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March 8, 2021

The Senate Committee on Education
Attn: Chair Senator Michael Dembrow,
Vice-Chair Senator Chuck Thomason, and
Members of the Committee

Dear Senators,

Thank you for taking the time to review my comments in Support of SB 404-2. I am the Executive Director/CEO of the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) based in Eugene. We are a nonprofit organization established in 1997 with a mission to support the growth and trust of the global organic community through expert, independent and transparent verification of input materials, and through education and technical assistance.

When I started at OMRI more than 10 years ago, I was employee number 17. Today we have more than 72 employees working not only from Eugene, but remotely from several other states as well. As employees move elsewhere due to personal reasons, they want to continue working for OMRI and staying connected to the organic sector. Our budget has increased from \$1.3 million in 2010 to over \$6.3 million today. OMRI's growth has remained ahead of the strong growth of the U.S. organic market.

SB 404-2 increases the resources and training available to help farmers transition to organic, or to simply increase their use of organic practices and methods. As more farmland transitions to organic, my nonprofit organization grows, and we are able to create more jobs and services. I have heard from many farmers and consultants that farmers trust and rely on extension agents when they transition to organic and when they need help with issues later. New organic specialists would be trained with the knowledge needed to help farmers with organic production.

I believe that a comprehensive market analysis is critical to the continued growth of the organic sector in Oregon. While some national sources report on the organic sector in Oregon, we need a market analysis conducted by Oregon to focus on what is important to us. Using that data, Oregon will be able to support continued growth for the benefit of the State and its citizens, including job creation and economic growth. We need hard data rather than anecdotal information. The Organic Trade Association conducted a study in 2016 that found that

- Counties with [organic hotspots](#)* lowered county poverty rates and increased median annual household incomes.
- Outreach and knowledge transfer are critical in creating organic hotspots.
- Organic agriculture can be used as an economic development tool.

** A hotspot is a cluster of counties with two important characteristics: (a) they are counties with statistically high numbers of organic operations (farms and businesses), and (b) they have neighboring counties with high numbers of organic operations.*

I believe that everyone should have access to fresh organic foods, including those served by the Women, Infants and Children public assistance program. Organic is for all races, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, genders, and political parties. In fact, around the world, women are primarily responsible for providing food for their families, and they are often responsible for growing it in developing countries. In Oregon, let's ensure that everyone has access to organic foods.

I serve as the volunteer President of IFOAM – Organics International, the change agent and voice for the global organic movement, with members in 120 countries. In my international work, I have seen how groups of very different people can rally around common goals. I believe that we all want healthful foods for our families, produced in a way that is better for people, animals and the planet. By following the [organic principles](#) of Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care, I believe that we can achieve truly sustainable agricultural systems in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Peggy Miars
Executive Director/CEO