



**TO:** Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Committee Members  
**FR:** Teryn Yazdani, Staff Attorney & Climate Policy Manager, Beyond Toxics  
Meet Panchal, Environmental Justice Statewide Projects Manager, Beyond Toxics  
**DT:** February 16, 2023

**RE: Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water in Support of HB 2998**

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

On behalf of Beyond Toxics, a state-wide environmental justice nonprofit, and thousands of our supporters across the state, we are writing to express our strong support of HB 2998—a bill that will establish the Oregon Soil Health Initiative to support farmers and ranchers with soil health practices that make the most sense for their land and businesses. HB 2998’s voluntary and incentive-based approach to expand resources and technical support is common sense and will help Oregon leverage the federal funding dollars to advance soil health practices and greatly benefit Oregon’s agricultural communities. Beyond Toxics is an organization that emphasizes environmental protection and health for all communities and individual residents, regardless of their income, status, or background. We strongly urge you to pass HB 2998 because it will significantly benefit the health of Oregon’s agricultural lands and the communities that rely upon them.

HB 2998 will expand resources to support farmers and ranchers with soil health practices that make the most sense for their land. Improved soil health provides environmental benefits that serve the whole community, including improved water quality, increased biodiversity and pollinator habitat, and sequestered carbon. Better soil leads to better crops, ultimately leading to reduced pesticide usage on agricultural lands. This greatly benefits farmers and agricultural workers by reducing their dependence on and exposure to pesticides and, in turn, protecting their health. Agricultural workers are one of the most vulnerable populations dealing with the health impacts of pesticide exposure. This group’s regular exposure to chemicals that can pose significant health and safety risks to humans—in addition to their impacts on non-human organisms, the environment, and the greater ecosystem—is disproportionately high compared to others.<sup>1</sup> Exposure to harmful pesticides can take place through either breathing in the chemicals or absorption through the skin during planting, weeding, thinning, irrigating, pruning, harvesting,

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond Pesticides, *Farmworkers Still Inadequately Protected from Pesticides, Report Finds* (Sept. 16, 2022), <https://beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog/2022/09/farmworkers-still-inadequately-protected-from-pesticides-report-finds/>

or processing crops.<sup>2</sup> Indirect exposure to pesticides can also occur through drift from a neighboring field or contact with pesticide residue on crops or soil. Further, many agricultural workers and their families are exposed to pesticides by living near treated fields. Studies also show that pesticides can be carried from fields into homes on clothing and skin, putting children in the home at risk.<sup>3</sup> Exposure to many of the pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides used on agricultural lands can lead to numerous negative health impacts. Pesticide exposure has been associated with neurological, endocrine, psychological, immunological, respiratory, reproductive, hematological, skin, kidney, and liver issues.<sup>4</sup> Agricultural workers also have elevated cancer risks due to increased exposure to pesticides through their occupation.<sup>5</sup> Managing soil health through practices supported by HB 2998 allows producers to work *with* the land to improve plant health, and reduce disease and pest resistance. This allows agricultural workers to reduce agricultural inputs like pesticides and the number of passes with a tractor. When agricultural inputs are reduced worker health is protected.

The soil health practices supported by HB 2998 will also help carbon-rich soil organic matter, increasing crop yields and resilience in the face of climate change. Our state is already experiencing climate change's adverse impacts, including drought and water insecurity, climate-fueled wildfires, and unprecedented heat domes. While these events impact all Oregon families and communities, they have specific impacts on our agricultural workers and pose unique challenges to mitigating climate change. As the climate crisis worsens, our agricultural system must adapt to meet existing demands. Oregon's Soil Health Initiative is one solution this legislature can pass now that will support producers, improve climate resilience, and increase environmental health in the face of a changing climate.

Please support and do all you can to advance HB 2998. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Pesticide Action Network, *Farmworkers*, <https://www.panna.org/frontline-communities/farmworkers>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Mariana Portela de-Assis et al., *Health problems in agricultural workers occupationally exposed to pesticides*, 18(3) Rev Bras Med Trab. (2021), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7879472/#r8>.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Kachuri et al., *Cancer risks in population-based study of 70,570 agricultural workers*, 17 BMC Cancer (2017), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5437486/>.