

Testimony in Support of SB 2273

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Date: February 5, 2023

To: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee

I encourage you to give a “Do pass” vote to SB2273. Here is a chance to invest in systems that help get food into our homes and onto our plates, and to maintain and improve the health of people and the economy. It could be helpful to you to consider this as an investment in the infrastructure that supports the exchange of business, like roads and bridges do. Without these flow and connective supports, small food businesses have difficulty remaining viable.

Certainly, agriculture and food production are important to producers and North Dakota's state and local economies. However, we focus so much of our attention on growing crops to export that we forget we also need to make sure that our residents have enough food that is accessible and affordable.

Because of disruptions that arose during the pandemic, many of us experienced for the first time going to a grocery store and not finding food items we needed. Half of North Dakota's school districts lost their primary food distributor and food deliveries in November 2021. Even before that, the state experienced and continues to experience the loss of rural grocery stores. And the disruptions continue through today with delayed, backordered, and out-of-stock food orders. We need to help shore up food systems that can help get food to people in our state to adapt to the changed and changing conditions of our world.

I am a member of the North Dakota Public Health Association, and our organization recently passed a [resolution in support of the development and growth of local food systems](#). A functioning food system - where food is grown, stored, sold, purchased, prepared and served, and how it is transported - is crucial for health, the functions of civil society, disaster/emergency preparedness, and economic development. All of us who live here, in cities, small towns, along township roads, or at the end of a gravel road, need access to enough healthful food every day.

The funding of projects to help food entities coordinate and collaborate can help ensure that projects like the RAD Food Co-op can spread across the state where gaps exist in people's ability to access food. The funding is needed because the kind of collaborative work is not currently in organization's budgets or in people's job descriptions.

Please invest in access to food in North Dakota; vote “yes” on SB2273.