



February 16th 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon

Re: Opposition to HB 2998 – Soil Health Initiative

Chair Helm and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2998. Oregonians for Food & Shelter (OFS) is a broad and diverse coalition comprised of members across Oregon's natural resource sector, including many of Oregon's top agricultural commodity groups and the forest products industry. These members come together around the importance of production tools, specifically pesticides, fertilizers, and biotechnology. As food and fiber producers look to the future and seek to sustain and grow their operations - which feed and house the world - these tools will become even more critical.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association (OCA) was established in 1913. Oregon is home to 13,000 ranching families. These families are distributed across Oregon in every county, making this sector of agriculture unique.

The Oregon Dairy Farmers Association (ODFA) was founded in 1892 and represents multi-generational family businesses across the state. Members are both small and large, and nearly a quarter of our members are organic producers. Milk is the fourth most valuable agricultural commodity in Oregon, and our producers are national leaders in milk quality.

Oregon producers have a keen understanding of the need to manage soils. Across Oregon, there are a wide variety of soil types supporting the production of over 240 different commodities. Producers already rely on an extensive system of expertise when issues arise with soils, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon State University Research and Extension programs, local Soil and Water Conservation District programs, processors, crop consultants and commercial agronomists, and industry representatives. This network of targeted expertise has advanced Oregon agriculture for decades.

Growers also routinely utilize soil analyses to measure a variety of metrics, depending on the crop and soil type, to make decisions about soil amendments and other management needs. **A wealth of information already exists regarding the characteristics of soils across Oregon, and their suitability for agricultural production.**

In fact, Oregon is home to incredibly high-quality soils, which, combined with climactic and other factors, is the basis for many world-renowned production systems. In some Oregon

systems that provide regional and national food staples, **soil moisture conservation is achieved through rotation of crop-free fields, not by maintaining living roots.**

To be clear, we understand the need for high-quality soils, and are supportive of a variety of programs providing services to growers to address soil challenges. However, **the specific set of principles outlined in the bill lacks broad application to the variety of production systems in Oregon and ignores existing and successful soil management approaches and services already adopted in the state.** Oregon has over 1,000 soil types, which all require very different soil management practices. Keeping soil covered and limiting disturbances works in some contexts, but certainly not all. We also note that in many cases, limiting disturbances with practices such as no-till cropping systems necessitates increasing the use of herbicides for weed management. These and other realities (the need for drought-tolerant crops and other biotechnologies, for example), are ignored by the current language.

Our main questions around this bill are: 1) What specific problem is this bill trying to solve? 2) Are there specific “non-healthy” soils that proponents feel need to be addressed, and if so, where are these soils and what are the specific issues? 3) What exactly will soils be tested for, and what are the testing metrics by which soils would be pronounced “healthy” under this concept?

Creating resiliency for Oregon’s agricultural sector is a much more complex issue than soils alone, and includes things like crop diversification, irrigation, and identifying tools and technologies needed to help growers adapt to a changing climate and increase production. **\$4 million is a significant investment on an idea that misses that bigger picture, is disconnected from well-established and ongoing work, and is focused on a narrow set of principles that lack broad applicability and strong scientific basis.**

Agricultural industry representatives would like to be partners in how these concepts get put together. Our door is always open to sit down and identify common goals, needs, and strategies to get there, well ahead of bill drafting schedules. **We oppose HB 2998 as drafted, and seek amendments to this bill that would better align it with existing programs and current needs.**