

Submitter: Mimi Casteel

On Behalf
Of: Hope Well Wine

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

Measure: HB2998

Hello Chair Helm, my name is Mimi Casteel with Hope Well Wine in Sheridan, Oregon, and Bethel Heights Vineyard in Salem, Oregon.

I am here to express my strong support of the Healthy Soils Bill.

I have worked in both public and private land management and research. Without exception, in every bioregion and land use type I have worked in, where soils are protected and thriving, function and productivity follow. On working lands we have unique opportunities to replenish and restore function to depleted agricultural soils. When I began implementing soil health practices more than a decade ago our baselines showed almost no measurable organic matter, but over ten years of experimentation and prioritizing the soil, we increased that to nearly 10%, and saw dramatic improvements in quality, yield stabilization, fruit composition, and especially soil water and drought tolerance. When every additional percentage of organic matter can hold an additional 18-20,000 gallons of water, that can mean a lot in a drought year or when temperatures climb above 100 degrees.

The Healthy Soils Bill focuses on our greatest asset, our soils, understanding that we have an incredibly important opportunity to make huge progress towards a future for Oregon where we don't just aspire to century farms, but to millennial farms, and our soils have the vitality to grow thriving communities and support generations of Oregonians to come.

I also want to say that when I started, it was very lonely. There weren't a lot of places to go for help, and I did a lot of trials alone in a vacuum. But now I work with a producer group of ranchers in Eastern Oregon, orchardists, grain growers and winegrowers here in the valley, and what these groups have shown me is that when farmers can learn from each other, what we can achieve is so much more than what we can do alone. Farming is good, challenging work, but it can be isolating. However, when your soils are healthy, and you have the support of your community, it changes everything. We want our children to inherit vital, thriving soils and see that this is a promising and rewarding way to work in service of this place and its people. One of the best aspects of the Soil Health Initiative is its focus on farmer-to-farmer networks, which is pivotal for sharing what works and for helping farmers find community and solidarity. I've seen it work every single time, and so I ask that you support HB 2998, I appreciate your support of our land stewards, and I thank you for your time.