

Testimony of Joseph Weber
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<http://www.webergreenhouses.com/links.php3>

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Health and Technology

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Geneseo, NY

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joseph Weber. I am the Vice President of Mike Weber Greenhouses Inc., a greenhouse company located in West Seneca, NY growing and selling quality plants for the past 35 plus years. We currently have 7 full time employees and 9 part time employees and \$1.3 million in annual sales.

My parents, Michael and Susan Weber, started this business as a traditional greenhouse company selling retail year round. We have found that it was easier for us to grow the wholesale side of the business and have evolved into niche markets including growing potted herbs we sell under our Gardner's Own brand, primarily at Wegmans supermarkets and independent garden centers. Our relationship with Wegmans has been a very positive example of how small businesses can work with larger businesses to improve efficiencies, profitability and a unique offering to customers. The example I will highlight that relates to the work of this Subcommittee is in the area of food safety.

Wegmans has a strong brand, an excellent reputation and a tremendous commitment to food safety and their customers. Our herbs enter through their produce department where they require all of their produce suppliers – even the smallest -- to be certified to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) standards. We are good at growing plants and not nearly as experienced with government red tape. This certification would be very difficult for us to accomplish without Wegmans' help. They put on a GAP training workshop and provide materials to train growers in the importance of GAPs in reducing microbial and bacterial risks during the production and distribution of **FRESH** fruits and vegetables. The workshop covers areas like water quality, manure and composting, assessing food safety risks and developing a crisis management plan. After growers have completed their own GAP program and have implemented it, we are required to undergo an annual GAP audit, but

much of the cost of this audit is reimbursed by Wegmans. There is still a large cost in writing and implementing a GAP program. The end result is that we have a high quality product that consumers really want and can trust in its safety and value in the market. Mike Weber Greenhouses, Inc. has a market and distribution in Wegmans that far exceeds anything we could duplicate with our retail or even wholesale sales.

As far as I am concerned, that is the value of a partnership between small and larger businesses – consumers get a unique, quality product that a small, local business can offer; and the large business can help distribute the product to customers over a geographic area and volume that we could never duplicate. I brought a sample of some of our herbs for you to see.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.