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HB 478

Testimony

Marguerite Jodry <marguerite.jodry@gmail.com> Tue, Feb 17, 2015 at 9:32 AM
To: Jennifer Hill-Hart <jhill-hart@aeromt.org>

I hope this isn't too long - thanks for delivering it for me!!!

To the members of the House Agricultural Committee,

My name is Marguerite Jodry. Two years ago, I went to work for a farm near Bridger where Certified Organic vegetables, cattle, and hogs are raised and marketed within the immediate area. I was only twenty five, but I already had several years of experience working on small farms in Montana and I knew this was the path I wanted to take towards building a life for myself. So last December when my boss declared he was ready to step back from the business of farming and asked me if I wanted to take over ownership, I leapt at the opportunity to bring myself one step closer to my goal of creating a sustainable livelihood through agriculture.

I'm barely two months into my new role as sole owner and manager of this farm, but I'm already seeing a difficult financial reality. Our short growing season means I'll have little cash coming in during the colder months of the year. It also means winters can be pretty slow - drawing up field plans, ordering seed, and fixing equipment only take up so much of my time.

Sure, I could get a job in town during these slower months, but there's livestock that need my attention during the day and in any case I didn't become a farmer so that I could spend half of my year off the farm. I became a farmer so that I could provide myself, my family, and my community with food - beautiful, nutritious, locally grown food. But there's actually a pretty simple solution to the problem of winter cash flow and it's why I urge you to support House Bill 478.

Value added processing is often toted as the "next big thing" in small to mid-scale alternative agriculture. I bake bread from wheat raised on the farm - why not sell it at farmer's markets? Or the hundreds of pounds of tomatoes that ripen before we can get them to market - why not freeze and sell them in small bags direct to our customers over the winter? Or what about something as simple as grinding the wheat and selling flour? Or the raspberry jam I made WAY too much of for just myself last year?

Under current laws, it's hard to even tell whether or not I'd be allowed to market any of these products. I don't have a commercial kitchen on the farm or access to one nearby. And I can't afford to build one any time soon. But there are potential marketing opportunities for all of these products. House Bill 478 clarifies the kinds of value-added products I could make and sell off my farm and provides for new marketing and revenue opportunities that could greatly expand profitability.

I strongly urge you to support House Bill 478 so that farmers like myself can begin to expand the range (and season!) of our income sources. I know that many of you are farmers yourselves and you know that farming is a hard way of life. But you also know it's an incredibly rewarding way of life despite the financial challenges. You can truly understand why I want to make a life for myself out of farming. This bill is your opportunity to ensure that a future in agriculture is economically viable for myself and other young farmers like me.

Sincerely,

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