



CLACKAMAS COUNTY

## Soil and Water Conservation District

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### **Testimony to be presented to the Joint Committee On Ways and Means SubCommittee On Natural Resources, February 26, 2015**

Co-chairs and members of the subcommittee:

My name is Tom Salzer, and I'm the General Manager of the Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District. We are a special district covering all of Clackamas County, and we work primarily with private landowners to keep soil on the farm, to protect water quality, and to improve wildlife habitat. We work closely with the Oregon Department of Agriculture as part of Oregon's conservation delivery system, and I'm here today to support the good work of ODA toward achieving water quality goals.

My take-home message today is very simple: the partnership between ODA and soil and water conservation districts works. It provides an effective mechanism to protect natural resources and support our agricultural economy. The department and the District both strive to protect the natural resources that allow Oregon's agricultural producers and communities to be successful, but we do it differently. While ODA is the regulatory authority, the District works with people on a voluntary basis: we don't write tickets and we don't turn people in.

Both agencies invest public funds to achieve water quality goals. We are really two sides of the same coin, and when voluntary measures with farmers don't work, ODA stands ready to step in to assure the protection of water quality.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the department's Focus Area program and their more recent Strategic Implementation Area process. Clackamas County SWCD has been pleased to be one of two districts selected by ODA to help test the SIA process. The District worried about a negative reception by people in the test area. That didn't happen. We worried that our constituents might confuse us with ODA regulators. That didn't happen.

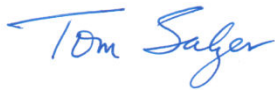
What did happen is that through the process of documenting good and not-so-good conditions in the agricultural landscape, we found that most of our farmers were doing the right things to protect soil, water, and wildlife resources. Where they weren't, ODA and the District worked with people in the SIA to fix the most pressing problems.

We could not be successful without strong support from the Legislature and from ODA. The lottery dollars that flow through OWEB and ODA to protect water quality are vital, and we

appreciate your efforts to maintain those funds. The training provided by ODA to soil and water conservation districts supports our combined efforts to protect Oregon's precious natural resources and assure a vibrant agricultural economy in Oregon.

So I thank you for your support of ODA and soil and water conservation districts, and we look forward to many productive and effective years working together.

Sincerely,



Tom Salzer, General Manager

## **More about the Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Clackamas County SWCD is widely recognized as a local and statewide leader in several conservation programs:

- We work extensively and effectively to manage invasive weeds.
- We continue to work in partnership to reduce the impact of pesticides on water quality.
- We partner effectively with ten watershed councils.
- We support the growing partnership between soil and water conservation districts and watershed councils, as directed in ORS 541.898(6).

In 2007, Clackamas County voters recognized the District's important role and effectiveness by authorizing a permanent tax levy. Currently, that levy provides nearly \$2 million a year to support the work of the District. Approximately one-third of those funds are returned directly to taxpayers in the form of financial assistance to implement needed conservation practices.

Clackamas County is one of the most significant agricultural counties in Oregon and leads the nation in several categories. In Oregon, Clackamas County ranks 1<sup>st</sup> for poultry and egg production, 4<sup>th</sup> in the number of irrigated farms, and 5<sup>th</sup> in total farmgate sales.

We have more farms than any county in Oregon, and the smallest average farm size. More of our farms are owned or operated by women than in any other Oregon county.

Nationally, Clackamas County ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in Christmas tree acres, 1<sup>st</sup> in rhubarb acres, 4<sup>th</sup> in nursery and greenhouse acres, and we have the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest inventory of llamas. Clackamas County ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in nursery and greenhouse sales compared to counties across the United States.

Learn more about the District's work by visiting our website at <http://conservationdistrict.org>