

WATER LEAGUE

*The mission of Water League is to engage
the public in the stewardship of water.*

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February 13, 2023

To: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Representative Ken Helm, Chair
Representatives Annessa Hartman and Mark Owens Vice-Chairs

RE: Water League supports HB 2998 that creates the Oregon Soil Health Initiative, the purpose of which is to improve soil health in Oregon; that describes the responsibilities of state agencies and entities that participate in initiative, and that directs the Institute for Natural Resources to convene a Soil Health Advisory Committee and develop a Soil Health Roadmap.

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Committee Members,

Water League supports HB 2998 enthusiastically and applauds the visionaries who proposed and created this bill. The potential scope of work could keep all of the agencies listed in the bill very busy, especially Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), which could benefit greatly from more funding than the bill currently appropriates for them.

Also, please consider including the OSU-based Institute for Water and Watersheds (IWW) as a *Collaborating Entity* in Section 1 (1) (a). The IWW partners with the Institute for Natural Resources (INR) and together they “share an advisory board, staff, and offices on the Oregon State University campus.” The partnership “expands [the IWW’s] ability to address multi-agency and multi-disciplinary resource issues.” The IWW and the INR are “sister” institutes who naturally pair together; indeed, SWCDs exemplify this relationship.

According to the Farm Bureau, quoting the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture:

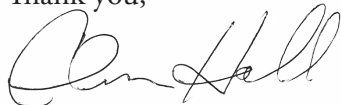
Farms with agricultural product sales of \$500,000 or more represented just 5% (1,720) of Oregon’s farms in 2017. But with \$4 billion in sales, these farms commanded 81% of all agricultural product sales. At the other end of the spectrum, farms selling less than \$1,000 in agricultural products represented 31% (11,662) of Oregon’s farms with \$2.9 million in 2017 sales or just 0.1%.

*Operations with sales in the \$100,000 but less than \$500,000 range represented 8% of Oregon's farms (2,844) and 13% of its 2017 sales, at \$666 million.**

This data suggests that there are vastly more farmers across the state of Oregon who are disenfranchised by the formula ratio described in Section 9 (2) (b) that says “*At least one shall represent farms with annual gross cash farm income under \$250,000.*” There should be greater equity among the farmers on the Soil Health Advisory Committee.

Also, please consider increasing the number of organic farmers in Section 9 (2) (a) that says: “*At least one shall be certified as a producer pursuant to the federal Organic Foods Production Act, 7 U.S.C. 6501, et. seq.*” There is a great irony that only one slot would be mandated for an organic farmer given the fact that organic farmers **have led the way forward** on soil health compared to huge “big-ag” commercial farms that have been known for destroying top soil. Indeed, today’s SWCDs and the NRCS are incarnations of the Soil Conservation Services started by President Roosevelt to address the disastrous effects of the Dust Bowl. The people with the most credibility and qualifications to populate the Soil Health Advisory Committee are Oregon’s organic farmers.

Thank you,



Christopher Hall
Executive Director

*** For more information on farmer and farm statistics, see: <https://oregonfb.org/about/oregon-agriculture/>**