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March 3, 2023

Senate Education Committee
Attn: Senator Michael Dembrow (Chair)
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 458

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

I'm writing in support of SB 458 because I believe it represents a strategic investment towards building increased resilience and economic opportunity for Oregon's vital food and agricultural sector. This bill meets critical needs of the Oregon State University Statewide Public Service Programs (OSU Statewides), including the Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Stations across Oregon.

For over a decade, I've served as Executive Director for Oregon Tilth, a leading nonprofit certifier, educator & advocate for organic agriculture. The organization's administrative office is located in Corvallis and we work with farmers, processors and distributors across Oregon, the U.S. and Mexico. The organization is accredited by the USDA to offer organic certification services in accordance with the USDA National Organic Program. We certify over 1100 farm operations, with diverse crops, geography and scales of production. We are the largest organic certifier in Oregon.

A resilient Oregon includes Resilient Food Systems. The economic, environmental and community challenges facing society at large are reflected in our food system. In addressing those challenges with a strategic, multidisciplinary, connected initiative, the OSU Statewides will join with Oregon's vibrant food and agricultural industries, including the organic sector, to catalyze opportunities found in more sustainable practices that support economic growth and long-term viability.

I can personally attest to the vital need for the OSU Statewides broadly, as well as OSU's Extension Service and the Agricultural Experiment Stations specifically.

Oregon Tilth has maintained a formal partnership with Oregon State University (OSU) since 2009. We have invested over \$300K in OSU. This unique public-private partnership has helped protect faculty positions in difficult fiscal years by allowing OSU to leverage matched dollars and it has also launched new initiatives, like helping establish a nascent Organic Extension Program at OSU. Working closely with the OSU faculty working at Experiment Stations and



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Extension faculty who transfer innovative organic practices into the field, we've seen OSU begin to address priority areas identified for applied research, outreach and technical assistance to farmers. However, current demands for support cannot be met with OSU's current capacity.

In the past two legislative sessions, the OSU Statewides have not received their base budget requests to cover cost increases, which primarily represent modest salary, benefits and operational cost increases. At the same time, Oregonians have growing needs to maintain the health of our communities, food systems and critical natural resources. We need to build a resilient Oregon and to do so, we need to invest in the OSU Statewides.

I understand there are many competing demands on state government. However, if we neglect to invest in research, education and technical assistance to support a resilient food system, then we risk our collective ability to adapt and innovate in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Thanks in advance for your consideration and supporting investments in food system resilience found in SB 458.

Kind regards,

Chris Schreiner
Executive Director
Oregon Tilth