

Testimony of Anthony Boutard
before the
House Agriculture Committee
19 March 2013

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Anthony Boutard and I live in Gaston, Oregon. I am testifying in support of HB 2427.

My wife and I have a certified organic market farm bridging Yamhill and Washington counties. We grow a wide range of crops, including Chinese cabbages, turnips, various radishes, rutabagas, kales and mustards.

Because it is very difficult to find high quality organic seed for many of these and other crops, we produce a significant quantity our own seed on the farm. Under our organic farm plan, we produce seed for approximately 35 plant varieties on-farm. Next winter we are planning to produce seed for Chinese cabbage and turnip. We also rely on seed from other Willamette Valley growers to fill in the holes in our own production.

The decision by the Oregon Department of Agriculture to open up parts of the valley, no matter how limited, to canola production is a serious breach for those of us who grow our own seed and contemplate growing it commercially in the future. As you drive down the Willamette Valley, you can see the Cascades to the east and the coast range to the west. It really is a small place, isolated by the mountain ranges flanking it, which is one of the reasons why the prohibition on growing rapeseed was necessary in the first place.

The argument for lifting the valley-wide ban is similar to arguing that the pollution will only enter a pond at its fringe, so what is the problem. As anyone who battles teasel, tansy ragwort, or Himalayan blackberries knows, plants do not stay put; they move with great ease, especially along roadsides, railroad tracks and other disturbed lands. The toughness and resilience that makes canola an attractive crop for a handful of growers, also makes it a huge problem for the rest of us.

The opening of the Willamette Valley to canola production will needlessly pose the risk of increased disease and insect pressure, making it harder for small farms to produce their own seed, especially organic growers that do not use poisons in their crop production. As with plant pests, insect pests and fungal diseases move about this pond-like valley quickly. Allowing rapeseed production in the valley may provide a reservoir of harmful insects and diseases that can disperse into the seed growing regions. Every year, growers are confronted with new pests, most recently the spotted wing drosophila and the brown marmorated stinkbug, through no fault of their own. We also have a history of self-inflicted damage, and the opening the valley to canola production may turn out to another case history for the future.

Several times a year, farm business draws me from Gaston to the southern end of the

valley, at it is amazing to see how many different crop seeds are grown in the valley. These seeds find their way around the world, producing vegetables that feed people throughout the Americas, and across Europe and Asia. For example, a tiny cabbage seed produced just south of Amity will grow into a head of cabbage winding up on a family's table in Ireland or Germany.

Our neighbors grew a crop of spinach seed last summer, and this year or next somewhere in the world it will be planted for someone's meal. In our part of the valley, specialty seed production is replacing the dwindling acreage of processing crops such as corn, cauliflower, cabbage, strawberries, cucumbers and beets. As the processors have left the valley, they have been replaced seed houses and the associated businesses, providing growers who formerly grew for processors a vital lifeline.

HB 2427 will provide me and my neighbors the assurance that the investments we make in high quality seed production, including years of selective breeding, will not be for naught. Seed production is a high-value agricultural activity that deserves protection from weedy, marginal rotation crops which will undermine the integrity of our efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2427.

Anthony Boutard
Ayers Creek Farm
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