

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Mike Powers, President SEIU Local 503

Date: March 16, 2023

**RE: Support for HB 5002 Department of Agriculture Budget**

Dear Co Chairs Dembrow and Pham and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Mike Powers, and I am testifying on behalf of SEIU Local 503 in general **support of HB 5002** relating to the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) 2023-2025 budget. SEIU Local 503 represents over 72,000 frontline workers across the State of Oregon, including over 20,000 state workers such as those at ODA.

Prior to being elected President of our Union, I worked at ODA for nearly 20 years. For a relatively small agency, ODA has an outsized impact on all Oregonians, all over the state. As you have no doubt learned, agriculture contributes over \$33 billion to Oregon's economy and continues to be a top job and economic driver. ODA is critical to that success.

You may not know that many ODA workers are national and international leaders in their fields. These dedicated and talented frontline workers provide a multitude of services including food safety, worker safety, water quality management, pest and disease control, laboratory product testing, national and international certification inspections, hemp inspection and regulation, and a host of others.

This session I want to make a special shout out to ODA frontline workers who have served Oregon agriculture and all Oregonians despite the dangers of COVID, high workloads due to high vacancies and relatively low wages, and the Workday pay debacle forcing some to take out payday loans or borrow from friends and family to pay the rent or their mortgage. You can be proud of them, and we owe them our respect and our support.

Overall, we support the Governor's recommended budget above Current Service Level, with a \$149 million plus budget supporting a bit over 400 FTE. We appreciate that the Governor sees an investment in ODA as a good one. We encourage the legislature to support the Governor's budget, notably the recommendations on Policy Option Packages, 210, 230, 260, 310, and 440 to boost equity efforts, build capacity, and keep on top of emerging pests that threaten our economy.

We understand that there is effort to co-locate ODA's Salem and Portland laboratories in Wilsonville. It is apparent that the decision has certain advantages for ODA and Oregonians. Our members are also aware that it will result in a higher cost to work for ODA, in high new commute costs and time away from home and family for those workers who live in Portland and Salem and who can't work from home. They are already stressed from high inflation and low cost of living adjustments. One option is for the legislature to provide at least a temporary differential to account for the higher cost of working for ODA labs.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration. I greatly appreciate this opportunity.

Mike Powers, President

SEIU Local 503