

Testimony of Rebecca Landis in opposition to SB 633

Chair Roblan and members of the Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development:

I am writing in opposition to SB 633, which is an attempt by less progressive elements of Oregon agriculture to stifle the right of Oregonians to enact policies affecting their local food systems.

Just as states are the “laboratories of democracy” in relation to the federal government, so are local jurisdictions a potential incubator for policies that may rise to the state level over time. SB 633 eliminates this possibility.

Proponents say they are trying to prevent a patchwork of local laws about agricultural practice. What they really want is a forum they think they can more easily control -- and a means to strangle in the cradle some of the ideas under discussion in rural communities with strong local food systems. The intent of this bill is NOT content neutral.

The “dangerous” ideas SB 633 proponents fear have resonance not only with urban people but with rural small farmers who want to protect the crop varieties they carefully cultivate against the whims of multinational corporations with no allegiance to anyone but Wall Street.

In fact, it’s small farmers who are leading some of the local efforts that SB 633 would pre-empt. So please don’t get suckered by the false narrative that farmers need protection from consumers.

As a farmers’ market manager I work with many small farm-direct marketers, who are closer to their customers than any other class of farmers. Smart farmers figure out how to grow what consumers want – they don’t keep pushing what someone in the corner suite thousands of miles away thinks we should be growing or eating here.

When you see a group of ordinary citizens wading through the initiative process and its many pitfalls, you know that whatever they seek is not a passing fancy.

If some local ordinances do pass, the legislature should not necessarily view the results as chaos. It is possible that these local initiatives will be building blocks for a new state law. In other cases the “patchwork” may be appropriate based on the varied agricultural profiles of Oregon’s counties.

Few Oregon farm operations span so many jurisdictions that they are likely to have a mixed compliance situation. If a farming operation does have to change, it would likely be to protect the rights of other farmers.

In Oregon – where, for example, we enacted women’s suffrage eight years before the 19th Amendment -- we sometimes sit proudly on the leading edge of national policy. Why then would we deny our local voters the right to attempt to lead on matters of consequence to our local food systems?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 633.