

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1532

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Kennemer and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alan Lewis and I represent Natural Grocers, a 66-year-old family-run health food chain operating 14 organic supermarkets in communities across Oregon.

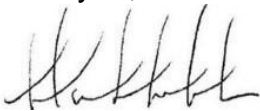
I am asking for your support for SB 1532, which would expand the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems by hiring five agricultural extension positions focused on organic practices that will assist Oregon farmers and ranchers and fund an economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector.

Natural Grocers has a particularly strong interest in organic livestock and crop production, since we only sell produce that is USDA certified organic and we focus on sourcing local organic eggs, dairy, meat, and other products. The Pacific Northwest offers abundant opportunity for organic producers, but the economic potential of the sector has not been fully realized due to lack of coordinated resources.

Farming, livestock production, and processing are important sources of economic activity for the Oregon economy and provide significant opportunities for family businesses to participate in the wider economy. The desire to start organic farms in particular is well known. Capital is available (especially at smaller scale), and there is strong market demand within the state and across the US for organic agricultural products. However, the expertise to run new farms profitably, manage perishable logistics, and bring goods to market is often limited, since it requires in-depth knowledge and sustained statewide efforts. We believe the addition of five extension agents to support organic farming is critical to developing the entire food supply chain for Oregon so farmers can make a living reliably and consumers have access to local and organic food.

In addition, the request for a comprehensive economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector will help identify opportunities that highlight the state's competitive advantages and needs for the future, and to help secure additional private investment. Organic agriculture can be used as an effective economic development tool, especially in rural areas—regardless of if farmers choose to certify all of part of their farms.

Thank you,



Alan Lewis, VP Natural Grocers
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Operating Certified Organic Markets in Medford, Salem, Beaverton, Bend, Corvallis, Gresham, Clackamas, Eugene, Portland Powell, Warrenton, MLK, Coos Bay, Tigard, and Klamath Falls