



February 3, 2022

State of Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 1532

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 1532. I am Megan DeBates, Vice President of Government Affairs for the Organic Trade Association. The Organic Trade Association is the largest membership-based business association for organic agriculture and products in North America. It is the leading voice for organic trade in the United States representing over 9,500 farms and businesses across all 50 states, including 65 in Oregon.

We strongly support SB 1532 which will invest in additional extension agents at Oregon State University that can provide technical assistance and support for Oregon farmers including those that are organic or are interested in transitioning to organic production. The bill also includes resources for Oregon to conduct a comprehensive economic analysis that will evaluate the total economic impact and value of the Oregon organic sector which is sorely needed due to lack of data.

Organic is good for the economy

Organic agriculture is a bright spot in the U.S farm economy, growing to over \$62 billion in annual sales in 2020, more than double the growth rate of the overall U.S. food market.¹ Organic is a significant part of Oregon's agriculture, ranking 10th in the nation for organic production with over 900 organic farms and businesses. Organic punches above its weight. Although organic farms only make up 1% of producers in the state, the value of that product represents 10% of Oregon's annual farm gate sales, with over \$450 million in organic commodity sales.²

Oregon also has one of the highest consumption rates of organic in the nation with over 90% of Oregon households regularly buying organic products.³ If Oregon fails to invest in organic agriculture, Oregonians will continue to buy organic products, but the economic benefit of those sales will transfer to other states or countries. Oregon should be investing more in their organic sector like other states do, such as Pennsylvania with their [PA Preferred Organic Program](#).

Organic agriculture empowers Oregon's rural communities. "Organic Hotspots" which are clusters of counties with high levels of organic agricultural activity, boost median household incomes by an

¹ The Organic Trade Association. 2020 Organic Industry Survey

² USDA NASS. *Farms, Land, and Value of Sales on Certified Organic Farms: 2019*. Table 1, p.7.

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Organics/organics_1_001%20_001.pdf

³ Nielsen UPC Scan Data of 100,000 households, 2016

https://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/HouseholdPurchasing_USOperations_500.pdf

average of \$2,000 and reduce poverty levels by an average of 1.3 percentage points. 47% of counties in Oregon are Organic Hotspots.⁴

USDA organic is recognized around the world as the global gold standard. There are significant trade opportunities for Oregon organic exports. The top five growing markets for organic products are Canada, Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Last year, the total value of tracked organic exports to those five countries was over \$564 million presenting a major opportunity for Oregon organic exports.⁵ Top organic commodities in Oregon such as dairy and berries are especially well positioned to take advantage of these international market opportunities.

Organic is a choice

Competition and choice are the bedrocks of the American economy. Organic is a **voluntary** regulatory program for producers and handlers who choose to meet a strict federal standard and market their products under the USDA Organic seal. The organic program provides uniform standards and enforcement for those who choose to participate. The market rewards businesses that opt in. Likewise, consumers are free to make choices to support organic products every time they make a purchase.

In summary, support for Oregon organic agriculture will provide economic opportunities for farmers, creating jobs and lifting rural economies while meeting the growing consumer demand for organic products in the U.S. and global marketplace. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Megan DeBates
Vice President of Government Affairs
Organic Trade Association

⁴ Organic Trade Association. *U.S. Organic Hotspots and Their Benefit to Local Economies*. 2016.
<https://ota.com/news/press-releases/19778>

⁵ FAS GATS. Standard Query Data Jan 2021- November 2021. Accessed February 3, 2022.
<https://apps.fas.usda.gov/GATS/ExpressQuery1.aspx>