

January 20, 2011

Multnomah County Commissioners  
501 S.E. Hawthorne Street, Suite 600  
Portland, OR 978214-3588

Dear Commission:

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has been a strong proponent and active ongoing supporter of the James Beard Public Market in Portland. When it opens it will serve as an important and vibrant part of a regional food system that provides fresh, wholesome and locally produced food from farms, ranches and waters of Oregon.

In the last decade American agriculture has experienced a dramatic increase in consumer awareness and interest in locally produced products. This is evidenced by increases in farmers markets and other farm direct marketing opportunities such as farm stands and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and indeed year-round local public markets such as Pike Street Market in Seattle.

We believe direct and frequent contact between non-farming “eaters” and the people that actually grow, husband and harvest food is the best way to build understanding and support for agriculture. Take a look at the Portland Farmers Market on Saturdays to see first hand how much information is shared between folks as they shop and purchase products directly from the producer.

Public understanding of agriculture is critical as we navigate public policy choices over water quality and use, land use as well as food safety and availability. That is why venues that tell the story of local agricultural products such as the James Beard Public Market are extremely valuable. We envision the market to serve as a year-round facility where consumers can source the best we have to offer while showcasing our products to visitors.

We encourage you to support the James Beard Public Market proposal to cite its facility at the Morrison Bridge location. We are encouraged to see similar community and county staff support for the market in the Multnomah County Food Action Plan. We feel this initiative will provided needed local food system infrastructure while providing important economic development opportunities for local growers and processors.

Sincerely,

Katy Coba  
Director