

SB 404-2 Submitted at the request of the Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC)



- Problem**
- From 2016-2019, total value of Oregon's certified organic agricultural products sold increased by nearly 30% (to \$454,406,000)
 - Over the same time, organic acres in Oregon increased by less than 1%. (.6%, an increase of 1276 acres)
 - And the number of organic farms in Oregon actually DECREASED by 1.1% (from 461 organic farms statewide to 456)¹

Solution Provisions in SB 404-2 provide resources for investing in Oregon's economic recovery and long-term success

Expanding Organic Extension Services at Oregon State University

Oregon State University's Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems embodies the full land grant university mission: applied research, extension, and community engagement. The Center was formed in 2013 after more than 20 years of achievement by the OSU Small Farms Program and is housed within the College of Agricultural Sciences, serving as a catalyst across disciplines to enhance farm and food business success. The Center works with small, medium, and large farms, with organic agriculture as a major focus. It is a key contact for historically underserved communities of farmers, embracing farmers of color, women, and veteran farmers. As part of the OSU Extension Service, the Center collaborates with farmers to enhance farm success through new crops and cropping systems, innovative practices, value-added processing, and business management. The direct connection from farmers and community organizations to researchers at OSU, and thus to researchers at other universities across the U.S. and the world, is a fundamental strength of this system. In fact, this program is the envy of the world. There are opportunities for urban and rural organic farmers, but there are also barriers and challenges that must be addressed. Organic agriculture is an area of specialization within the agricultural sciences specific to crop and region. **The proposed cluster hire of five organic positions will advance Oregon's capacity in organic agriculture.** The positions will function as a team linking with other agricultural scientists and expert farmers creating a synergy that provides Oregon's farmers access to and success in the organic marketplace.

Integrated Support for Organic Agriculture and Soil Health at the Oregon Department of Agriculture

The proposal for an Organic Policy Special Assistant at ODA is modeled on a successful program for encouraging the development of organic systems that was instituted at the federal level by the USDA. There are two main goals addressed by the proposal for this new position within the ODA: 1) coordinating department policies that impact organic production and marketing and 2) integrating organic policy throughout the range of department activities. This dual focus is necessary because Oregon's organic agriculture covers a broad scope, encompassing a wide variety of organic products—from produce, to grains, to livestock products—and Oregon's organic trade also includes many organic handling and processing operations. Creating a position with a designated focus on ensuring cohesive, integrated policies for organic production and handling not only encourages the expansion and development of the organic trade, it also makes excellent use of ODA's resources through:

- Encouraging increased communication about, and understanding of, the needs of the organic trade throughout ODA;
- Fostering analysis of policy gaps needed to eliminate hurdles to further development of Oregon's organic trade;
- Eliminating duplicative regulatory efforts;
- Streamlining programs to promote and market Oregon's organic products;
- Creating a focal point for ODA's interactions with other state agencies interested in organic issues such as those with programs for economic development and environmental improvement; and
- Fostering opportunities for encouraging use of ecological farming practices throughout Oregon's agricultural community.

1. 2019 Organic Survey results have been released by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS): <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Newsroom/2020/10-22-2020.php> See the full survey online: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Organics/index.php

SB 404-2 would also create a new **Soil Health Specialist position at ODA**, creating in-house expertise at ODA to improve soil health on Oregon's agricultural lands, serving all farms. Healthy soils practices are aligned with organic practices and provide a variety of benefits that are important to farmers and ranchers. Healthy soils keep cropland productive, hold more moisture, provide natural pest and disease prevention benefits, keep cropland resilient in the face of natural disasters and unpredictable climate conditions, and help protect air and water quality. Healthy soil practices can also keep carbon in the soil and depending on the practices, can reduce farmers' energy use and reduce fertilizer-related greenhouse gas emissions. This new position at ODA would:



- Support implementation of ODA's climate change plan which is aligned with the new Oregon Climate Action Plan, advancing Oregon agricultural practices that promote soil health through education, technical assistance and coordination
- Pursue funding from agency partners to support more widespread adoption of soil health practices
- Recommend additional policies and programs in Oregon to support soil health, using other state policies as models
- Collaborate on research to understand Oregon's soil carbon sequestration rates and how various practices can promote carbon sequestration

Economic Analysis by the Oregon Business Development Department

Market analysis is critical to the success and growth of the organic sector. Global organic statistics are published annually in the book *The World of Organic Agriculture*, which includes emerging trends in organic for six continents and 187 countries. The Organic Trade Association publishes organic statistics for the United States, including some state-specific information. However, we need a full market analysis conducted by Oregon, for Oregon that goes beyond farmgate sales, to encompass the wide variety of organic business activities in our state. We have witnessed tremendous growth in Oregon's organic sector, including job growth and positive economic impacts, and we need to quantify it, rather than rely on anecdotal information, so we can better plan for and leverage growth opportunities for Oregon. We have seen the organic sector continue to grow and add jobs even during recent recessions and the current COVID pandemic. A market analysis could provide needed support, enabling the State of Oregon to benefit from continued growth in the organic sector.

Increasing equity in access to organic food – Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program

Now more than ever, as we experience the global COVID-19 pandemic, there is growing recognition of the role nutrition plays in our health as individuals and as a society. Food is our first "medicine" and diet can contribute, or be a detriment, to our health. A large body of research has shown that not only do organic crops and dairy have lower levels of synthetic chemicals, such as pesticides and antibiotics, but that eating an organic diet can also reduce pesticide loads within our bodies.² These pesticide loads are particularly harmful to pregnant women and developing children; the very people the WIC program is dedicated to serving. While all states must adhere to federal guidelines when setting their WIC-authorized foods, states are given leeway to consider regional, cultural and other preferences. Currently, Oregon's WIC standards generally lack allowances for any organic foods. Having access to healthy, organic food should not be limited to those who are wealthy. If passed, SB 404-2 would ensure organic products in Oregon are eligible for purchase by recipients of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) public assistance program.



The Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC) is a trade support organization, working to advance the development and growth of the organic industry and community in Oregon. The OOC represents volunteer stakeholders-- farmers, wholesalers, processors, organic certifiers, scientists, consumers and retailers. We lead promotional activities and advocate for state policy to support and grow Oregon's organic trade.

Advancing the development and growth of the organic industry and community
www.oregonorganiccoalition.org