



*The friendliest store in town.*

April 27, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and Members of the Committee:

My name is Athena Petty and I am the Senior Manager of Sustainability at New Seasons Market.

New Seasons Market is a regional grocer focused on connecting eaters with farmers and creating good for generations to come. As a retailer employing more than 3,000 staff in Oregon with hundreds of local farm partnerships, we champion the regional food economy with a focus on the future. As the world's first B Corp grocer, we support organic and regenerative agriculture due to the potential this form of agriculture has to create economic benefit to our rural communities, heal our soils and watersheds, and create safe livelihoods for those working the land.

New Seasons Market recently joined the Oregon Organic Coalition and I am writing to express support for HB5025, including funding to expand the Organic Extension Program by five positions. These positions will focus on organic and low-input practices that can assist all Oregon farmers and ranchers, not just certified organic producers.

The Organic Extension Program was officially launched in 2017, growing from 1 to 2.2 FTE positions in its six years. It has a proven track record of providing much-needed technical assistance to farmers that are looking for alternatives to input-heavy production and practices that allow them to diversify their operations or try new ways to build resilience. More expertise in organic practices is needed to address other crops, like fruits, nuts, grains and pulses, perennials, and seeds. This work is critical to building long-term food security, based on diversified, local production.

Through these positions, OSU will be able to expand the reach of organic practices that are already providing benefits to certified organic, transitioning and non-organic farmers, and increase applied research. Many of these common practices, like cover crops, compost management, crop rotations and efforts to enhance soil health, can - when used fittingly - benefit all producers and the planet.

Over the years, the Oregon Organic Coalition has seen organic growers' need for support evolve and expand. US organic industry sales were valued at \$63.3 billion in 2021. Despite the continued growth of organic in Oregon, and various opportunities to accelerate that growth, Oregon is losing ground compared to other organic market-leading states across the country. Pennsylvania invested nearly \$4 million specifically for organic programming. As a result, Pennsylvania's organic growth from 2008 to 2021 went from \$212 million to \$1.1 billion in annual sales. Likewise, Washington leveraged investments in organic to fuel annual organic sales from \$282 million to \$1.13 billion. In contrast, during this same period Oregon's organic annual sales only grew from \$155 million to \$386 million. And Oregon has fallen from the top 10

in organic production to ranking 12th today. Investments in organic and organic practices are necessary to recapture the state's standing as an organic leader.

Oregon's farmers increasingly recognize organic production as an opportunity for growth, differentiation and long-term farm security. To support growers in Oregon, the state must holistically invest in the infrastructure and knowledge needed to recognize the opportunity in front of us. In challenging economic times, new investments may seem daunting. However, the estimated additional fiscal impacts of these five positions are minor compared to the triple bottom line benefits they can bring to Oregon's agricultural sector.

By making this investment in the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems, OSU could not only help farmers increase farm viability and better access the burgeoning organic market – if desired – but could also attract additional public and private funding. For example, in 2021, Chico State University's Center for Regenerative Agriculture and Resilient Systems received a \$6.9 million NRCS award for a five-year project designed to improve soil health to help orchard, vineyard, rangeland, dairy and row crop producers in Northern California build food and fiber production resiliency.

Please support the expansion of OSU's Organic Extension Program.

Sincerely,

Athena Petty