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On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and  
Water

Measure: HB2998

Which problem should this Bill try to solve?

Management practices inherent to modern agriculture exert stress on the soil resource. If stress is allowed to accumulate unbalanced over time, a deterioration of the functionality and hence, a deprecation of the value of the soil is the consequence. This general problem is now recognized worldwide and has prompted the "Soil Health Initiative"

Ambition:

The Oregon legislature is coming together to strive for an organisational framework that keeps resources intact and the people of Oregon prosperous. In the context of widespread soil degradation (and its inverse = soil health), taking this charge serious requires us to develop and establish, at a minimum of environmental cost, the economically viable technology needed to ensure unrestricted functionality of the soil resource as a foundation of sustainable food supply systems.

To achieve progress and leadership, innovation must be sought. It is not adequate to simply fund an institute that has never previously generated any analysis, recommendation or technical document regarding soil health. Other states, such as Washington State have a head start in terms of putting an innovative institutional effort in place. For this reason, new technologies and challenges have to be pursued, ranging from the application of modern information technology (Precision Ag, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning) to the expert use of plants (cover crops) to remediate damage to the soil. Another area that is important yet widely neglected, even by the National Soil Health Institute, is the interface between natural and social sciences.

Deficits of the current draft (HB 2998):

1. The effort, while commendable, comes across as an attempt to provide funding for an Institution (Institute for Natural Resources) that has little to no expertise in the matters and disciplines listed above.

2. It is imperative that actions to conserve and strengthen the soil resource go well beyond the few minor considerations listed in the present version of the Bill:

- Keeping the soil covered;
- Maintaining the presence of living roots;
- Enhancing biodiversity; and
- Limiting disturbances

Writing the above, very general items into law may create the impression that the

public and the legislators representing the public "have done their duty" and generate complacency down the road.

3. The current draft should be revised to include more substantial consideration of the technical means, economic constraints and unique geographic situations across the state. To this end, the soil health initiative must, to a much greater extent than presently, encourage the participation and include the expertise of those that are actively managing Oregon lands to produce the services (Food, Fiber, Clean Water) that the people of Oregon rely upon now and in the future. The Ag industry needs to assume responsibility and be actively involved in drafting the bill, not have their voices and interests diluted in overpopulated advisory boards.

4. An important issue with the potential to threaten the viability of the initiative is the fact that by now the majority of Oregon Ag lands are no longer managed by owner, but by tenants through leasing contracts. The bill can not close its eyes to this fact, it must include an effort to engage land OWNERS who may reside out of state and hold them accountable!