



March 25, 2025

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Organic Coalition

RE: Support for SB 5502 – Oregon Department of Agriculture Budget

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC). Incorporated in 2008, the OOC works to promote the growth of Oregon's organic industry and community, while building resilient regional food systems.

The OOC supports many aspects of the proposed Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) budget but will focus our testimony on areas that have the greatest overlap with our work.

An Organic Policy Specialist at ODA was originally envisioned with input from former ODA Director Taylor and has even been included in previous GRB budgets. While it wasn't included in the most recent GRB, apparently due to an oversight, the OOC worked with Senator Gelser Blouin and Representative Nosse to introduce SB 887A, which adds the Organic Policy Specialist position at ODA. SB 887A has since been passed unanimously to Ways and Means, and as OOC's top priority of the session, we hope that it will be rolled into ODA's budget bill to finally create the needed Organic Policy Specialist position at the Department of Agriculture.

As mentioned in my verbal testimony, the OOC received an USDA Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG) Award and one of our grant partners is ODA. OOC has been working with ODA Trade Development Manager Erick Garman to leverage the federal OMDG funds with support from Organic Trade Association and others to bring Oregon organic producers to trade shows, which has led to other domestic and international marketing projects for Oregon's diverse agricultural products. The OOC has long supported ODA POPs for domestic marketing knowing that viable farms need viable markets. Additionally, the OOC submitted testimony in support of HB 2689, which would allocate funding for this sort of marketing and promotion at ODA.

The OOC works closely with ODA Farm to School Program Manager Amy Gilroy. We recently collaborated on recruiting organic producers to attend the Farm to School Showcase in Salem and for inclusion in the Oregon Harvest for Schools Directory. In this vein, the OOC is supportive of expanding funding to \$1 million for the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program, which provides funding for food producers to access necessary equipment to meet the demands of the school marketplace. Oregon's organic community has long highlighted the need for the exact types of projects targeted in this grant program—post-harvest handling and storage, including Cold Storage, Mobile Washing Stations, Food Safety Infrastructure Upgrades, Agricultural Water Infrastructure, Warehouse Conversions & Upgrades, Heating & Cooling Systems for Season

Extension, among others. Many Farm to School farmers are certified organic, which gives them an extra point in the selection process, or use organic practices.

The OOC is also working with ODA and the Oregon Co-Packers to identify challenges and opportunities for organic producers along the supply chain, especially as data shows that younger generations are willing to pay more for local/organic products.

The OOC is grateful for the ongoing partnership with ODA and would like to see the state invest more in agency, especially as we face food systems disruptions with extreme weather and other events. We believe that along with additional funds for marketing and an Organic Policy Specialist, funding should be maintained for Specialty Crop Block Grant program management, the State Meat Inspection Program, and ongoing Pest Control programming, which can be especially debilitating for organic producers who cannot use prohibited methods to manage infestations.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Wong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Amy Wong
Oregon Organic Coalition - Coalition Director