



April 19, 2021

The Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Attn: Co-Chairs Senator Kathleen Taylor and Representative Jeff Reardon, and members of the
Committee
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR

RE: Testimony in Support of funding ODA Budget, including provisions in SB 404

Dear Co-Chairs, Senator Taylor, Representative Reardon, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Hummingbird Wholesale to ask you to support funding of ODA's Budget Bill, SB 5502, and also call for the inclusion of additional investments to the ODA to support the organic sector and advance support for soil health, as presented by provisions in SB 404. SB 404 includes the addition of two new positions at ODA: an Organic Special Assistant to the Director and a Soil health Specialist. These positions are sorely needed to provide needed support for economic recovery and growth, and for investment in a more climate friendly approach to agriculture for all farmers, both organic and conventional.

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. Members of our staff and other stakeholders in the organic trade meet regularly with ODA leadership and these conversations have been invaluable in the development of the proposed SB 404. With the provisions in SB 404, which would create two positions at ODA to support organic agriculture and soil health, we have the opportunity to more fully invest in and leverage these benefits, for a more resilient future. We all know that organic producers have unique needs, and those needs are currently underserved at the ODA. These two new positions are a way to address these gaps.

The requests for two positions at ODA presented in SB 404 address current gaps in much needed support for farmers and our communities:

- 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*

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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.

We recognize these are challenging economic times and new investments may seem daunting. However, supporting Oregon's agriculture and markets, through funding ODA's Bill, SB 5502, as well as the additional investments in ODA presented in SB 404, is critical to our economic recovery, supporting rural communities and supporting more climate friendly agricultural practices. The estimated fiscal impacts of SB 5502 and SB 404 are small compared to the inevitable return on investment. We believe now is the time for investments in support of Oregon's agriculture, and specifically the organic sector, 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