



The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
821 SE 14th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214-2537

tel 503 802-8100

fax 503 802-8199

nature.org/oregon

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Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony on SB 5502, Department of Agriculture Budget

Submitted by: Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor

Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on SB 5502, the budget for the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) for the 2021-23 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is a key actor in the state's efforts to develop a natural and working lands goal to mitigate climate change, working alongside the Oregon Global Warming Commission, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. In conjunction with the reduction of fossil fuel-based emissions, natural climate solutions such as protecting and restoring ecosystems and improving land management practices are a critical part of our approach to climate mitigation and adaptation. Improving soil health is one component of this work to protect and restore the ability of natural and working lands to sequester and store carbon.

As you consider the ODA budget for the coming biennium, we urge you to adequately fund the agency's ability to contribute to this work. Specifically, we ask you to support POP 370 – Baseline Soil Health Assessment (\$225,000 GF), which was included in the Governor's Budget and provides funding to gather data on soil health information. Additionally, we ask for the inclusion of POP 365 – Soil Health Position (\$213,374 GF), which was not included in the Governor's Budget, but would fund a position to focus on improving soil health on Oregon's agricultural lands. Sufficient data will help inform the implementation of practices that will be necessary to meet our climate goals, and added staff capacity would allow for more targeted support for Oregon's farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on Oregon's critical Natural Resource funding priorities.