



April 21, 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 SB 5502 ODA Budget Bill, with additional funding provisions in SB 404

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

I am writing on behalf of The Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC) 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 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. The OOC, our members and other stakeholders in the organic trade meet regularly with ODA leadership. These conversations have been invaluable in the development of the proposed ODA positions outlined 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. We have had input from ODA on the best way to integrate such positions into their existing programs, so we know these are proposed to elevate the current organizational structure at ODA. In fact, the Soil Health Specialist position request was in ODA's original 2021 budget request to the Governor.

Oregon currently ranks 5th nationally in certified organic acreage and 8th in the number of certified farms. Oregon organic farmgate sales increased 64% from 2017 to 2019, to \$454 million annually. During this same time period, Oregon organic acreage increased by less than 1% and the number of organic farms actually decreased by 1.1%. Nationally, Oregon is falling behind other states in organic production overall, ranking 12th, while we used to be in the top 10. 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 and to further reap the benefits of the economic and climate opportunities organic represents. 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 and organic farms use 50% less new reactive nitrogen, a potent greenhouse gas. Supporting organic is a meaningful way to help mitigate climate change. The requests for two positions at ODA presented in SB 404 address current gaps in much needed support for farmers and our communities.

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

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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.

SB 404 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; and
- Collaborate on research to understand Oregon's soil carbon sequestration rates and how various practices can promote carbon sequestration.

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,



Stacy Kraker, President, Oregon Organic Coalition