

HB 2998 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

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

Action Date: 03/14/23

Action: Do pass with amendments and be referred to Ways and Means by prior reference.
(Printed A-Eng.)

Vote: 8-0-1-0

Yeas: 8 - Boice, Gamba, Hartman, Helm, Levy B, Marsh, McLain, Owens

Exc: 1 - Scharf

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 2/16, 2/21, 3/14

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Creates the Oregon Soil Health Initiative (Initiative) to promote soil health by advancing voluntary, incentive-based soil health strategies through activities that include providing technical assistance, outreach, education, financial incentives, and supporting research. Requires the Oregon State University Extension Service (OSU Extension Service) and any voluntarily participating soil and water conservation districts to promote soil health practices to Oregon's agricultural communities through outreach, promotion of farmer-to-farmer learning, collaboration with local partners and agricultural producers to conduct soil health demonstration projects, highlighting existing soil health improvement efforts, and supporting agricultural producers in the identification of soil health goals and progress monitoring. Requires OSU Extension Service to increase the voluntary adoption of soil health practices by providing technical assistance to agricultural producers, to ensure that outreach, education, and assistance are accessible on an equitable and culturally appropriate basis, and to provide additional specialist capacity as needed. Requires OSU College of Agricultural Sciences (CAS) to train technical service providers in soil sample collection and provide free or low-cost soil health testing to voluntary participants. Requires the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) to provide grants for the voluntary continuation of, or transition to, soil health practices and to provide grants to soil and water conservation districts and other technical assistance providers to increase their capacity. Requires the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to employ one full-time equivalent soil health specialist to coordinate with and support the efforts of the OSU Extension Service, CAS, OWEB, soil and water conservation districts, federal agencies, tribal governments, nongovernmental organizations, and other organizations to support the Initiative. Appropriates \$500,000 and \$480,000 to the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund to be distributed to OWEB to provide grants for the implementation of soil health practices and for technical assistance providers to increase capacity, respectively. Appropriates \$225,000 and \$480,000 to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for distribution to CAS and the OSU Extension Service, respectively. Appropriates \$272,234 to ODA. Specifies that all appropriations are to be taken from the General Fund. Takes effect on 91st day following adjournment sine die.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Role of pesticides in soil health practices
- Role of soil and water conservation districts and other experts
- Administrative concerns
- Potential of measure to open up federal funding opportunities

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Replaces the measure.

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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 A creates the Oregon Soil Health Initiative and appropriates \$2.74 million General Fund moneys to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for implementation.