



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 665 Waltherville, OR 97489

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April 21, 2021

**Testimony Regarding SB5502 - Appropriates money from General Fund to State Department of Agriculture for certain biennial expenses  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources**

Dear Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of [Friends of Family Farmers \(FoFF\)](http://www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org), a farmer-led non-profit that has advocated for family-scale farmers for over 15 years. Friends of Family Farmers works to build strong local and regional food systems and to ensure family-scale agriculture remains viable in our state today and into the future. FoFF appreciates the opportunity to give input on ODA's budget. The priority areas we are advocating for include soil health, the state meat inspection program, domestic marketing, and expanding organic agriculture in Oregon.

**Policy Packages – Budget Enhancements**

- POP 110 - *Emergency Management Coordinator \$229,770 GF: Requests a coordinator position to be responsible for ODA emergency response activities related to food safety, water safety, animal welfare, and maintaining agriculture market access. This position would also oversee Continuation of Operations Planning (COOP).* FoFF had many farmers calling us during the wildfires looking for help with evacuating animals and recognize that wildfire and other weather emergencies are unfortunately only likely to increase in regularity and severity.
- POP 130 – *Agency Equity Officer \$256,319 GF: Requests a position to better serve ODA's diverse agricultural and food sectors along with the associated customer base.* FoFF is committed to addressing racial inequities in Oregon and beyond.
- POP 365 – *Soil Health Position \$213,374 GF: Requests a position to focus on improving soil health on Oregon's agricultural lands.* FoFF's Oregon Pasture Network is actively involved in improving soil health and carbon sequestration on working lands and would like to see far more acreage in Oregon employing soil-building methods.
- POP 370 – *Baseline Soil Health Assessment \$225,000 GF: Requests funding to gather data on soil health information.* This is critical to determine which areas, and which systems of agriculture, yield the healthiest soil.
- POP 430 – *Developing Domestic Markets \$430,000 GF: Requests General Fund to support regional and domestic market access activities and initiatives.* While FoFF understands that international trade is important to Oregon's bottom line, the pandemic taught us that we need to focus on shorter supply chains and local food system resilience. We know this program likely will be utilized for promoting grass seed for cover crops in the Midwest, but we hope that it can also be used to promote meat going through the State Meat Inspection program, which will help small scale meat producers in Oregon. We would also like to see other domestic and regional promotion efforts, including the organic sector.

**Policy Packages – Recommended Budget Continuation**

- 084 – *2020 1st Special Session Continuation \$926,195 GF: Continues three positions and startup costs approved in June 2020 into the 2021-23 biennium related to state meat inspection.* FoFF has been

advocating for this program for the last year and has seen the need for this for decades. Please see our testimony on [HB2785A](#).

- 090 — *Diversity in Ag Grant Program \$1,000,000 GF: Adds funding for creating Diversity in Agriculture Market Access through a new grant program.* FoFF is committed to addressing racial inequities in Oregon and beyond.
- 240 – *State Meat Inspection \$670,656 GF: SB 5711 (2020 1st Spec Session) funded startup costs for a state meat inspection program. This package requests additional staffing and General Fund for program establishment.* The reality is that for Oregon to pass a USDA audit in order to be approved for a state meat inspection program, the state will have to show that it is investing adequate resources into the program.

#### **Of concern**

- The elimination of a position and support services and supplies in the Soil and Water Conservation District Program (\$317,594) LF. As Oregon works to confront climate change, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are often on the frontlines in supporting communities throughout the state and need more support, not less, at this critical juncture.
- Elimination of two Ag Water Quality positions (\$256,949) GF / (\$188,009) LF / Total (\$444,958). Friends of Family Farmers is concerned about critical groundwater areas in Oregon, especially nitrate contamination in the Lower Umatilla Groundwater Management Area. We don't want to see resources spread thin when rural communities need more monitoring, especially if another CAFO is permitted on the former Lost Valley Dairy site.
- While FoFF understands that ODA will be able to connect those in need of mediation to federal resources, we are concerned about the elimination of Oregon's Farm Mediation Program (\$102,740) GF, especially in light of the fact that there are no programs or policies in place to address cross pollination or contamination between hemp and marijuana crops and organic and genetically engineered crops, both of which threaten high-value industries in the state.

#### **Please add an Organic Policy Special Assistant at ODA**

Friends of Family Farmers would also like to see funding for an Organic Policy Special Assistant at ODA. This proposed position is modeled on a successful program for encouraging the development of organic systems that was instituted at the federal level by the USDA. There are two main goals addressed by the proposal for this new position within the ODA: 1) coordinating department policies that impact organic production and marketing and 2) integrating organic policy throughout the range of department activities. This dual focus is necessary because Oregon's organic agriculture covers a broad scope, encompassing a wide variety of organic products—from produce, to grains, to seeds, to livestock products—and Oregon's organic trade also includes many organic handling and processing operations. Creating a position with a designated focus on ensuring cohesive, integrated policies for organic production and handling will aid and encourage the expansion and development of organic trade.

We thank you for your consideration.

*Amy M Wong*

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