

Good evening, Directors. My name is Emily Cooper. As a graduate of Headwaters, I would like to respond to Director Rossi's report about the incubator program with some thoughts about my own experience.

I started my farm, Full Cellar Farm, at Headwaters in 2014. After graduating from the program at the end of 2018, I moved my farm to the property next door, which at the time was also owned by the District. In late 2022 my husband and I bought it, and I plan to farm on the property for the rest of my career. Currently I run a 3-acre certified organic vegetable farm, employing 4 other people in the main season. My farm grossed over \$200,000 last year, and I paid myself a salary of \$42,000. I paid my staff between \$18 and \$21 per hour. I also lease out almost 2 acres of our farm to two other farmers. I say all this to challenge the idea that somehow Headwaters isn't successfully training future farmers. Before starting my farm at Headwaters, I had worked for 6 years on other farms, and had lots of experience but no savings to show for it. I come from a non-farming family, and had no access to inherited land or capital. I would never have been able to start my farm without Headwaters. The skills I learned there, and the peer network I developed while farming there, have led directly to where I am now.

Since the meat of Director Rossi's report addressed the weed situation at Headwaters Farm, I will focus there too. Yes, the weed pressure is intense at Headwaters, but it's disingenuous to say that the farmers there have caused the problem. I started my farm in the second year that Headwaters accepted farmers and farmed mostly on land that no other incubator farmer had leased before me. That's how I can say with certainty that the weeds at Headwaters were there from the start. The weed pressure at Headwaters is the result of years of mismanagement by a ball and burlap nursery that sold its topsoil off and drove trucks and heavy machinery all over during the wet season, resulting in soil that is very heavy and compacted, with very low organic matter. Weeds can tell us a lot about the soil, and the weeds that proliferate at Headwaters are largely weeds that thrive in water logged and/or compacted soil. The only way to deal with these weeds in a lasting way is to improve the tith and amount of organic matter of the soil.

Farmers who start their businesses at Headwaters are there because they don't have access to family land or wealth to start farming on their own. We often don't come from a farming background. While many of us did have several years of experience from working on other farms, it's a whole different thing to be the sole decision maker for a piece of land. So yes, the unavoidable fact is that we will and do make mistakes. Sometimes the scale of our plan is overwhelming. Sometimes other things in our lives, outside of farming, interfere with our plan. Sometimes we just need a few years to figure out the best system for our scale and tools. That's kind of the point of this kind of program. For beginning farmers, it's a low-risk way to start a business and hopefully grow it to the point where it can stand on its own somewhere else. The downside of that is that incubator farms like Headwaters will always suffer from having a lot of short-tenure farmers starting their businesses there and then moving on, but that doesn't mean that the program is not succeeding. We screw up; we learn; and eventually we move on and pass our plot on to another new farmer.

And one final thought on that process of passing it on. The rules are currently that Headwaters farmers farm in ways that would not impact a future farmer's decision to become certified organic. All inputs used on a field have to be allowed under the National Organic Program, and farmers must provide a list of their inputs each year to staff so there are records for each plot that can be used by future farmers who want to become certified. This is fair and right. Our ability to access certain higher priced markets requires that we be able to elect organic certification if we wish, and the 5-year

time limit of the program would hardly give us time to complete the 3-year transition to organic if the clock started when we got there.

In sum, while I agree that Headwaters farmers face significant challenges related to weeds and pest control, the solutions are complicated and can only be reached through education, and understanding that a certain amount of difficulties are part of the deal when providing a place for new farmers to learn. That doesn't negate the fact that Headwaters is providing a valuable service to our community, giving beginning farmers like me a safe and low-risk place to start out, and over time increasing the sustainability and land stewardship ethic of farmers in East Multnomah County.