

**Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural  
Resources and Water  
On HB 4049**

**February 8, 2024**

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**Oregon Environmental Council**

Chair Helm, vice-chairs Owens and Hartman, members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Karen Lewotsky, and I am the Water Program Director & Rural Partnerships lead for Oregon Environmental Council.

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

OEC strongly supports HB 4049, which will provide providing \$740,000 in funding for Oregon State University researchers to study perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in biosolids.

Biosolids, the processed end product from many of our wastewater systems, are a valuable source of nutrients. Their application to working lands has been shown to be superior to commercial inorganic fertilizers in many ways. According to a 2021 study, "increasing biosolids application rates increased soil chemical and biological health indices, leading to an improvement in the overall soil health index." Compared to nitrogen fertilizers, "biosolids led to an improvement in the biological soil health index. Findings indicate that long-term biosolids land application to semi-arid dryland cropping systems can improve soil health, suggesting that biosolids may play an important role in prolonged agroecosystem sustainability."<sup>i</sup> A number of Oregon producers are already working with wastewater treatment facilities to add biosolids to their management practices for increasing soil health, sequestering carbon and improving crop productivity.

Meanwhile, PFAS has been front and center in recent news. We are all aware of its challenges – it's a forever chemical that takes a very long time to break down, it is present in many products, is used in many manufacturing and industrial processes and poses significant threats to human and environmental health. It is found almost everywhere in air, water and land, but concentrations vary geographically, and they vary wildly.

In all but a few instances, Oregon has very low levels of PFAS. Our water providers, waste water utilities and water quality agency are well-aware of its human and environmental health challenges, and are working to understand how PFAS gets into

our water and at what level. We commend them for tackling this challenge in a coordinated and voluntary manner, and encourage them to continue that work.

Determining if and how PFAS moves into the environment from land-applied biosolids is a pressing question. HB4049 will provide funding for a coordinated OSU/DEQ study on this question. Non-food production fields with a history of biosolids application will be compared with adjacent fields with no history of biosolids application. This will enable researchers to track PFAS movements through soils, providing agencies, agricultural producers and wastewater utilities with information for evaluating when, where and how biosolids should continue to be applied to working lands, and at what rate. Participation in the study will be voluntary, and private information will be anonymized to the full extent allowed by law.

This data will help Oregon's DEQ, the federal EPA, Oregon agricultural producers and wastewater utilities understand PFAS impacts in Oregon. Federal studies and policy makers are focused on many areas, especially areas with high PFAS concentrations like Maine and Michigan. but they are not looking at Oregon in particular. If we want future policies and regulations to take Oregon's specific PFAS situation into account, it is incumbent upon us to gather this data in a scientifically rigorous manner.

We urge you to support this study with full funding as requested by HB4049 and the -2 amendments. Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> [Long-term biosolids land application influences soil health](#), 2021. University of Colorado, USDA.