



April 19, 2021

The Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Attn: Co-Chairs Senator Betsy Johnson, Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward and Representative Dan Rayfield and Members of the Committee
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR

RE: Testimony in Support of funding for SB 404

Dear Co-Chairs, Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Hummingbird Wholesale to ask you to advance SB 404 out of Ways and Means to both floors for final passage of the Bill.

We are a family-owned, certified organic food manufacturer and distributor based in Eugene, Oregon. We currently employ 43 people in support of our Eugene operations and distribution. We sell grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, honey and a large variety of in-house manufactured products. We work directly with farmers in the Pacific Northwest to plan and market their crops, serving wholesale customers both regionally and across the United States. We are dedicated to building and supporting a healthy, sustainable, regionally focused food system. Our support for organic farmers and agriculture is at the heart of all we do, because we believe organic production is a triple bottom line win for our future – organic agriculture strengthens the economy, enriching both rural and urban communities, and reduces many negative environmental and health impacts in the agricultural system. With SB 404, we have the opportunity to more fully invest in and leverage these benefits, for a more resilient future.

All three provisions in SB 404 address current gaps in much needed support for farmers and our communities:

- Increased funding for the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems at OSU Extension Services to hire a cluster of 5 Organic Specialists. These positions would be tasked with providing technical assistance and research-oriented solutions to organic and conventional farmers who are interested in site-specific support for regenerative solutions and practices. *Oregon's agriculture spans a diversity of farm types and acres – farming in the Willamette Valley vs. Eastern Oregon and vegetable cropping vs. legumes and grains – and each has unique needs. Organic farming is unique and, particularly for farmers transitioning to organic, there is a need for technical and research assistance that our extension services is particularly positioned to provide. As markets demand more organic products, and farmers see the many benefits of transitioning to organic systems, technical support for making that transition is imperative to our success. There are opportunities for urban and rural organic farmers, but there are also barriers and challenges that must be addressed. The proposed cluster hire of five organic positions will advance Oregon's capacity in organic agriculture*



- Creation of two new positions at the Oregon Department of Agriculture—a Soil Health Specialist reflecting ODA’s interest in supporting more climate-friendly agricultural practices for Oregon; and an Organic Policy Special Assistant to the Director to oversee increased marketing of organic products, facilitation of more national and international trade in Oregon’s organic products, and coordination of ODA’s activities across the agency in support of Oregon’s organic sector. *There is a growing body of research that backs up what we have long known from anecdotal evidence, that soil health is a key contributor to positive outcomes, both agriculturally and environmentally. Investing in soil health can improve yields, reduce soil erosion, reduce moisture loss and sink more carbon in the soil, keeping it out of the atmosphere. The addition of a Soil Health Specialist at ODA supports all farmers, not only organic farmers, and falls perfectly in line with a climate action plan for Oregon. Adding an Organic Special Assistant to the Director is really just a first step to further developing the expertise and support the ODA can and should provide to organic farmers and the organic trade in Oregon.*
- A legislative directive to the Oregon Business Development Department to conduct a comprehensive economic analysis of Oregon’s organic sector. *The organic sector is unique and, with the growth we have seen nationally and, in our state, establishing a baseline of data for the sector will help us to better understand where we need to further invest to harness the opportunity that organic agriculture and trade represents for Oregon.*

We recognize these are challenging economic times and new investments may seem daunting. However, the estimated fiscal impact of SB 404 is small compared to the inevitable return on investment. We believe now is the time for investments in support of the organic sector and increasing access to organic food for more people, in order to advance Oregon toward economic recovery, social equity and climate change adaptation. The passage of SB 404 is an important step in rebuilding better for increased resilience. We recognize Oregon is facing a challenging budget situation. ***And we strongly support SB 404 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Tilt', is positioned above the printed name.

Charlie Tilt

Owner and CEO, Hummingbird Wholesale