



Testimony in Opposition to SB 633
Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development
March 12, 2013
Ivan Maluski, Policy Director
Friends of Family Farmers

Chair Roblan and members of the committee:

Friends of Family Farmers submits this testimony in opposition to SB 633, which would pre-empt local communities from having the ability to establish appropriate local rules and policies regarding agricultural crops.

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This bill's primary intent is to pre-empt efforts in a handful of counties to address local concerns regarding the planting of genetically modified (GM) crops that have emerged in the absence of any state or federal regulatory framework. Specifically, it would pre-empt a measure already approved for the ballot in Jackson County. These county level efforts have arisen because, despite many opportunities, the state has not established any regulatory regime to oversee the planting, notification of planting, or labeling of these crops. Once a GM crop has been deregulated by the federal government, there are no federal or state rules that require any sort of limits, mapping, public notification, setback distances for crops at risk of cross-contamination, or labeling of food products containing GM ingredients. This is of particular concern within Oregon's substantial and fast-growing organic industry where contamination with GM material can mean significant financial losses.

Regardless of your position on GM crops, SB 633 is simply bad policy. It presumes that local communities are incapable of making their own decisions about what is in their own best interests. It assumes that the preference among voters in the most populous counties is always best for the entire state by removing local control over what are often local issues. And this bill is fundamentally anti-democratic in its attempt to pre-empt a measure relating to GM crops already legally on the ballot in Jackson County.

If this bill were to establish a responsible statewide regulatory framework for GM crops that addresses localized concerns, we might be able to support it, but its intent is to pre-empt local action even as the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Legislature have in recent years done nothing to establish any statewide standards or rules. Indeed, one of the primary organizations supporting this legislation also appears to oppose any statewide rules for GM crops or foods.

Friends of Family Farmers works on many farm policy issues, and we have developed our broader policy approach through listening sessions with more than 300 farmers and ranchers across Oregon. One issue that has emerged in these discussions is the need for greater oversight of genetically modified crops, including the establishment GM-isolation/control areas or other restrictions to ensure the viability of specialty seed and organic crops; reporting of GM-crop use for greater transparency and accountability; and, preservation of the public's right to know where their food comes from and what's in it.

SB 633 is bad public policy, particularly in light of the longstanding absence of state action or oversight on these issues. We urge your opposition to this legislation.