



Testimony in support of HB 5025 – Expanding OSU’s Organic Extension Program

April 27, 2023

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

My name is Amy Wong and I am the Board Chair of the Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC), based in Lyons, Oregon. The OOC was founded by organic trade leaders in 2004 to build unified support for organic advocacy. The OOC has brought together organic farmers, businesses, affiliated organizations, and other stakeholders, to provide direction and advocacy, and to support efforts that promote and grow organic trade and farming practices in Oregon.

Last session, the legislature declared organic an “Emerging Sector” and funded the recently released [Oregon Organic Market Assessment](#). One of the many recommendations in the *Assessment* is to continue to invest in **Organic Technical Assistance & Applied Research by expanding the successful Organic Extension Program at OSU**. Significant organic gains could be made in food-grade grain, dairy/livestock, fruit & tree fruit, soil ecology, vineyards, and hazelnuts.

The Organic Extension Program was officially launched in 2017 and has grown from 1 to 2.2 FTE positions and 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.

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.

One organic extension specialist recently mentioned that they receive more calls from non-organic farmers than organic, as farmers of all stripes look to low-input production methods to increase farm viability.

Organic farmers and ranchers are research pioneers for all of agriculture, including declining sectors of conventional agriculture looking for lower-input practices. Organic producers often find themselves on the frontline, trying out new practices and learning through trial and error in pursuit of sustainability innovations—all within strict regulatory confines, and with little federal and state support.

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. Investments in organic and organic practices are necessary to recapture the state's standing as an organic leader. One proven way to support organic, and Oregon's agriculture sector, is by increasing funding for organic technical assistance and applied research. Oregon is fortunate that there is an existing, and trusted, program already doing this work in the areas of vegetables, pastures and forages, and naked barley. However, many other key Oregon crops could benefit.

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

Most sincerely,



Amy Wong

Board Chair