



SB 5502—Oregon Department of Agriculture Budget

Testimony to Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

28 February 2013, H-170

Honorable Committee Members:

Oregonians for Food & Shelter (OFS) is a grassroots coalition of farmers, foresters, and other chemical users focused on natural resource issues involving pesticides, fertilizer, and biotechnology. We are writing you today in regards to SB 5502—the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) budget for the 2013-15 biennium. Our membership has extensive interactions with ODA, and their funding is very important to us.

First and foremost we need to thank the Department of Agriculture for the work they do for our members. The department provides great service to agriculture in Oregon as well as the state at large. They serve an important dual role as a promoter of Oregon Ag products and regulator of Ag activities. In order to have a strong Ag economy in Oregon both of these roles are important.

Unfortunately, in these times of reduced budgets our natural resource agencies continue to shoulder a large share of the burden. Despite this, the agency has managed to serve its customers well and remains a model for state agency interaction with the public.

Our members are especially concerned with the pesticide and fertilizer programs within ODA. A strong regulatory structure is important and our members have confidence that ODA can handle the task, but only if they have the needed resources.

As general fund and lottery dollars continue to be cut from ODA they are becoming more and more reliant on fees. Both the pesticide and fertilizer programs are completely fee funded. Users are supportive of these programs and gladly pay these fees. Our concern though is the continued prospect of "fund sweeps". When users pay to fund a program important to them, they expect the dollars to stay there. When these dollars are used for other things the public trust is broken and it makes it more difficult for the agency to get the future funding it needs through fee increases. We ask that you to not consider any fund sweeps from ODA dedicated program funds.

There are also a couple of budget items related to pesticides that we feel are extremely important. The first one of these is the Pesticide Analytical Response Center (PARC). The PARC board is made up of 14 agency representatives and pesticide experts and serves as a clearinghouse for pesticide related incidents. It is a place for coordination by the involved state agencies and ensures that pesticide related issues are being addressed properly. This forum is crucial for coordinated investigations to collect and analyze information about reported incidents. PARC is extremely important to us and is a budget priority for OFS members.

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From its authorization in 1991, PARC was funded through general funds and seen as an important program for good government. As budgets became tighter in 2009-11 biennium, PARC funding was shifted to the pesticide program. This was intended only to be a short term fix, and in the proposed budget PARC is shifted back to the general fund which is the proper place for that program.

Importantly, by funding PARC out of general funds it also allows for pesticide program funds to be used for the expansion of the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) program. OFS strongly believes that PSPs are model way to deal with watersheds that are found to have pesticides present above the established benchmarks. The success in Hood River, amongst others, has shown what a locally-driven, voluntary, collaborative approach can do to address pesticides in water. The proposed 50/50 split general fund and pesticide program fund, is the appropriate way to expand the program.

We know that you will be facing some tough decisions during the budgeting process, but hope you consider the importance of a well-funded Department of Agriculture for Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Scott J. Dahlman

Executive Director