

# Senate Bill 526

Sponsored by Senator DEMBROW; Representative HELM (Pre-session filed.)

## SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure **as introduced**.

Directs State Department of Agriculture to establish program to support farmers who employ agricultural practices that lead to resilient farms.

## A BILL FOR AN ACT

1  
2 Relating to support for agricultural producers who employ agricultural practices that lead to resil-  
3 ient farms.

4 Whereas according to 2017 United States Department of Agriculture Natural Agriculture Sta-  
5 tistics Service (USDA NASS) data, 87.8 percent of Oregon farms have sales of \$99,999 or less; and

6 Whereas according to 2017 USDA NASS data, 90.4 percent of Oregon farms are 499 acres or  
7 less; and

8 Whereas farmers across Oregon who make up these statistics have been subject to extreme  
9 weather events and other stressors, including COVID-19; and

10 Whereas these farmers are facing shortages and restrictions in irrigation water as drought  
11 conditions worsen; and

12 Whereas these farmers are facing labor challenges and increased costs related to new heat and  
13 smoke, and agricultural overtime, legislation; and

14 Whereas according to USDA NASS data, although organic farms make up only two percent of  
15 producers in the state, the value of that product represents 10 percent of Oregon's annual farm gate  
16 sales, with over \$450 million in organic commodity sales; and

17 Whereas according to the National Organic Research Agenda Report, organic producers lead  
18 the nation in adoption of soil health practices, with, for example, 76 percent of organic field crop  
19 farmers planting cover crops regularly compared to only 10 percent of conventional field crop  
20 farmers; and

21 Whereas Table 1.6 in the National Organic Research Agenda Report shows that 97 percent of  
22 respondents rate "potential enhancement of farm environmental sustainability" as a factor in tran-  
23 sitioning to organic; and

24 Whereas farms already employing organic practices incur myriad costs compared to farms not  
25 doing so, and should be duly rewarded in order to safeguard soil and water health and farm viability;  
26 and

27 Whereas the USDA Organic Certification Cost Share program reimbursement was reduced from  
28 75 percent to 50 percent of organic certification costs, not to exceed \$500 per certification scope;  
29 and

30 Whereas the State Department of Agriculture already administers the organic cost share re-  
31 imbursement; and

**NOTE:** Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter [*italic and bracketed*] is existing law to be omitted. New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1       Whereas Oregon does not currently support transition costs and education; and

2       Whereas the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program, which built upon  
3 the Organic Certification Cost Share Program by providing additional relief to assist producers  
4 during the pandemic, was insufficient and short-term; now, therefore,

5 **Be It Enacted by the People of the State of Oregon:**

6       **SECTION 1. The State Department of Agriculture shall establish a program to support**  
7 **agricultural producers who employ agricultural practices that lead to resilient farms. The**  
8 **program established under this section shall include:**

9       **(1) Reimbursements for agricultural producers for costs related to organic certification.**  
10 **Agricultural producers shall be eligible to receive a reimbursement under this subsection if**  
11 **they have been approved by the department to receive a reimbursement under the United**  
12 **States Department of Agriculture Organic Certification Cost Share Program. A reimburse-**  
13 **ment under this subsection shall be equal to the agricultural producer’s total eligible certi-**  
14 **fication costs under the Organic Certification Cost Share Program minus the reimbursement**  
15 **received by the producer pursuant to that program.**

16       **(2) Reimbursements for agricultural producers who are transitioning to organic agricul-**  
17 **tural practices. Costs eligible for reimbursement under this subsection may include:**

18       **(a) Certification costs not eligible for reimbursement under subsection (1) of this section;**

19       **(b) Soil testing costs; and**

20       **(c) Registration fees for educational programs related to organic agriculture.**

21       **(3) The department may adopt rules to implement this section.**

22       **SECTION 2. In addition to and not in lieu of any other appropriation, there is appropri-**  
23 **ated to the State Department of Agriculture, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, out**  
24 **of the General Fund, the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ , which may be expended for the purposes of**  
25 **carrying out section 1 of this 2023 Act.**

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