

# CALL TO ACTION: Take a Stand for Local Food Producers

by Perry McNeese, GEM's General Manager

As part of its mission, *the Good Earth Market purchases hundreds of locally grown or produced products from 81 individual producers/growers*. Each of these growers or producers is a small family farm or business. Their products are fresh from the fields or minimally processed, if processed at all. Whether they grow produce, raise livestock or make jam and jelly, their businesses are small by every comparison, small enough that they personally know their customers or retailers on a first name basis.

Unfortunately, well-intended legislation threatens these small farmers, food processors and the Good Earth's ability to serve its Members, customers and the Billings community. The worthy goal of the **Food Safety Modernization Action, S. 510**, is to prevent food borne illness such as E. coli and salmonella. The bill, however, applies a "one size fits all" to food safety and does not recognize the differences between mega-farms and small farms. S. 510 would place fees and burdensome and costly regulations on small direct market farmers and small food processors.

*Small farmers and processors are already regulated.* The State of Montana and Yellowstone County have licensing requirements and health standards small producers and processors must meet to do business. The State approves all manufactured products and labeling before a product goes to market. In recent years, highly publicized incidents of contamination—peppers, peanuts, spinach and hamburger—happened in the industrialized food chain. *In the sixteen years Good Earth has been buying local products, we have not had a single incident of product integrity and have never had to recall anything locally produced.*

Why then should these small business people be subjected to the same fees and record keeping as a multimillion dollar industry? They grow or make the product personally. They know exactly what goes into it and where it is distributed. They are perfectly capable of tracking their products should a problem occur.

Many of these local growers and processors gross no more than \$50,000 a year and some only a couple

thousand dollars annually. Paying fees and establishing and maintaining the record keeping requirements proposed in the bill would be an undue hardship, enough of a hardship that they would likely be unable to continue in their business. Many may not have the resources or the profit margin to comply with the proposed fees and regulations and remain in business. While selling produce and processed goods is the primary livelihood for some, the \$30,000 or \$40,000 gross income they generate annually is barely enough to make it worthwhile, certainly not enough to warrant the same regulations as a Smuckers or Kraft Foods. *Good Earth buys \$402,307 worth of products from its 81 local producers annually.* This total represents about 18 percent of total purchases and is an integral part of our ability to remain in business. These purchases represent the majority of the income for many of our grower/producers, but their products hardly represent a potential health risk. The proposed legislation would most certainly eliminate some food sources for the Good Earth and would be devastating to our grocery store.

*Senator Tester has proposed amendments to S. 510 which would exempt both small farms producing for direct sales and small processors from the bill.* This country should be able to prevent food borne illness without eliminating small farmers growing locally and small processors contributing to the Billings economy.

Those of you that would like to support the cause of small local producers can contact Senator Baucus and ask him to support Senator Tester's amendments. You can also thank Senator Tester for supporting local food producers and processors.

## **Senator Max Baucus**

511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
<http://baucus.senate.gov/>

## **Senator Jon Tester**

724 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-2604  
<http://tester.senate.gov/>