



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 751 ♦ Junction City, OR 97448

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Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

I am writing on behalf of Friends of Family Farmers (FoFF) to express our support for HB 2998, The Healthy Soils Bill. FoFF is a statewide nonprofit that serves small and midsized, diversified, local market focused farmers and we have over 1,600 farmers active in our network. Every two years, we conduct surveys and focus groups to get to the root of the problems our farmers are facing and align our advocacy and programs to solving problems for the folks we serve. In 2022, our outreach showed that the impacts of extreme weather and drought was the number one issue impacting our farmers' ability to thrive¹.

Whether its fluctuations to established seasonal patterns, worsening storms, or the ongoing drought, farmers are looking for ways to adapt and become more resilient to the shocks these disasters can have. Soil health practices, like those supported in this bill, are acknowledged to improve water regulation by the soil and help plants become more resilient to temporary disruptions. The NRCS has well established research and guidance on the principles of soil health² and its implications in building resilience for climate shifts and unpredictable conditions. These are also not new practices. Many soil health principles are reflected in Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the native people of Oregon and have been part of land management strategies for millenia. Managing for soil health allows producers to work with the land to reduce erosion, maximize water infiltration, improve nutrient cycling, save money on inputs, improve plant health, and ultimately improve the resiliency of their working land. Better soil helps raise better crops. It is time to provide voluntary pathways to give our farmers the tools to act in their own best interest when it comes to soil health.

The majority of the farmers we serve already implement these principles to a certain extent but want the education, guidance, and financial incentives the Soil Health Initiative this bill provides to make their pathway to soil healthy farming easier. This is also a crucial start to the work on soil health that has begun on the federal level. This Initiative will help Oregon to position ourselves well and be ready to receive federal dollars relating to projects in this area. If we don't act now, we are cutting ourselves off for potential funding for our farmers to improve resilience across Oregon. We are also extremely excited to see the inclusion of peer to peer learning for and by farmers in this

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OTYggcyNiofkzpUI_3d9deaf9ATBD-Ti/view

² <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soils/soil-health>

initiative. We have some amazing producers who are already doing great things for their farms via soil health and state support will allow farmers to learn from each other, and develop a truly Oregonian approach to improving the health of our working lands' soils.

We urge you to support HB 2998. Not only will the Soil Health Initiative help our farmers in the short term, it is the responsible thing to do to set Oregon up for long term investment in the health of our working lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice Morrison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Alice Morrison
Organizational Director
Friends of Family Farmers