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Testimony in Support of SB2273

Stephanie Blumhagen, Executive Director, FARRMS and Board Chair, ND Local Food Development Alliance

Bottineau, ND

Date: January 26, 2023

Chair Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee,

Please give a “Do Pass” vote to SB 2273. This funding has the potential to preserve rural grocery stores and create opportunities for local food producers, creating economic growth and improving access to fresh healthy food in rural communities.

I am the Executive Director of the **Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability (FARRMS)**. We provide education and support to increase the number of farmers and sustainable ag practices and provide greater access to locally grown food in ND.

I serve as Board Chair of **The North Dakota Local Food Development Alliance (NDLFDA)**. This coalition gathers farmers, local USDA and state agency staff, nonprofit organizations, and local food advocates to collaboratively build our state’s local food systems.

FARRMS and the ND Local Food Development Alliance support opportunities for success for the over 500 farm businesses that grow and market food for our local communities. In the past several years we have seen an increased demand for locally grown food and increased interest in producing local food. This is a time of opportunity for local food systems in North Dakota. Consumers are seeking more locally grown food and more rural North Dakotans are launching local food enterprises. At FARRMS we help farmers create and implement business plans for sustainable local food enterprises. These new businesses need infrastructure and robust local food systems creating viable markets in order to thrive.

This bill can provide funding for infrastructure to support rural grocery stores and create viable longstanding local food businesses. Infrastructure such as coolers and freezers, aggregation space, climate-controlled delivery trucks, climate-controlled food lockers, and online shopping platforms would benefit both rural grocery stores and local food producers.

Rural communities need access to fresh, nutritious food and economic opportunities. We have consumer demand for local food, grocery stores and farmers working to provide local food, and a growing network of organizations supporting local food access. The funding authorized in SB2273 will provide yet another puzzle piece toward success. Please vote “Do Pass” to support rural grocery stores and local food producers working hand in hand to create thriving healthy rural communities.