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Written Testimony from Annie Hoy, Outreach/Communications Manager, Ashland Food Co-op

Chairman Witt, members of the committee. My name is Annie Hoy, 1085 Pleasant Way, Ashland, OR 97520. I am representing Ashland Food Co-op, a 40 year old consumer-owned organic and natural foods retailer. At this writing, AFC has nearly 9,000 consumer owners who in 2012 purchased \$29-million worth of organic and GMO free foods. 65% of our owners have an Ashland, OR address. The other 35% come primarily from Jackson and Josephine counties. My written testimony today is in favor of HB 2319, 2715 and 2739.

As a consumer owned cooperative business, everything we do is consumer driven. Forty years ago, consumers were looking to feed their families whole, organic foods rather than pesticide laden fruits and vegetables and highly processed foods. Our increasing number of consumer owners today still trust us to provide high quality organic, natural and non GMO foods. National trends also show a surging interest in organic and non GMO foods.

According to the USDA, "Organic farming has been one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture for over a decade." Since the National Organic Standard was instituted, consumers have made it clear that GMOs have no place in the \$30 billion organic marketplace. Use of GMOs is not allowed under the USDA Organic Standard. Oregon ranks 5th in the national for the number of organic and exempt certified farms, according to the USDA's 2008 Organic Production Survey.

Ashland Food Co-op has seen a steady rise in the number of organic farm operations at a scale large enough to meet the demand of our customers. We currently work with 40 or more local organic growers in southern Oregon. Their farms would be threatened by an increasing number of local conventional growers planting GMO crops. Our business would also be threatened because if their crops were contaminated by transgenic material from neighboring GMO growers, they would no longer be able to be Certified Organic. Without a strong

local organic growing community, we and our consumers would have to turn to more expensive and distant growers to meet the increasing demand for organic and GMO foods.

Ashland Food Co-op supports the ability of our county to ban growing these crops in our region. We believe that this type of local control is in the best interest of our consumer owners. These consumers have voiced this both verbally and with their pocketbooks. We hear every day from folks who question our product selection to make sure we are as GMO free as possible.

That is also why we support labeling products that contain GMO ingredients. We have spent considerable time and energy to contact suspect companies personally to get assurances that their products do not contain GMOs. Labeling would certainly make this simpler.

We also support HB 2736 because our local organic farmers should be protected from GMO pollen drift. It is a hardship for these small scale family farms to bear the cost of contamination. Farming families live on a shoestring budget. They are not like large corporate farms that receive hefty subsidies. These are farms with real people living on them, raising children and contributing the diversity of our economic base.

GMOs are not tested for safety in the public domain. In fact, patented seeds cannot be obtained for public research. The FDA does not test these novel organisms. They rely on the patent holder to say there are not safety concerns. This sort of “self-regulation” has not proven to be reliable when it comes to our food.

As a retail operation that depends on safe, organic and non-GMO food to employ our 165 workers and feed our nearly 9,000 consumer owners, we agree that GMOs should be more closely regulated on the local front. Our economic future as a region known for our organic agriculture depends on it.