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March 10, 2021

The Senate Committee on Education

Attn: Senator Michael Dembrow (Chair), Senator Chuck Thomsen (Vice-Chair) and Members of the Committee  
Oregon State Capitol  
Salem, OR

**RE: Testimony in Support of SB 404-2**

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen and Members of the Committee:

Our world has changed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. As we mark the anniversary of initial lockdowns in response to the pandemic, legislators and leaders across the state continue to face great uncertainty as we chart a course that ensures care, safety and resilience for Oregon and its communities.

I recognize these are challenging economic times and new investments may seem daunting. **However, I believe investments in support of the organic sector and increasing access to organic food for more people will advance Oregon towards economic recovery, social equity and climate change adaptation. The passage of SB 404-2 is an important step in rebuilding better for increased resilience.**

For over 11 years, I've served as Executive Director for Oregon Tilth, a leading nonprofit certifier, educator & advocate for organic agriculture since 1974. The organization is accredited by the USDA to offer organic certification services in accordance with the USDA National Organic Program. Our certification program currently serves over 2200 clients throughout the U.S. and Latin America. We certify a diverse mix of crops, livestock and processed products across the organic supply chain. Our clients' organic sales represent over \$6 billion of the organic market. We certify over 1100 farm operations, with diverse geography and scales of production. We are the largest organic certifier in Oregon.

Organic is good for the economy

*Growth* – U.S. organic sales have grown substantially from \$1 billion in 1990, when the federal organic law was signed, to over \$55 billion in 2020. U.S. organic food sales continue to grow at a rate more than double the rate of the overall U.S. food market and now account for nearly 6% of all food sales. Organic produce captures 15% of the nation's overall fruit and vegetable market.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Organic Trade Association. 2020 Organic Industry Survey

*Resilience* – Despite difficult economic conditions, organic sales soared in 2020, up 12% from 2019. The Spring 2020 “pantry load” rush resulted in a combined organic sales spike of about 42%.<sup>2</sup> Behind the scenes, the organic supply chain adapted its practices to keep pantries and refrigerators stocked, and supported their communities through donations, shifting business models to produce essential supplies, retooling work processes to protect employees and taking creative measures to meet demand. Milk, potatoes, alfalfa (livestock feed), berries and cattle are the top organic products in Oregon, all representing staple foods that consumers purchased in higher quantities when cooking more at home during the last 12 months.

*Farm Viability* – It isn’t an easy transition, but each year more farmers choose to go organic. Organic farming creates more jobs with greater stability. The number of organic farms grew by 39% in recent years, while the total number of farms in the U.S. shrank by 3%. During that same period, organic farm income nearly doubled while the income of all U.S. farms remained stagnant. Furthermore, the average value of products sold from organic farms is double the average value sold from all U.S. farms. Younger farmers gravitate to organic—the average age of organic farmers is six years younger than that of the national average of all farmers.<sup>3</sup>

Oregon currently ranks 5<sup>th</sup> nationally in certified organic acreage and 8<sup>th</sup> in the number of certified farms. Oregon organic commodity sales increased 64% from 2017 to 2019, to \$454 million annually. With Oregon’s ability to produce a wide variety of crops, there is now considerable momentum for Oregon to be a leader in a number of organic crops.<sup>3</sup> ***SB 404-2 creates a new Organic Policy Special Assistant to the Director at the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to coordinate increased marketing of organic products, facilitate more national and international trade in Oregon’s organic products, and integrate ODA’s activities across the agency in support of Oregon’s organic sector.***

*Jobs* – Organic farms hire more people per acre, and those people work for more days of the year.<sup>4</sup> Organic suppliers and handlers are creating jobs across the country by opening, expanding, and retooling manufacturing and processing facilities. Over 50% of organic businesses with more than five employees report an increase of full-time employment and the majority continue to forecast full-time employment growth.<sup>5</sup> And 30% of Oregon organic farms plan on increasing production over the next five years.<sup>6</sup>

*Rural Development* – Organic hotspots kick-start rural economies. Hotspots, defined as counties with high levels of organic agricultural activity whose neighboring counties also have a high level of organic activity, boost median household incomes by an average of \$2,000, and reduce poverty levels by an average of 1.3 percentage points. Nearly half (47%) of the counties in Oregon are Organic hotspots.<sup>7</sup> ***SB 404-2 includes a legislative directive to the Oregon Business Development Department to conduct a comprehensive economic analysis of Oregon’s organic sector to inform opportunities for continued growth and development.***

### Organic is good for people and the planet

*Access* – The organic sector is committed to ensuring that organic is accessible to everyone. We want to empower all people to exercise the right to healthy and sustainable food. The rate of food insecurity (being without access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) in Oregon is 14.6%. About 552,900

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<sup>2</sup> SPINS. 2021

<sup>3</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Census of Agriculture. 2012 and 2017

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Finley, M. Jahi Chappell, Paul Thiers & James Roy Moore. 2018. Does organic farming present greater opportunities for employment and community development than conventional farming?

<sup>5</sup> The Organic Trade Association. 2019 Organic Industry Survey

<sup>6</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2019 Organic Survey.

<sup>7</sup> Jaenicke, Edward C. 2016. U.S. Organic Hotspots and Their Benefit to Local Economies

Oregonians are food insecure, of those 194,070 are children.<sup>8</sup> Organic can play a critical role in the healthy development and long-term health outcomes for at-risk communities. ***SB 404-2 includes a provision ensuring that organic products in Oregon are eligible for purchase by recipients of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food assistance program.***

***Sustainability*** – Organic production requires practices that advance sustainability in agriculture like crop rotation, cover cropping, building soil health, increasing biodiversity, and reducing nutrient pollution. The prohibition of the most toxic agricultural chemicals in organic farming benefits the environment, reduces farmworker exposure and improves occupational health.<sup>9</sup> It's also important to note some of the practices used by organic farmers can and have been incorporated on non-organic farms. While they may not implement all the practices necessary to achieve organic certification, non-organic farms can also benefit from and contribute to sustainability by selective adoption of some organic practices.

***Climate*** – Organic agriculture is proven to sequester more carbon in the soil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Research shows organic soils already sequester 25% more carbon than soils from non-organic farms.<sup>10</sup> Organic farms use 50% less new reactive nitrogen, a potent greenhouse gas.<sup>11</sup> Supporting organic is a meaningful way to help mitigate climate change. ***SB 404-2 creates a new Soil Health Specialist position at the ODA, reflecting the agency's interest in supporting more climate-friendly agricultural practices for Oregon.***

#### Investments in Organic Extension positions to support farmers

Oregon Tilth has maintained a formal partnership with Oregon State University (OSU) since 2009. We have invested over \$250K in OSU to help protect faculty positions in difficult fiscal years by allowing OSU to leverage matched dollars in this unique public-private partnership. Working closely with the OSU's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems, we help inform the research and education agenda to meet the unique needs of the organic sector.

Oregon Tilth's research report published with OSU, [\*Breaking New Ground: Farmer Perspectives on Organic Transition\*](#), surveyed 1800 farmers across the U.S. who had pursued, successfully and unsuccessfully, a transition to organic. With 600+ respondents, our findings showed that farmers need technical support for organic transition and production, plus applied research to solve production, market, and policy barriers. In 2017, our [partnership helped establish a nascent Organic Extension Program at OSU](#).

OSU has begun to address priority areas identified for outreach and applied research. For example, organic extension faculty have updated tools for organic nutrient management, and degree day models for organic pest management. A robust research program is active with grant-supported projects investigating cover crops, winter vegetable production, and pest management in brassicas. An OSU Organic Agriculture Working Group is catalyzing organic agriculture related work across Oregon in multiple disciplines from plant breeding to soil health.

I've attached to this testimony a letter from July 2020, addressed to the Joint Ways and Means Committee, urging protection of Organic Extension Positions. The letter was signed by 90 people who represent farms,

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<sup>8</sup> Oregon Food Bank. Hunger in Oregon. 2020

<sup>9</sup> The Organic Center. 2018. Organic Agriculture: Reducing Occupational Pesticide Exposure in Farmers and Farmworkers

<sup>10</sup> Ghabbour E.A. et al. 2017. Chapter One - National Comparison of the Total and Sequestered Organic Matter Contents of Conventional and Organic Farm Soils. *Advances in Agronomy*, 146, 1–35

<sup>11</sup> Shade, J., Cattell Noll, L., Seufert, V. et al. Decreasing reactive nitrogen losses in organic agricultural systems. 2020

food businesses, NGOs and individuals from across the state, including the coast (Astoria, Noti), up and down the Willamette and Rogue valleys (Ashland to Portland), southern Oregon (Klamath Falls) and along the Columbia Gorge (Hood River). Organic Extension is highly valued across the food supply chain and state.

Farmers need outreach and technical expertise to put scientific findings into practice. Organic Extension brings innovation from applied research into the field via high contact with farmers. This increases organic farmers' access to technical assistance, resources, expertise and ultimately, new market opportunities and price premiums. ***SB 404-2 invests in an OSU Extension Service cluster hire of 5 positions specializing in organic crop production to assist Oregon farmers in accessing the \$55 billion national market for organic products.***

I recognize Oregon is facing a challenging budget situation. ***And I strongly support SB 404-2 as a strategic investment that will increase support for organic and transitioning farmers, improve access to organic food and make way for greater economic recovery and growth in Oregon.***

Thanks in advance for your consideration.

Kind regards,



Chris Schreiner  
Executive Director  
Oregon Tilth

July 31, 2020

Senator Betsy Johnson  
900 Court St. NE, S-209  
Salem, OR 97301

Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward  
900 Court St. NE, S-213,  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Representative Dan Rayfield  
900 Court St. NE, H-275,  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Speaker, Representative Tina Kotek  
900 Court St. NE, Rm. 269  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Protect OSU Organic Extension Positions

Dear Joint Ways & Means Committee Co-Chairs and House Speaker,

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges in 2020. It has revealed vulnerabilities in our national food system, created massive economic disruptions, and created a once-in-century public health crisis. We recognize the critical role state leaders play in advancing policy to mitigate the pain created by the pandemic and in ensuring smart investments for the future of the state.

Organic agriculture is a growing and vital segment of the Oregon economy supporting farmers, businesses, and retailers. During the 2019 legislative session, legislators provided funding for two positions with the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service focused on organic agriculture. This meaningful, multi-year investment is a prime example of public resources that enable a resilient, competitive and sustainable agriculture and food system.

Farmers need outreach and technical expertise to put scientific findings into practice. Organic Extension brings innovation from applied research into the field via in-the-field contact with farmers. This increases organic farmers' access to technical assistance, resources, expertise and ultimately, new market opportunities and price premiums.

Funding for both extension positions became available in January 2020 and OSU moved quickly to fill the first position. The second position was ready to begin the hiring process in March when the COVID-19 economic downturn forced OSU into a hiring freeze. Due to state budget reductions, we are deeply concerned these positions may be threatened or cut. This risk represents a significant lost opportunity in economic recovery for Oregon agriculture.

The rebuilding of agricultural economies after the COVID-19 crisis offers a unique opportunity to transform the food system and make it resilient to future shocks, ensuring environmentally sustainable and healthy food for all. A shift toward organic farming connected to strong regional food systems can heal our soils, air and water, boosting economic resilience and local jobs. This can be attained by promoting sustainable farming practices and facilitating market access through strong organic extension support services.

We recognize Oregon is facing a challenging budget situation. Organic extension positions represent a strategic investment that were needed before the pandemic and are even more crucial now as they allow the state to expand its knowledge, commerce and leadership in organic agriculture.

We urge you to continue permanent funding and commitment to Oregon-focused organic research and education. Please protect existing funding for both organic extension positions and plan for additional investments in the future as part of building a better, more resilient food and agriculture sector in Oregon.

Thanks in advance for your consideration.

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Farm, Food Business or Organization Name (if applicable)</u></b>
Chris Schreiner	Oregon Tilth
David Parrish	Oregon Tilth
Rianne Ferris	Oregon Tilth
Ivory LosBanos	Medicine Flower
Kenneth Cancilla	Cancilla Vineyards
Jordann Bartlett	Oregon Tilth
Larry S Nelson	LaNa's Conscious Farm Inc
Alyssa Martinez Neumann	Oregon Tilth
Erin Radniecki	Oregon Tilth
Callie Uhan	Oregon Tilth
Sally Lammers	Oregon Tilth
Nathaniel Lamers	Portland Coffee Roasters
Barry Haynes	Ashland Food Cooperative
Kathy and Tim O'Leary	Long Walk LLC, dba Valley View Orchard
Margaret Bengry	Redwing Farm
Katie Goldberg	Oregon Tilth Certified Organic
Rose Varnum	Klamath Valley Botanicals LLC
Jack Gray	Winter Green Farm
Darin Jones	Oregon Tilth
John Caputo	Not applicable
Mary Stehman	Meridian Orchards, Inc.
Suzanne Sarmasti	Sarmasti Farms
Frank Morton	Wild Garden Seed

Steve Pierson	Sar Ben Farms
Jessi Freitag	Liv Foods, Inc.
Ron Oberg	Happy Apple Farm
Robert Briggs	Present Moment Farm LLC
Brad Lerch	Royal Blueberries & Cafe Mam Coffee
Diane Hennelly	Oregon Tilth
Nathan Johnson	Sunbow Produce
Kim Nelson	Oregon Tilth
Neil Austin	Austin Farm
Elizabeth Denhart	Hood river farm LLC
Jim Russell	Whitewater Ranch
Melissa Collman	Cloud-Cap Farm (Dairy)
Levi Fredrikson	Oregon Tilth
Sebastian Aguilar	Chickadee Farm
Gregory Arnell	Oregon Soap Company
Matthew Dillon	Clif Bar & Company
Abigail Singer	Rogue Farm Corps
Shari Sirkin	Dancing Roots Farm
Laura Jean Largent	Cultivate Oregon
Conner Rueth	JEM Organics
Maia Hardy	Ecotrust
Brittney Deming	Friends of Family Farmers
Alice Morrison	White Rabbit Gardens
Matt Van Wey	Quackenbush Farm and Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District
Caitlin Jacobson	Na
Hilary Thompson	Organic Consumer
Meghan Bursiek	N/a
Abby Bradbury	Abby's Greens LLC
David Eskeldson	Egors Acres
Kendra Howard	Floribunda Farm and Kitchen
Rosemary Quinn	N/A
Gia Matzinger	Deschutes Canyon Garlic
Bonnie Albright	WWFN
Lauren Reynolds	Graduate of the OSU extension urban farming program
Michael hall	Linda hall farm, LLC.
Amanda Morse	Blue House Greenhouse Farm
Marisha Auerbach	Oregon State University
Jim Fields	FieldsFarm
Lexi Pellegrino	Part time farm employee
Sara Hubbe	SweetWell Farm
Janet Meyer	Windflower Farm LLC
Shauna Beckstein	n/a
Jane Peterson	Olmstead Rd PermaFarm LLC
Karin Stutzman	Western Skies Cattle Ranch

Kelly Cabral	Ohio State University
Tanya Raye	Backyard farmer
Abbey Churchill	Prairie Wind Family Farm
Sylvan Hoover	N/A
Nicole Haun	Volunteer at nourish.la
Laura Rost	None
Sarah Kleeger	Adaptive Seeds
Megan DeBates	Organic Trade Association
Ellie Lanphier	None
Kevin Boekhoff	Bright Earth Foods
Joey Staub	Gathering Together Farm
Ryan Naughton	Cold Spring Harbor Labs
Patti Rieman	Fir Oak Farm
Susanna Fitzgerald	Community gardener and organic supporter
Jerome Sabol	East Fork Farm
Rosario allende	OSU student and gathering together farm employee
Jago Cox	Gathering Together Farm
Angela Wartes-Kahl	Independent Organic Services, Inc.
David Oberstein	Portland Farmers Market
Justin Freeman	Bagel Sphere, Owner; Oregon Tilth, President
Michelle Week	Good Rain Farm
Katie Gourley	Sweet Clover Baking
Siiri Sampson	Siiri Sampson LLC