



TO: Joint Committee On Ways and Means, Subcommittee On Natural Resources
FROM: Lisa Arkin, Executive Director, Beyond Toxics
DATE: April 21, 2021
RE: SB 5502 (ODA Budget)

Co-chairs Senator Taylor and Representative Reardon and members of the Committee:

My name is Lisa Arkin and I am the Executive Director for Beyond Toxics, a statewide environmental justice organization advancing policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivating grassroots leadership from Oregon's frontline and impacted communities. Beyond Toxics also co-leads the Natural and Working Lands Tables (Forests & Agriculture/Water Sub-tables) for the Oregon Climate Action Plan (OCAP) Coalition, which engages at every step of the EO 20-04 implementation process, working to ensure the strongest possible outcomes for our climate, our communities and our economy. We are providing testimony in support of several programs, projects and positions that should be included in Oregon Department of Agriculture's (ODA) budget in SB 5502.

1. Equity and Inclusion

a. Policy Option Package #130: Agency Equity Officer

This position would establish a Chief Equity Officer position to better serve ODA's diverse agricultural and food sectors along with the associated customer base. It is crucial for ODA to have the capacity to connect with historically underserved communities that are impacted by ODA's programs. EO 20-04 draws attention to the disproportionate effects climate change will have on communities who have been under-resourced and underrepresented in decision-making processes. EO 20-04 also directs state agencies to "[p]rioritize actions that will help vulnerable populations and impacted communities adapt to climate change impacts" in their budgets (Section 3(C)(2)). Advancing equity is a top priority for Beyond Toxics.

The Equity Officer position would help ODA engage with and better serve historically underserved communities that are impacted by ODA's programs, which will be increasingly important as communities work to adapt to the changing climate. This position would enable ODA to partner with community organizations and advocacy groups to gauge the needs of all community members with a particular focus on responding to the needs of Black, Native American, Latinx and other communities historically marginalized by government policies, in turn giving ODA the opportunity to support culturally important food growing and harvesting, climate-resilient communities and environmentally healthy natural and working lands. .

b. Policy Option Package #320: Worker Protection Standard Position

POP 320 would create a position for education, training, and technical assistance regarding rights and responsibilities of agricultural employers and employees under the federal Worker Protection Standard and related state laws. This is vital because migrant and Latinx farmworkers are essential workers who have historically been underserved and underrepresented in public policy decision-making processes. Yet, they are disproportionately exposed to the impacts of changing climate, such as heat or wildfire smoke, or toxic pesticides. This position would provide crucial support for the health and wellbeing of our

farmworker neighbors.

2. Soil Health and Pesticides

a. Policy Option Package #365: Soil Health Position

This POP will create in-house expertise at ODA to improve soil health on Oregon's agricultural lands. Healthy soils provide a variety of benefits that are important to farmers and ranchers. Healthy soils keep cropland productive, hold more moisture, provide natural pest and disease prevention benefits, keep cropland resilient in the face of natural disasters, and help protect air and water quality. Healthy soil practices can also keep carbon in the soil and depending on the practices, can reduce farmers' energy use and reduce fertilizer-related greenhouse gas emissions. They also help farmers and ranchers stay resilient in the face of changing and unpredictable climate conditions.

We also want to call for an emphasis on the importance of organics and regenerative farming practices in the establishment of this position, which reduce the need for additional inputs and increase climate resilience. We would like to see an expressed willingness to collaborate with organic and regenerative farming communities on behalf of ODA. This would also allow ODA to reduce expenditures on pesticide management and enforcement programs in the future.

Our understanding is that the Soil Health Position will likely be funded with federal support for the next biennium, which would eliminate the need to fund that \$225,000 from the general fund for the 21-23 biennium. We encourage the revenue and expenditure authorizations necessary for the federal funds allocated to this position to be received in the current budget.

b. Policy Option Package #370: Baseline Soil Health Assessment

ODA has requested resources to support pilot work to establish a baseline assessment of soil health for several crops. This will complement work that was recently funded in Washington State. ODA will be working with OSU to develop this assessment. While we fully support the pursuit of soil health assessment and efforts to improve soil health across Oregon, we would like to see a clear intent to study the carbon benefits associated with organic and regenerative farming on behalf of ODA.

c. Policy Option Package #330: Pesticide Certification and Training

This POP would allow ODA to accept the revenue from a new pesticide license type (with passage of HB 2031). It would grant ODA the authority to create the new license type in rule to streamline the regulatory burden on certain pesticide users, while still requiring them to have a certification and license and receive education aimed at protecting public health and the environment.

Thank you for considering our comments on SB 5502. We urge you to support the above programs, projects, and positions to advance climate-smart agricultural practices, principles of equity, and encourage toxics-reduction at ODA.

Sincerely,

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