



Investing in Soil Health for Climate Resilience 2023 Annual Report

OrCAN's vision is a future where healthy soils are the foundation of thriving food systems in Oregon – reconnecting healthy ecosystems, economies, and communities.

Our mission is to empower a broad, producer-centered network to improve soil health across Oregon through collaboration, education, and policy advocacy.

This is an update on OrCAN's work (1) building an inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network, (2) catalyzing place-based technical assistance with improved information and tools, (3) advancing institutionalized support for soil health, (4) cultivating our human, financial, and structural resources, and finally, (5) a look ahead to our work in 2024.

1. Building an Inclusive, Collaborative State-wide Soil Health Network

OrCAN's network grew from 744 in early 2023 to 929 currently. Most of that growth is the result of engagement in our annual Climate Resilience Training for Agricultural Professionals and outreach at the Small Farms Conference. Through our policy advocacy efforts early in the year, we built relationships with several new larger scale farmers who are influencers in their communities and within the agriculture industry. Our policy advocacy efforts also resulted in strengthened relationships with industry groups including the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Association of Nurseries, Oregon Wheat Growers League, and Oregon Wine Growers Association, all of whom endorsed the Healthy Soils Bill Campaign.

Throughout 2023, we met regularly with agency partners including Oregon Department of Agriculture's leadership and staff, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's leadership and staff, and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. We met with program partners and other organizations including: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, OSU Extension, NW Climate Hub, Friends of Family Farmers, American Farmland Trust, Oregon Agricultural Trust, Northwest Center for Alternative Pesticides, Upper Willamette SWCD, Ecotrust, Quivira Coalition, Adelante Mujeres, Anahuac Farm, and Wapato Island Farm. OrCAN staff attended an Oregon NRCS Technical Advisory Meeting, an Oregon Board of Agriculture meeting, and several field days hosted by OSU Extension and an SWCD, all to learn and build relationships in person.

As the lead for the Oregon Community Food System Network's Climate, Resilience and Stewardship Committee, OrCAN helped to convene "tricky topics" conversations focused on carbon sequestration on agricultural lands and access to water. OrCAN was elected to serve on the National Healthy Soils Policy Network's Steering Committee, and OrCAN continues to serve as a member of the Pacific NW Western Cover Crop Council.

2. Catalyzing Place-based Technical Assistance with Improved Information and Tools

Education: OrCAN's [Climate Resilience Trainings for Oregon Agriculture Professionals](#) are a crucial, cross-programmatic activity where we facilitate connections, increase access to existing information, and improve resources and tools for climate resilience in Oregon. We implemented this year's successful training series over three sessions in November 2023, with over 200 people registered for the series. 50% of registrants self-identified as farm advisors/technical service providers. Registrants were from 30 of Oregon's 36 counties, representing non-profits, farmers, and researchers, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions that leveraged existing networks and catalyzed place-based technical assistance. Topics included:

- Farmer Perceptions of, and Barriers to, Climate Adaptation in Oregon
- Drought and Heat Mitigation Practices, Obstacles & Needs
- Climate Resilience and Adaptive Management on Rangelands and in Rural Oregon

Follow-up [resources and recordings of the sessions](#) were shared out after the sessions.

Information and Tools:

Participants in the Climate Resilience Training identified a need for better access to soil health equipment. In response, OrCAN created and shared out a new [Statewide SWCD Equipment Rental Program](#) resource, and facilitated a conversation among partners interested in increasing access to soil health equipment through equipment rental and sharing programs.

We continued to share events, resources, and funding opportunities with our network participants. We promoted the following funding opportunities:

- Inflation Reduction Act funding available through the NRCS's [EQIP](#) and [CSP](#) Programs
- Oregon Community Food Systems Network [Farmer/Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant](#)
- USDA [Rural Energy for America Program](#) for energy efficiency and renewable energy

We published a [farm profile](#) of CAMPO Collective: an agroecological, worker-owned farm in Washington County linking social and ecological values, and also published a blog post on [no-till as a water conservation tool](#).

We've also begun to identify research and/or resource needs, including:

- *What cover crops work best in different regions, soils, and cropping systems?*
- *How do farmers improve soil health in water-limited or high-desert conditions?*
- *What resources are available or needed to help farmers interpret soil test results?*

And we expanded and updated the resources listed on OrCAN's website, which now includes [curated resources in Spanish](#). (An English version of this resource page is also available [here](#).) We partnered with the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP) to provide relevant Spanish-language resources about farming and ranching in a changing climate in Oregon. We also significantly grew our audiences and engagement on our social media accounts.

3. Advancing Institutionalized Support for Soil Health

State-level Advocacy:

OrCAN engaged our community in advocating for two bills during the 2023 legislative session, which ran from January-June.

- ✓ The [Natural Climate Solutions Bill \(SB 530\)](#) passed! [SB 530](#) was incorporated into the omnibus Climate Resilience Package, which was funded and passed in the last days of the 2023 session! The Natural Climate Solutions provisions provide \$10 million for incentives and technical support to land managers (including farmers and ranchers) for the adoption of natural climate solutions, including soil health practices. OrCAN has been monitoring and engaging in the implementation process to ensure that soil health practices are recognized as natural climate solutions and that the financial incentives and technical assistance provided by the state are equitable and work for farmers and ranchers on the ground. We've provided public comment on implementation of the directives in the bill. And we've coordinated with the Governor's office and state agencies on their proposed uses of the Natural Climate Solutions Funds (created in the NCS Bill) and hope to see a stronger proposal for use of the funds later in January.

- ✗ The [Healthy Soils Bill \(HB 2998\)](#) was not passed. HB 2998 was a voluntary, incentive-based approach focused on expanding strategies to advance soil health including: technical assistance, farmer-to-farmer education, financial incentives, equipment and soil testing. Although it had broad support from the agricultural community and the legislature, the funding request for the Healthy Soils Bill was not prioritized by the legislature, so it did not pass this session. Here's more about our [advocacy on the Healthy Soils Bill and why it ultimately didn't pass](#). Fortunately, most of the policy goals of the Healthy Soils Bill, specifically the financial assistance and technical assistance, can be achieved through implementation of the Natural Climate Solutions bill, where OrCAN is heavily engaged.

OrCAN was a champion for both bills, educating and engaging our community in advocacy, especially farmers and ranchers. We're encouraged that the state will be providing support for climate mitigation and resilience, including soil health, on Oregon's farms and ranches! Engagement from OrCAN's community was critical and helped to make this possible. Here's OrCAN's more comprehensive [End of Legislative Session Report](#).

OrCAN and partners with Friends of Family Farmers and Oregon Community Food Systems Network (OCFSN) also successfully advocated for \$2.6 million for a new [Farmer and Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant](#). OrCAN served on the Grant Advisory Committee to inform development of the Program and expects to serve on the Grant Review Committee as well.

OrCAN served on the Oregon Global Warming Commission's Natural and Working Lands Advisory Committee. In that role, we engaged producers and collectively provided input on the Oregon Global Warming Commission's list of practices and metrics to increase sequestration and reduce GHG emissions from Oregon's agricultural lands.

Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network: 2023 Annual Report

In November, OrCAN's Executive Director attended a gathering of state legislators at TomKat Ranch in Pescadero, CA. The event was hosted by the State Innovation Exchange to help lawmakers from across the country learn about regenerative agriculture practices and policy, and Megan was invited as a resource person for the group.

Federal Advocacy:

OrCAN advocated for several federal policy priorities including:

- 1) The Agriculture Resilience Act (ARA), a policy concept for the Farm Bill
- 2) Federal funding for state assistance for soil health
- 3) Healthy Soils Healthy Climate Act
- 4) Maintaining \$20 billion for farm conservation programs from IRA in next Farm Bill

Our advocacy included the following special events and regular communications:

- OrCAN staff and two farmers testified before the Congressional House Agriculture Committee at a hearing/listening session on the Farm Bill in Albany in early June
- Farm tour (co-hosted with Oregon Tilth) for Rep. Salinas's Legislative Director at [Garnett's Red Prairie Farm](#), where we discussed the value of federal funding for soil health and Rep. Salinas' priorities as a member of the House Agriculture Committee
- OrCAN staff attended two roundtables with Rep. Salinas and Sen. Wyden
- At Rep. Salinas's request, OrCAN provided examples of states with soil health programs
- OrCAN staff attended and recruited farmers for four Town Halls for Congressional targets
- Four meetings with staff for Rep. Salinas, Rep. Chavez-DeRemer, and Sen. Merkley and regular communication with Congressional staff re: OrCAN's Farm Bill priorities
- Promoted NRCS conservation funding deadlines to demonstrate demand for IRA funding
- Shared out action alerts urging constituents to contact their Members of Congress about OrCAN's priorities

4. Cultivating OrCAN's human, financial, and structural resources so they effectively support the activities required to accomplish its mission

OrCAN's previous Co-Director, Ashley Rood, moved on from the organization, giving plenty of notice, so we were able to undertake a very thorough transition process. [Carly Boyer](#), OrCAN's new Program Manager hired in July, is managing OrCAN's network training program, collaborative projects, and communications. They will also help to build and support OrCAN's evolving network. We're excited about what Carly brings to our team!

We finalized [OrCAN's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan](#) and shared it out with funders and other partners. We also finalized OrCAN's [Organizational Values](#) and [Equity Statement](#). We're exploring a transition to a new fiscal sponsor and have been working with a fundraising consultant with the goal of diversifying and expanding our funding sources, which has already been fruitful.

5. What's planned for 2024

Building an inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network:

OrCAN is diving into an intentional network planning process to clarify the structure of our inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network, with a focus on meeting the needs of historically marginalized and under-resourced producers. Through this process, we'll create a network charter which reflects the network's purpose, principles, priorities, structure, and participation criteria (foundational elements) while clarifying network governance and accountability. A core group of advisors, representing the sectors we want to be involved in the larger network, is coalescing to help us create a shared vision for the network. This collective process of developing a charter will provide the basis for powerful collaboration and long-term viability of the network.

Catalyzing place-based technical assistance and Improving information and tools:

We will structure our Climate Resilience Training for Agriculture Professionals differently in 2024, because our audience is clearly up to speed with the *what and why* of climate resilience and wants to know *how* to access resources and funding for farmers and ranchers. This year, we'll focus our outreach on 4 key funding opportunities:

- Inflation Reduction Act funding available through the NRCS's [EQIP](#) and [CSP](#) Programs
- Oregon Community Food Systems Network [Farmer/Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant](#)
- Natural Climate Solutions Fund opportunities (created in Natural Climate Solutions Bill)
- Restore NW Grants (in development) modeled after [Zero Foodprint's Restore Grants](#)

We'll also host a webinar on how to start an equipment rental program for Soil & Water Conservation Districts including how to operate a program, challenges and lessons learned, funding sources and opportunities for collaboration.

Advancing institutionalized support for soil health:

OrCAN will be engaged in every opportunity relevant to farmers and ranchers, as the Natural Climate Solutions Bill is implemented, to ensure that soil health practices are recognized as natural climate solutions and that the financial incentives and technical assistance provided by the state are equitable and effective for farmers and ranchers in Oregon. OrCAN may serve on the Natural and Working Lands Advisory Committee for the Oregon Climate Action Commission (formerly the Oregon Global Warming Commission), and during the 2024 short legislative session, we'll be part of a coalition advocating for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program to be fully funded. At the federal level, we'll advocate for continued IRA funding for federal conservation programs, State Assistance for Soil Health, and the Healthy Soils Healthy Climate Act ([S.1356](#)).

Thank you for your interest in, and support for, OrCAN's work!



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Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network's Mid-year Report January - June 2024

OrCAN's vision is a future where healthy soils are the foundation of thriving food systems in Oregon – reconnecting healthy ecosystems, economies, and communities.

Our mission is to convene an inclusive, producer-centered network to promote soil health and climate resilience across Oregon through collaboration, education, and advocacy.

This is an update on OrCAN's work (1) building an inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network, (2) catalyzing place-based technical assistance with improved information and tools, and (3) advancing institutionalized support for soil health, and finally, (4) a look ahead to our work for the remainder of 2024.

1. Building an Inclusive, Collaborative State-wide Soil Health Network

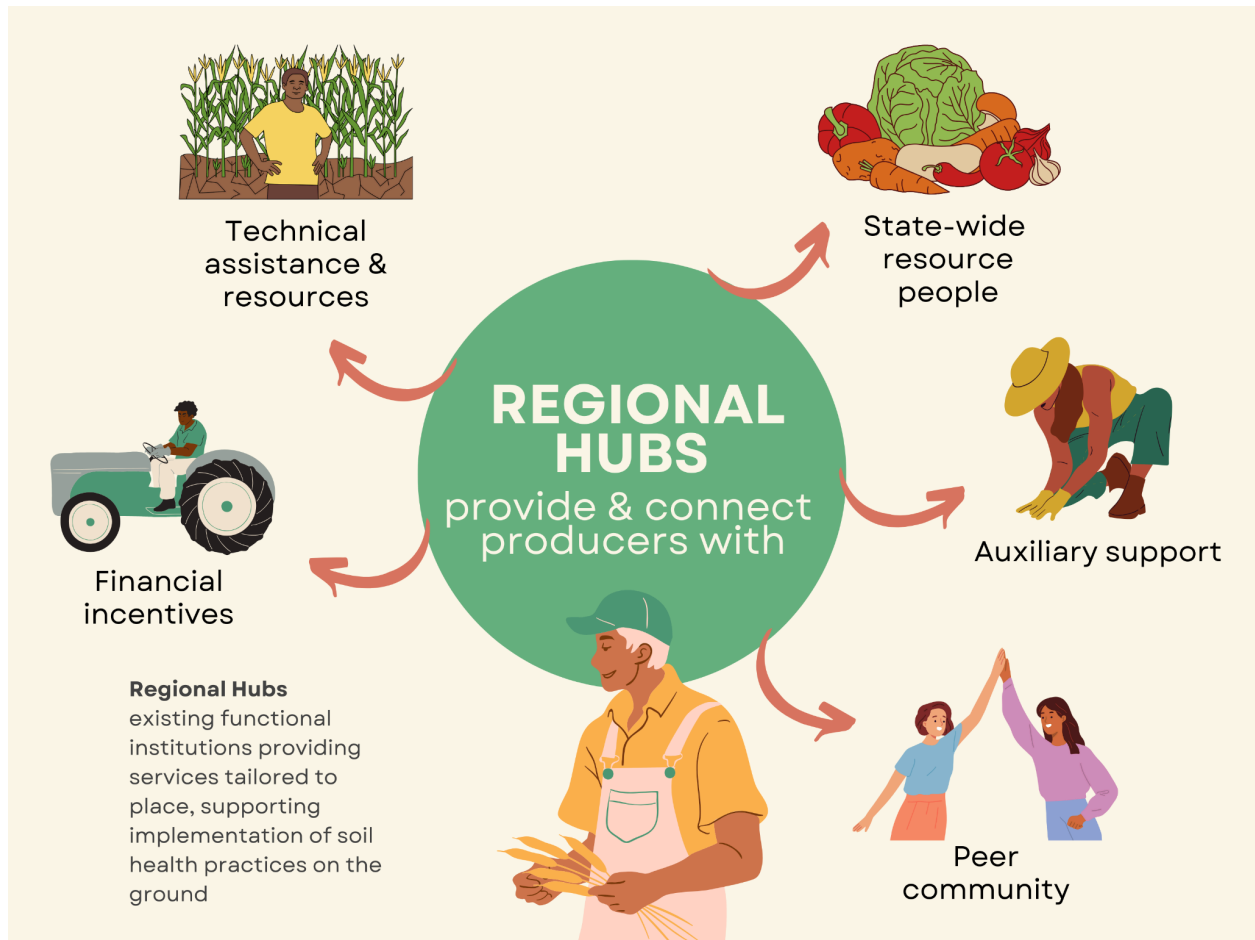
From January-May 2024, OrCAN led twenty-five Oregonians through a process to clarify the structure of an inclusive, collaborative statewide network designed to promote soil health for climate resilience, with a focus on meeting the needs of historically marginalized and under-resourced producers.

We convened two Advisory Councils, one of Producers and one of Farm Service Providers, who provided multiple rounds of input. We also collected input from other key partners, including OSU Extension and the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, and shared our plans at two state-wide convenings. The process resulted in this [Soil Health Network Overview](#) which reflects the network's purpose, strategic approach, structure, roles and responsibilities, and governance, and lays out a process for building the network.

Below is a summary of our plan for the Network:

Our producer-centered network has identified several key elements in healthy soil practice implementation: adequate technical assistance (TA), financial resources, a network of supportive peers, and land tenure. We are creating an inclusive, collaborative statewide Soil Health Network to support Oregon producers' access to these elements through a *Regional Hub structure* that will offer place-based, bioregion-specific resources, including:

- **Technical Assistance** via 1:1 consultation and on-farm education events
- **Information and Tools** including access to statewide resources, equipment & soil testing
- **Financial Incentives and Resources** such as implementation grants and grant writing
- **Peer Community** for producers to share successes/challenges, support, and inspiration
- **Auxiliary Support** for underserved producers



Who is in the Network?

Producers interested in maintaining or improving their soil health. The Soil Health Network welcomes producers with a variety of crop types and farm sizes, racial/ethnic identities, and geographic regions within the state of Oregon.

Farm service providers and researchers focused on soil health who are knowledgeable about specific practices; different crop types and farm size/scale; and/or provide soil testing, funding or other resources. These include Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and OSU Extension (researchers, faculty and staff).

Auxiliary support organizations such as non-profits, business/economic development organizations, tribal services, and certifiers who can provide support for marginalized, underserved, and/or under-resourced producers to access soil health resources and funding.

Sharing the Plan and moving forward:

OrCAN hosted a virtual convening, at the end of the process, to present our [Soil Health Network Overview](#) to key partners and advisors. We hope this plan will provide the basis for powerful collaboration and long-term viability of the network.

2. Catalyzing Place-based Technical Assistance with Improved Information and Tools

We continued to share events, resources, and funding opportunities with our network.

We promoted the following funding opportunities:

- NRCS's [Conservation Stewardship Program](#): OrCAN hosted two informational webinars for 44 farm service providers and 53 producers on how to access funding for soil health, now at historic high levels (thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act!).
- Oregon Community Food Systems Network [Farmer & Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant](#) makes \$2.6M available to fund soil health as a resilience strategy. OrCAN staff also served on the grant review committee, which awarded \$1.6M to 116 small-scale farms across Oregon in the first round of funding, with a preference for BIPOC producers.
- [Portland Clean Energy Fund mini-grants](#) for regenerative agriculture projects
- [Ecotrust's Microgrant opportunity](#) for BIPOC producers

We promoted these additional opportunities and resources for Producers:

- Regenerative Ag Farm Tours in Madras and Pilot Rock
- [Quivera's Carbon Credit Conundrum webinar series](#)
- [Ag Soil Health Meeting](#) in Corvallis
- [Ecdysis Foundation's](#) call for vegetable producers implementing regenerative practices, for data collection
- [American Farmland Trust's call for a "Soil Health Successful" farmer](#) in Oregon (to be featured in a case study/profile)
- OSU Extension's Organic Winter Cereals and Cover Crop Field Day
- Hazelnut Cover Crop Workshop in Albany
- Regenerative Winegrowing Immersion at Paicines Ranch in California
- Updates to make OrCAN's online [Resources](#) more navigable.

OrCAN shared our "questions that need answering" with researchers Markus Kleber, Director of OSU's Soil Lab and Nathan Stacey, Oregon State Extension's new Small Farms Extension Specialist with a focus in Crop and Soil Science. Questions included:

- *What cover crops work best in different regions, soils, and cropping systems?*
- *How do farmers improve soil health in water-limited or high-desert conditions?*
- *What resources are available or needed to help farmers interpret soil test results?*

OrCAN staff visited several farms and ranches for educational events, including a Regenerative Ag Field Day in Madras to learn from internationally recognized experts Ray Archuleta and Alejandro Carillo. Staff also attended a Gathering Fire facilitation training at Paicines Ranch Learning Center in California, where they gained valuable facilitation skills and connections.

3. Advancing Institutionalized Support for Soil Health

Oregon's Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) Funds

OrCAN coordinated with the Governor's office and state agencies on proposed uses of the \$10M NCS Funds for incentives and technical support to implement natural climate solutions on natural and working lands, including soil health practices on farms and ranches. OrCAN co-hosted two listening sessions and a survey to share feedback from farmers and farm service providers on the State's proposed use of NCS Funds. OrCAN and the farmers in our Network were concerned that there wasn't enough funding (less than 10% of NCS Funds) allocated to financial incentives for farmers, so we [advocated](#) for more funding for incentives. Michelle Week, owner of Good Rain Farm (ḡast sq̄it), said in her public comment: "Very few farmers need to be convinced that climate-smart practices are best. We need financial and physical support."

In March, the Oregon Climate Action Commission approved a \$750,000 allocation of NCS Funds for technical assistance (TA), conservation management planning, and payment-for-practices for farmers and ranchers via the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP), with some flexibility for additional allocations based on demand. We're working to demonstrate that demand and monitoring implementation to ensure that the NCS Funds are deployed equitably and effectively for farmers and ranchers in Oregon.

Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program (OAHP)

OrCAN was part of a coalition that successfully advocated for \$6M in base funding for OAHP during Oregon's 2024 short legislative session. We called on our community of producers to advocate for funding for OAHP to help grow the program and fund implementation of conservation practices on farms, including those that improve soil health.

Maintaining \$20 billion for farm conservation programs from Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

OrCAN participated in the National Sustainable Ag Coalition's Climate Week of Action with an action alert calling on Congress to protect IRA funding for climate-friendly ag practices. OrCAN staff also participated in a press conference about protecting federal funding for climate-smart ag programs in the Farm Bill. See coverage by Oregon Public Broadcasting: "[Farmers call on Congress to keep conservation funding in farm bill.](#)"

Federal State Assistance for Soil Health

OrCAN has been advocating for State Assistance for Soil Health, federal grants to states for implementation of soil health programs. Both the House and Senate draft versions of the Farm Bill include this new program, which is promising!

Maintaining funding for the Sustainable Ag Research and Education (SARE) Program

OrCAN advocated to maintain funding for SARE, a farmer-driven program that supports innovative sustainable farming practices, and funds OrCAN's Climate Resilience Training for Ag Professionals.

4. *Plans for the remainder of 2024*

Building an inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network:

Now that we've completed our planning process to clarify the structure of our inclusive, collaborative state-wide soil health network, we're ready to begin building the Network! We'll be seeking funding to:

- Provide statewide resources, support, learning opportunities and connection and identify and facilitate connections with statewide resource people;
- Develop/formalize partnerships with BIPOC-led and allied farm service providers to provide auxiliary support for marginalized, underserved, and/or under-resourced producers; and
- Launch pilot Regional Hubs where there is interest, knowledge and capacity.

Catalyzing place-based technical assistance and Improving information and tools:

We're planning for the first-ever gathering of Oregon's agricultural community to promote soil health for climate mitigation and resilience on Oregon's farms and ranches. OrCAN will host a two-day, in-person, state-wide Conference in early 2025. Our goals are to share state-wide resources, identify gaps and needs, and create opportunities for collaboration. The conference will include speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities, with farm service providers as the primary audience. We'll also be revamping OrCAN's communications to better honor indigenous and ancestral soil health practices.

Advancing institutionalized support for soil health:

OrCAN will be engaged in every opportunity relevant to farmers and ranchers, as the Natural Climate Solutions Bill is implemented, to ensure that the financial incentives and technical assistance provided by the state are equitable and effective for farmers and ranchers in Oregon. This includes engaging in development of OAHP Conservation Management Plan grants, which include funding for soil health practices. OrCAN will be helping to fill seats on the Oregon Climate Action Commission's Natural and Working Lands Advisory Committee, and may also serve on the Advisory Committee. We'll continue to advocate for our Farm Bill priorities and are preparing to advocate for OrCAN's [priorities for the 2025 legislative session](#).

Cultivating our human, financial, and structural resources:

OrCAN is transitioning from a fiscally-sponsored project to an independent non-profit, so we'll be submitting our 501(c) application to the IRS and getting structures and systems in place to function as a non-profit beginning as early as January 2025.

2024 is shaping up to be an exciting year for soil health in Oregon!

Thank you for your interest in, and support for, OrCAN's work!



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