

HB 2998 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/16

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Creates the **Oregon Soil Health Initiative** (initiative). Requires the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), Oregon State University, College of Agricultural Sciences (CAS), Oregon State University Extension Service (OSU Extension Service), and the Institute for Natural Resources (INR) to participate in the initiative. Defines public bodies or nongovernmental organizations that may voluntarily participate in the initiative. Specifies **goals of the initiative**, including the improvement of agricultural viability, environmental functions of agricultural soils, and improvement of water quality. Describes responsibilities of state agencies and other participating entities. Requires participating entities to coordinate with each other and avoid duplication of efforts. Authorizes participating agencies and entities to designate any other entity with expertise in soil health as a collaborating entity by unanimous agreement. Requires **ODA** to carry out certain duties related to networking and coordinating between state agencies outside of Oregon as well as between farm service providers. Requires ODA to support OWEB regarding conservation funding programs and the identification of federal funding opportunities, and to identify and promote other public and private funding opportunities related to the goals of the initiative. Requires ODA to identify research needs, organize an assessment of current adoption of soil health practices, coordinate with CAS to advance research related to soil health baselines and solutions, and to coordinate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to incorporate previous and future research findings related to soil health. Directs **OWEB** to identify federal funding opportunities and to provide grants for the voluntary implementation of soil health practices. Requires participating soil and water conservation districts to apply for grants relevant to the initiative and to measure and provide soil health data to Oregon State University as far as practical and with the voluntary consent of landowners. Allows soil and water conservation districts to be assisted and represented by a statewide organization. Requires **CAS** identify research funding opportunities related to soil health, as well as train sample collectors, provide soil health testing to voluntary participants, and create and maintain a database of soil health data in coordination with ODA and NRCS. Requires **OSU Extension Service** and participating soil and water conservation districts to promote soil health principles and practices and to provide technical assistance to land managers and agricultural communities on an equitable basis as far as is practicable and subject to available funds. Requires **INR** to carry out administrative duties associated with the initiative and to convene a **Soil Health Advisory Committee** (advisory committee). Specifies appointment procedure and selection criteria for advisory committee members. Requires INR in consultation with other collaborating entities and the advisory committee to study and recommend strategies to advance and incentivize soil health on agricultural and range lands and report its findings as the **Soil Health Roadmap**. Requires INR to submit the Soil Health Roadmap to the Governor and agriculture-related interim legislative committees by September 15, 2024, and to submit subsequent updates to the roadmap by September 15 of each even-numbered year. Encourages participating entities to advance voluntary soil health practice adoption on Oregon's agricultural lands beyond the responsibilities described in this measure. **Appropriates** \$480,000 to ODA for implementation. Appropriates \$2.48 million to OWEB for the purpose of providing grants. Appropriates \$1.38 million to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and specifies distribution between CAS, OSU Extension Service, and INR. Specifies that all appropriations are to be taken from the General Fund.

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Takes effect on 91st day following adjournment sine die.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Soil Health is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Healthy soils are important for the profitability of Oregon's farms and ranches as well as for associated ecosystem services. Initial inventories of Oregon's soils were made in the 1970s by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with the OSU Agricultural Experiment Station and the Department of Soil Science. Factors impacting soil health may be changes in drought patterns, wildfires, and farming practices.

House Bill 2998 would create the Oregon Soil Health Initiative and appropriate \$4.34 million General Fund moneys to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and Higher Education Coordinating Commission for implementation.