

March 16, 2013

My name is Gary Vachter. My wife and I reside at 17124 French Prairie Rd. St. Paul, OR. I'm a 3rd generation farmer and we have farmed for 31 years. We raise grass seed, specialty seeds, wheat and clovers.

We have invested a large sum of money in equipment, in infrastructure and time invested in our learning curve for growing these crops.

The seed companies we grow for have invested money in their infrastructure, spent years developing relationships with buyers in other countries and are providing year round and part time jobs.

The crops we grow are not subsidized or affected by mandates. If canola is allowed to be grown in the Willamette Valley, the specialty seed industry will be greatly affected, if not eliminated. There is no question about if there will be a greater amount of contamination. Cross pollination through birds, wind, bee movement and seed escaping when shipped are all contributing to the problem. We can use the Roundup Ready Bent grass experiment as a perfect example of how quickly well thought out plans became out of control.

Consumers of our products have made it very clear that they will not purchase seeds that run the risk of contamination with canola. These are not false threats. They have pulled out of other countries because of this exact situation.

We all have to follow laws and rules. As vegetable seed growers, we follow rules of the pinning board. And yes, it restricts what and where we are allowed to grow our crops. This gives our customers reassurance they are getting the quality they request and in turn demands a higher return for our crops.

Growers that want to grow canola state they need it as a rotation crop. This is a weak reason at best. There are many clovers and legume crops that rotate just as well, but don't interfere with the specialty seeds.

The pro canola groups state they are limited to what crops they can grow because most of them don't have irrigation. Lack of irrigation is a contributor to the unsprouted seed problem. Using last summer as a perfect example, by not having the patience to wait for a sprout and working unsprouted seed into the soil, adds to the seed bank in the soil, which will come back to haunt a grower form many years in the future. Some of my past harvest management is to lightly stir the soil surface and irrigate one to two times to sprout the majority of the seed before I do heavier tillage.

We're not opposed of ODA allowing the testing of experimental crops to expand the options for growers. We are opposed of allowing new crops brought in that will put established crops at risk. Canola is a crop that will do that.

I'm also a Farm Bureau member and Farm Bureau is not representing my interest as a specialty grower or the interest of all specialty seeds growers in the Willamette Valley.

ODA, your job is to promote and protect a viable Ag. Industry. We have that in place now. Don't allow a small group to risk the viability of an established stable industry because of political correctness. Think about it this way. Isn't an industry that grows seeds to produce food, the oldest "green" industry known to man? Thank you.

Gary Vachter