester-Hagan amendment, the bill would have unnecessarily burdened and handicapped small-scale, local food producers. It noted that the “well-publicized incidents of contamination in recent years – including the recent egg recall – occurred in industrialized food supply chains that span national and even international boundaries. The food safety problems in this system can and should be addressed without harming the local food systems that provide an alternative for consumers.”

The bill passed with 73-25 vote.

Based in Billings, Mont., WORC has 44 local chapters in seven western states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming.

###