



February 28, 2025

RE: SB 887

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash and members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of SB 887, to create an Organic Policy Specialist position at the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

Organically Grown Company, known as OGC, began in Eugene, OR nearly 50 years ago as a non-profit grower’s cooperative, selling fresh, organic produce and specialty crops to help small to mid-size farms expand their market access and to get healthy food to the people. Significant growth and demand in the organic industry created the need for us to evolve from a cooperative to an S-class corporation in 1999, and then to an employee stock ownership program (ESOP) in 2008. Then in 2018, OGC became proudly owned by the first-of-its-kind, Sustainable Food and Agriculture Perpetual Purpose Trust (SFAPPT), an ownership model that allows us to remain independent and true to our mission – *promoting and inspiring the growth of the organic agriculture movement.*

Today, as a Trust-owned organization, we operate out of 7 facilities in the pacific northwest, employ over 250 produce professionals and in 2024 served PNW eaters over 125 million pounds of organic produce. While we source produce from across the globe, our roots are in Oregon, helping the area’s organic farmers get their produce to retailers, restaurants, food buying clubs and even food banks.

Throughout our journey we have remained dedicated to not only helping organic farmers get their products to consumers, but also in leading policy/advocacy action on behalf of all our stakeholders, especially our farmers who are too busy on their farms to meet with legislators.

There are many reasons why Oregon should invest in an Organic Policy Specialist at the Oregon Department of Agriculture – environmental, health, resiliency, and economic benefits that result from organic agriculture. However, I will focus my testimony around one central theme, that organic agriculture helps ALL producers and businesses, not just those who are certified organic.

The organic sector is more than just farmers and land stewards. In addition to the nearly 600 certified organic producers in Oregon, there are more than 400 marketers, processors and non-farming businesses certified to produce organic value-added products. This includes many of the major and recognizable brands and products shoppers look for in grocery stores. In fact, a large portion of our state’s food manufacturers make and sell

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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 nominal federal and state support.

Investments in organic farming education, advocacy, and programmatic needs are necessary to promote the growth of our agricultural industry.

Over 90% of Oregon households are buying Organic foods.

organic products, and they do so alongside their products' non-organic counterparts. What's not so well-known is that these products (organic and non-organic) are processed in the same facility.

Businesses (and farms) can do both organic and non-organic production. Organic standards actually allow for what we call Split-Operations, those that manufacture both or manage both organic and conventional land. In fact, a large portion of our organic operations do this. According to USDA's National Ag Statistics Services latest survey, 40% of our state's organic farms are split operations. And an estimated 90% or more of our certified organic food manufacturers and processors make not only organic products, but non-organic products too.

As such, investments made in organic agriculture and food manufacturing can benefit ALL farms and businesses. For example, if we invest in infrastructure such as a new organic storage facility, dairy plant, slaughter facility or processing plant, it will serve not only Oregon's ORGANIC businesses, but conventional ones as well. And if programs offered by ODA were more tailored to organic and split operations it could benefit ALL of our state's food producers.

The beauty of the organic industry is that it's not "all or nothing." The ability for farms and businesses to operate both organic and conventional, certifying only a portion of their operation if they wish, was done purposefully during the creation of the Organic Foods Production Act. When the law was created it was clear that the market could not support a rapid influx of organic food. So, by allowing producers to certify a 'portion' of their operations they could participate in both markets and even have a safety net knowing that their organic crops and products could be sold as conventional if they couldn't find organic buyers – a luxury conventional-only operations do not have. It also created a path so that producers could also easily transition their conventional land to organic as organic markets grew. Simply said, playing in both markets is smart business.

My final point is that a growing number of producers are interested in organic practices. Whether to improve their soil health, reduce their reliance on costly synthetic inputs, or to become more resilient against the impacts of increasingly unpredictable conditions, producers are looking to incorporate ecological/biological practices. And they don't need to become certified organic or market their products to reap the benefits of organic practices. But what they do need are support and opportunities – something the ODA could offer if there was a position with the department focused on incorporating Organic Policy into their programs.

It's no longer organic versus conventional. Farms and business do both, and shoppers want both, too. Sadly, the organic sector, despite its many benefits, doesn't get the support it rightfully deserves. By supporting SB 877 we can change this.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Dill
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Organically Grown Company