



February 3, 2022

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery
Support for SB 1532 and -2 Amendment

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Kennemer, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC) in support of SB1532 and the -2 amendment, as well as urging the legislature to address OSU's \$2 million budget shortfall by restoring the University's "CSL."

SB1532 -2 seeks funding for five Agricultural Extension Agents focused on organic practices to help all farmers, as well as an economic assessment of the organic industry. This bill is about providing resources, technical assistance, and applied research for farmers—it is not regulatory in any way, nor would it raise taxes.

These positions would be at the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems and would be able to assist all farmers. The Center is an extension- and engagement-oriented hub of collaboration within the College of Agricultural Sciences that bases its faculty in the field to work directly with farmers and communities. In general, OSU's Centers and Institutes bring together faculty from multiple fields of study for joint research projects to advance ecosystems science, improve human health, and promote innovation and economic prosperity.

The OOC previously successfully advocated for two OSU Organic Extension Agents at the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems, one focused on vegetable production, the other on pastures and forages, and it would be expedient to build upon this existing foundation. Both Agents have significantly helped many farmers across different geographies, some of whom you will hear from in the public hearing.

Examples of the aid includes updated tools for nutrient management using organic inputs, and degree day models for organic pest management. It is important to note that some of the practices used by organic farmers can and have been incorporated on non-organic farms. Organic methods have also led to soil with increased water holding capacity—a benefit that is critical during drought. Many common organic practices like cover crops, compost management, crop rotations and efforts to enhance soil health can, when used fittingly, benefit all producers and the environment.

The Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems has expertise in these methods, which are the foundation for building a resilient regional food system. Covid-19 highlighted fractures within overly-consolidated international supply chains and Oregon will be well-served by investing in long-term food security that is rooted in local production employing methods that can benefit all farmers.

As Oregon faces extreme weather events like last year's heat dome heat wave, technical assistance and applied research in organic practices are urgently needed, something this bill directly addresses. And findings in both the Oregon Global Warming Commission's *Natural and Working Lands Proposal*, and OrCAN's recent report *Lay of the Land & Levers for Change: Farming for Climate Resilience in Oregon*, back up this need.

Growing the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems through these positions will put OSU and Oregon on the map as a leader in pioneering organic management expertise. Chico State University's Center for Regenerative and Agriculture and Resilient Systems provides a good model for how a university can create strategic focus on the future of farming in addition to leveraging partnerships with conservation districts and other technical assistance providers. In 2021, the Center received a \$6.9 million NRCS award for 'Soil Health Management Systems for Northern California', a five-year project designed to help orchard, vineyard, rangeland, dairy, and row crop producers in Northern California build food and fiber production resiliency.

Last year, the University of California also launched the [institute for organic research and education](#) with \$500,000 endowment from Clif Bar and a \$500,000 match from the UC President. And Pennsylvania's PA Preferred Organic Initiative led to an 800 percent increase in organic, from \$78 million in 2012 to \$707 million in 2017, resulting in the average sales per farm increasing from \$131,000 to \$675,000. With this increase, Pennsylvania now ranks third in the U.S. in organic sales.

The OOC would like to see OSU become a national destination for this type of extension research and technical assistance. Programs that invest at least 3-5 FTE into programs like these attract federal funding, as well as additional private investment, much like you've seen with Oregon Tilth's and Organically Grown Company's investments in Oregon.

There are tremendous growth opportunities within organic agriculture and trade, but Oregon-centric data is needed. Wisconsin is currently undertaking such an assessment as the state realized that a market analysis could spur future economic growth for both rural and urban communities.

According to OSU's 2021 report *Oregon Agriculture, Food and Fiber: An Economic Analysis*, Oregon's organic industry grew substantially between 2008 and 2019 and while the number of farms decreased, the size of farms increased, with overall organic acreage almost doubling. And even though certified organic farms, as measured by NASS, currently only represent 1.2% of agriculture in Oregon, organic captures 6% of all Oregon farmgate sales.

Between 2016 and 2019, the total value of Oregon’s organic agricultural products sold increased nearly 30% to \$454 million. However, Oregon is falling behind other states and is no longer in the top 10 for organic production, ranking 12th, which is why this legislation is critical to reestablishing Oregon’s leadership within organic.

In general, Organic agriculture is a bright spot in the U.S farm economy, growing to over \$55 billion in sales a year in 2020, more than double the growth rate of the overall U.S. food market. Organic farming also creates jobs with greater stability—organic farms hire more people per acre, and those people work for more days of the year. The number of US 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. And younger farmers gravitate to organic—the average age of organic farmers is six years younger than that of the national average of all farmers.

And in terms of youth and market trends, market data from the Hartman Group’s *Organic and Beyond* 2020 report shows that 82% of consumers use organic food and beverages at least monthly—challenging the notion that organic is only for the wealthy—with much higher adoption rates among Gen X, millennials and Gen Z—the market of the future.

A comprehensive economic assessment of Oregon’s organic sector will help identify opportunities that highlight the state’s competitive advantages and needs for the future, and to help secure additional private investment. Organic agriculture can be used as an effective economic development tool, especially in rural areas—regardless of if farmers choose to certify all of part of their farms.

I urge your support for SB1532 -2.

Most sincerely,

Amy M Wong

Amy Wong
Board Chair
Oregon Organic Coalition