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Competitive Grants Program Review Committee
SAREP 2010 Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems
UC Davis
One Shields Ave.
Davis, CA 95616

To the Committee:

I am pleased to support the application of Kendra Klein for a SAREP Graduate Research Grant in the field of "Food and Society – Building Regional Markets". Her proposal, "Stuck in the Middle: Examining the Role of Food Supply Chain Middlemen in Farm to Hospital Initiative", is a meritorious project and well deserving of support. This is someone with a long-standing, serious interest in alternative food supply and food systems, who fits quite nicely into the purposes of the SAREP program.

Kendra is a student in the Environmental Science, Policy and Management program at UC Berkeley, and I am serving as her external advisor for her doctoral dissertation, of which this project is a key part. Her area of specialization in food provision raises any number of theoretical issues concerning agrarian systems, distributional pathways, cultural foodways, human health, social equity, and more – for which Kendra is well-prepared. She has a good head on her shoulders and has shown great promise in the classroom and comprehensive exams. Kendra also has solid track record outside the university, working in the field of environmental health and doing research in the highlands of Guatemala, from which she has developed a well-grounded appreciation of the link between nutrition and health and the often shaky linkages between food production and food consumption -- an extremely pertinent topic in today's United States.

Kendra has come up with a fine research proposal. Unlike so many studies today in alternative regional food systems, this one goes beyond farmers' markets and cooperative buying to provisioning at major medical institutions. Hospitals are not only big players

in food distribution, in the so-called 'mid-tier value chains', but are central actors in changing food and health habits of the general population. There has been a major change in policy at hospitals toward healthier food that has the potential to drive a seismic shift in American food habits and agricultural sales networks.

There is a large gap in our knowledge of food supply chains and huge obstacles to reforming supply lines, given the power of the major distributors (GPOs). Hospitals administrators need to rethink their approach to food contracting, which requires changes in tactics, good legal advice, regional cooperation and hard bargaining. Meanwhile, GPOs need to alter their modes of operation to include more regional and alternative providers, or be forced to do so by the demands of purchasing agents and competition from new entrants in the market. The work of NGOs like Health Care Without Harm will be crucial in this restructuring of food chains.

As you can see from the proposal, Kendra has carefully thought out the dimensions of the research problem and the key questions raised for decision-makers, and who to interview to get answers. She is also preparing interview questions in order to gain systematic data. She is partnering with a very capable group in the Bay area, the staff at Physicians for Social Responsibility – people whom I can vouch for personally – and the wider Health Care Without Harm coalition, who are leading the farm-to-hospital movement nationally.

Kendra Klein is well prepared to undertake doctoral research at a high level, and I have great confidence in her advisors, Professors Morello-Frosch and Winickoff, to provide the essential guidance to allow Kendra to grow along with her studies and to bring this research program to fruition.

Sincerely,



Richard A. Walker
Professor of Geography
Co-Director, Global Metropolitan Studies
Director, California Studies Center