



HUMMINGBIRD WHOLESALE
Nourishment with INTEGRITY™

February 8, 2022

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

My name is Charles Tilt. I am the co-owner with my wife Julie of Hummingbird Wholesale, Inc. in Eugene, which distributes foods grown under Organic certification to grocers, restaurants, and food producers throughout the Pacific Northwest. We currently employ 47 people in support of our Eugene manufacturing and distribution center, selling grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, honey and a large variety of in-house manufactured products. We have been in business since 1972, and providing organic food since certification began in 1990.

We work directly with farmers in the Pacific Northwest to plan and market their crops, and serve wholesale customers both regionally and across the United States. Our support for organic farmers and agriculture is at the heart of what we do, because we believe organic production is a triple bottom line win for our future – organic agriculture strengthens the economy, enriching both rural and urban communities, and reduces many negative environmental and health impacts in the agricultural system compared to conventional practices.

I am writing to request your support for SB 1532, which would expand Oregon State University Extension Service's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems by hiring five agricultural extension positions focused on organic practices to assist Oregon farmers and ranchers. SB 1532 will also fund an economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector. With SB 1532, we have the opportunity to more fully invest in and leverage benefits from organic practices for a more resilient future.

The five additional agricultural extension positions focused on organic practices in SB 1532 would be tasked with providing technical assistance and research-oriented solutions to organic and conventional farmers who are interested in site-specific support for regenerative solutions and practices. Oregon's agriculture spans a diversity of farm types and acres – for example, farming in the Willamette Valley vs. Eastern Oregon and vegetable cropping vs. legumes and grains – and each has unique needs. Organic farming is unique and, particularly for farmers transitioning to organic, there is a need for technical and research assistance that our extension services is well positioned to provide. As markets demand more organic products, and farmers see the many benefits of transitioning to organic systems, technical support for making that transition is imperative to our success. There are opportunities for urban and rural organic farmers, but there are also barriers and challenges that must be addressed. The proposed cluster hire of five organic positions will significantly and strategically advance Oregon's capacity in organic agriculture.

Having an economic assessment of Oregon's organic sector would contribute to our understanding of how our state can transition toward increased economic and environmental sustainability. Although organic products are growing in popularity, with the total value of Oregon's organic agricultural products sold increasing by more than 90% to \$454 million from 2014 to 2019, the industry remains in its infancy as compared to its potential; as measured by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, certified organic farms only represented 2.8% of

total Oregon farmland in 2019.¹ With the uniqueness of the organic market, establishing a baseline of data for the sector will help us to better understand where we need to further invest in harnessing the opportunity that organic agriculture and trade represents for Oregon.

We recognize these are challenging economic times and new investments may seem daunting. However, we believe investments in support of the organic sector and increasing access to organic food for more people will advance Oregon towards economic recovery, social equity and climate change adaptation. The passage of SB 1532 is an important step in rebuilding better for increased resilience. We recognize Oregon is facing a challenging budget situation. And we strongly support SB 1532 as a strategic investment that will increase support for organic and transitioning farmers, improve access to organic food and make way for greater economic recovery and growth in Oregon.

In March of 2019, as a regionally focused organic food distributor, we were uniquely positioned to respond to the demand for stored food in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Localized food systems offer resiliency for supply disruption events, and organically certified local food systems have the added benefits of a higher financial return to the grower and health benefits for the consumer and the biological systems upon which we all depend.

Thank you for your attention to this legislation. I wholeheartedly encourage you to support SB 1532.

Sincerely,



Charles P. Tilt
Co-Owner, Hummingbird Wholesale, Inc.
Eugene, Oregon

¹ *Oregon Agriculture, Food, and Fiber: An Economic Analysis*, Oregon State University College of Agricultural Sciences, August 2021, p. 7, available at https://agsci.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/main/about/oragecon_report_2021.pdf.