

Submitter: Elizabeth Dix
On Behalf Of: Oregon Sierra Club
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery
Measure: SB1532

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

My name is Elizabeth Dix and I am a volunteer representing the Oregon Sierra Club.

We are asking for your support for SB 1532, expanding the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems by hiring 5 positions focused on assisting farmers with organic practices and funding an economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector.

The new positions will focus on organic practices helping all farmers, regardless of organic certification. Through these positions, OSU will expand the reach of organic practices and increase applied research. Many common practices like cover crops, compost management, crop rotations and efforts to enhance soil health can, when used fittingly, benefit all producers and the overall Oregon environment.

Farms of all sizes and types have been significantly impacted not only by COVID-19, but by floods, ice storms, fires, smoke and record-setting extreme heat. The heat dome heat wave created "existential threats" to farm viability in many agricultural sectors, like the berry industry. Technical Assistance in organic practices is sorely needed to help farmers employ methods that allow them to diversify their operations or try new ways to build resilience. For example, organic methods have led to soil with increased water holding capacity—a benefit that is critical during drought.

The organic community has long known the importance of technical assistance offered by these positions. The Oregon Global Warming Commission's recent Natural and Working Lands Proposal (which we also support) noted that additional technical assistance for Oregon farmers and ranchers is needed.

According to OSU's 2021 report Oregon Agriculture, Food and Fiber: An Economic Analysis, Oregon's organic industry grew substantially between 2008 and 2019 and while the number of farms decreased, the size of farms increased, with overall organic acreage almost doubling. And even though certified organic farms, as measured by NASS, currently only represent 1.2% of agriculture in Oregon, organic captures 6% of all Oregon farmgate sales. Between 2016 and 2019, the total value of Oregon's organic agricultural products sold increased nearly 30% to \$454 million. However, Oregon is falling behind other states and is no longer in the top 10 for organic production, ranking 12th, stressing that legislation is critical to reestablishing Oregon's leadership position.

In general, Organic agriculture is a bright spot in the U.S farm economy, growing to over \$55 billion in sales a year in 2020, more than double the growth rate of the overall U.S. food market. Organic farming also creates jobs with greater stability—organic farms hire more people per acre, and those people work for more days of the year. The number of US organic farms grew by 39% in recent years, while the total number of farms in the U.S. shrank by 3%. During that same period, organic farm income nearly doubled while the income of all U.S. farms remained stagnant. Furthermore, the average value of products sold from organic farms is double the average value sold from all U.S. farms.

In terms of youth and market trends, market data from the Hartman Group's Organic and Beyond 2020 report shows that 82% of consumers use organic food and beverages at least monthly—challenging the notion that organic is only for the wealthy—with much higher adoption rates among Gen X, millennials and Gen Z, the market of the future.

A comprehensive economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector will help identify and highlight the state's, competitive advantage opportunities, future needs, and secure additional private investment. Organic agriculture can an effective economic development tool, especially in rural areas—regardless of whether farmers certify all of part of their farms.

Thank you for your consideration.

Elizabeth Dix (Volunteer Oregon Sierra Club Legislative Committee)