

- Policy (specifically around food safety, worker housing, and regulations)
- Equipment (the need for scale-appropriate equipment and a mechanism to share it)
- Plant breeding (in general and regarding varieties for specific localities)
- Disease (e.g., fireblight and mummy berry, neither of which have organic controls)

The absence of policy from the statewide survey’s “top eight,” especially in light of how much it was discussed in the focus groups, may be the result of the survey mechanism. “Policy” is such a large and diffuse category that it may not resonate with farmers as part of a list on a statewide survey. Yet when farmers and stakeholders start talking about what they’re doing and what’s on their mind, policy-relevant topics, from federal laws to local zoning, are quickly on the table. We define these as “policy;” farmers and food system stakeholders define them as “problems.”

Summary

This report combines different perspectives—farmers, researchers, and food system stakeholders across statewide and sub-regional scales—to shed light on what is needed to enhance organic agriculture in Oregon. Some recommendations are very specific, and others are classic challenges that need ongoing effort.

Though this needs assessment was initially designed to determine research needs related to in-field, on-farm production, we also identified priorities and research well beyond what is typically learned through university field station research. Market development, grower and consumer education, and policy development are just as important. If some markets for organic products are reaching saturation, how can new markets be developed? What new business structures, not to mention infrastructure, will be required?

The intent for future phases of this work is to include additional organic sector stakeholders with statewide perspectives and examine other sub-regions of Oregon. In addition, there is potential to expand the assessment by working with researchers in nearby states.

We hope that the challenges and recommendations in this report will stimulate research and action from researchers, educators, and policymakers in Oregon. Our research has started a compelling and complex conversation. Let’s keep it going.