

PORLAND, OR

# 10 Food Bills to Follow in Oregon's 2023 Legislative Session

Bills addressing food insecurity, takeout containers, and more

by Natalie Pate | Jan 20, 2023, 12:02pm PST



The Oregon state Capitol building. | Nadia Yong/Shutterstock

The **2023 Oregon legislative session** kicked off this week in Salem. Over the next five months, lawmakers will consider hundreds of proposed bills, many of which could impact how people access, handle,

produce, and consume food. Here's a look at 10 food-related bills to follow this session:

## Food insecurity for students, immigrants, and planned communities

Before the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians was food insecure, according to the [Oregon Food Bank Network](#), meaning they didn't have regular access to quality food or enough of it. As of 2022, that number has grown to 1 in 8 — an increase advocates attribute to the fallout of COVID-19.

[House Bill 3030](#) could fill expected gaps as federally funded school meals [established in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) end. The bill would establish a Universal School Meal Account to reimburse Oregon school districts for some costs incurred in providing meals. Money would be for things not otherwise reimbursed or paid by the state or federal government, or other sources, and would prioritize districts that offer meals at no charge to all students without consideration of individual eligibility.

Lawmakers are also hoping to address students outside the K-12 system. [National statistics](#) estimate between 30 to 40 percent of students in higher education are food insecure, compared to [10 to 11 percent of the overall population](#). [House Bill 2393](#) would require Oregon's [Higher Education Coordinating Commission](#) to investigate solutions to food insecurity for students enrolled in post-secondary institutions across the state.

[Sen. Cedric Hayden](#), R-Roseberg, has sponsored a bill looking at food insecurity solutions on a more individualized level. [Senate Bill 437](#) would allow lot owners and their tenants in planned communities — often [defined by](#) a collection of plots with shared obligations — to produce food through gardening, hen-keeping, or beekeeping.

"[P]eople need to have access to safe, reliable sources of food," the text states, "and ... the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how easily our supply of fresh foods can be disrupted."

Lastly, on the issue of hunger relief, multiple Democratic lawmakers from both the Senate and House are chief sponsors on a bill focused on aid for immigrants. [Senate Bill 610](#) would establish a Food for All Oregonians Program, which would provide nutrition assistance to Oregon residents who would qualify for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits if not for their immigration status.

## Takeout containers and single-use plastics

Several bills this session deal less with the food itself and more with the materials we use to carry, store, or consume it. For example, **Senate Bill 543** would prohibit food vendors from using containers or single-use items with polystyrene foam unless they met set criteria. It would also prohibit someone from selling or distributing these containers, as well as containers that have polyfluoroalkyl substances, or **PFAS**. Exposure to PFAS, which generally make products nonstick or stain resistant, has been linked to **cancers, liver damage, and other health conditions**, according to various studies.

The bill's chief sponsors are **Rep. Maxine Dexter**, D-Portland; **Sen. Janeen Sollman**, D-Hillsboro; and **Sen. Michael Dembrow**, D-Portland. The same three lawmakers are behind **Senate Bill 544**, which would require food producers to reduce single-use plastic packaging and foodwares by 25 percent over the next decade.

“Sadly, we are being buried in plastic,” Sollman said **Tuesday** in a committee meeting. “Only 9 percent of that is actually recycled. The rest of it is ending up in our waterways and ending up in our bodies.” The trio has also sponsored **Senate Bill 545**, which would establish rules allowing diners to use their own containers for refills at restaurants and food carts.

Rep. Lily Morgan, R-Grants Pass, is the chief sponsor of **House Bill 3047**, which would repeal Oregon's existing provisions that prohibit food and beverage providers from giving single-use plastic straws to consumers unless requested. Lawmakers established the practice in 2019, when they passed **Senate Bill 90** with resounding support from Oregon's House and Senate. Several bars, restaurants, and cities, **including Portland**, made the move sooner. Oregon was **among the first states** to pass such a ban.

## Producing and donating meat

Two bills this session focus on allowances for small-scale meat producers and the possibility of charitable meat donations.

If passed, **House Bill 2689** would provide a licensing exemption for farmers slaughtering fewer than 1,000 rabbits annually for human food. **Rep. Mark Owens**, R-Crane, and **Sen. Lynn P. Findley**, R-Vale, are the chief sponsors. The bill had its first **hearing Thursday**, during which both lawmakers said the same exemption already exists for poultry farming. Owens explained the farmers are still held to state rules and requirements and are subject to inspection.

Findley said passing the bill “would support small farmers and their customers with better, more affordable options.”

“Passing this bill would support the entrepreneurial spirit of young farmers,” he added, “... (and) offering this exemption will result in Oregonians having more options for local, fresh, sustainable meats.”

Also up for consideration is **Senate Bill 479**, which would make way for the donation of meat to charitable organizations and others that offer food for noncommercial purposes. Some hunger relief advocates have previously warned against meat donations due to quality control issues and the potential for foodborne illnesses to spread in vulnerable communities. As **Feeding America states**, these foods can spoil easily and some food banks may not have the refrigerator or freezer space needed to keep items fresh.

The bill states the meat would only be donated by a person licensed to slaughter animals for meat and would be subject to federal inspection; the meat must be processed under a federally approved program and slaughtered at a custom processing establishment.



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