



March 12, 2021

To Senate Committee on Education
From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Re: Support for SB 404 – Organic Food Production

Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) supports **SB 404** with the -2 amendment. OACD represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which are special districts governed by countywide elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD supports the expansion of the Oregon State University Extension Service Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems in **SB 404-2** by providing five additional organic specialist positions. The marketing study by the Oregon Business Development Department will provide a series of evaluations to determine the economic impacts of Oregon's organic products sector. In addition to those features of the bill, two new full-time positions are funded at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, one as a soil health specialist.

The soil health specialist is a position that is very much needed for a number of soil health programs. The in-house expertise provided by this position to improve soil health on Oregon's agriculture lands is important to our District members as healthy soil practices can lead to sequestering carbon and allow for farmers and ranchers to be resilient in unpredictable climate conditions. Research shows organic soils have the ability to sequester more carbon than non-organic soils, about 25% more. This position will support ODA's climate change plan.

Conservation districts provide technical services to landowners and a large segment of our landowners have completed organic certification or have incorporated organic practices in their regular Integrated Pest Management Programs (IPM). The extension agents funded in this legislation will provide the necessary research and education for

practices for Oregon's diversity of organic crops. Organic farming kick starts rural economies, provides jobs, and crop sustainability. The growth in Oregon's organic blueberry production is one example of increased production to meet market needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your decision-making process.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jan Lee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jan Lee, Executive Director
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