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March 3, 2025

Senate Natural Resources & Wildfire Committee  
Attn: Senator Jeff Golden (Chair)  
Oregon State Capitol  
Salem, OR

**RE: Testimony in Support of SB 887**

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of SB 887 and the opportunity to strategically invest in Oregon's food and agricultural sector by establishing an Organic Policy Specialist at the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). This position would lead the facilitation, marketing & trade of organic products, and ensure that organic practices and regulatory requirements are considered in policy development across the ODA and other state agencies.

As the CEO of Oregon Tilth for over 15 years, I have led a nonprofit dedicated to organic certification, education, and advocacy. Headquartered in Corvallis, we work with farmers, processors, and distributors across Oregon, the U.S., and Mexico. Accredited by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), we certify over 1,100 farm operations of varying crops, geographies, and scales. We are Oregon's largest organic certifier.

In 2022, the Oregon Legislature funded a market analysis of organic agriculture as one of the state's five emerging sectors. Conducted by Business Oregon and an independent consulting firm, the 2023 report concluded that organic production and food sectors are vital to Oregon's economy. The report highlighted key opportunities for growth in organic agricultural production, food manufacturing, and distribution while emphasizing benefits such as local food security, climate resilience, job creation, and environmental health.

Despite these opportunities, Oregon is falling behind. The U.S. organic industry reached \$70 billion in retail sales in 2023, yet Oregon's growth has lagged compared to other leading states. From 2008 to 2021, Pennsylvania's \$4 million investment in organic expanded its sector from \$212 million to \$1.1 billion in annual farmgate sales. Washington saw similar gains, growing from \$282 million to \$1.13 billion. In contrast, Oregon's organic sales increased from \$155 million to \$386 million, peaking at \$454 million in 2019. Oregon farmers have a significant opportunity to diversify and capitalize on the growing demand for organic products.

Organic agriculture spans a diverse range of products—fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, meat, and more. Organic farmers are influenced by all divisions at the ODA. Establishing an Organic

Policy Specialist would provide crucial coordination and support for this sector. This role would mirror a federal position that successfully aligned policies across all branches at the USDA and coordinated inter-agency initiatives to enhance efficiency and support for organic producers.

Oregon Tilth has long collaborated with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve support for organic farmers. Through this partnership, we have seen the benefits of a dedicated Organic Policy Specialist at the USDA in driving policy integration and efficiency. A similar position at ODA would provide Oregon farmers with better access to resources and regulatory clarity.

Organic is a voluntary choice, not a mandate. And many farms operate as split operations, managing both organic and non-organic acreage. Additionally, organic farming practices have been successfully integrated into non-organic systems, benefiting a broader range of farmers.

Consumer demand for organic products continues to rise, creating economic opportunities for farmers, rural communities, and businesses seeking to diversify. However, without strategic investment in an Organic Policy Specialist who understands the principles and practices of organic farming, manufacturing, and market development, Oregon farmers and food businesses risk missing out on these benefits.

I appreciate your time and consideration in supporting investments that strengthen Oregon's food system resilience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Schreiner".

Chris Schreiner  
Chief Executive Officer  
Oregon Tilth