

SOUTHERN OREGON'S NEWS SOURCE

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Keep it local

GMOs may or may not be a threat; state should let Jackson County voters decide

We're not ready yet to say one way or the other whether GMOs should be banned in Jackson County. But we are convinced that a legislative bill that would prevent county residents from voting on the issue is a bad idea.

GMOs — genetically modified organisms — are, in this case, crops that have had their genetic structure modified by man. Some call them dangerous "Frankenfoods" that carry unknown consequences for consumers, others say they are a perfectly harmless alteration that will allow farmers to create the expanded food supply the world desperately needs.

Both sides can trot out their scientific arguments; in the end, the decision will come down to which ones you believe.

But it's a decision that should not be blocked by the state Legislature, if for no other reason than simple fairness.

The Legislature is considering a bill, Senate Bill 633, that would prohibit local jurisdictions from banning GMOs. Supporters of the bill — primarily farm-related organizations — say the issue is too complex for local jurisdictions to consider and that the state should have one set of rules that applies to everyone equally, rather than a hodgepodge of different rules.

The bill is of particular interest in Jackson County, where a measure that would ban GMO crops has already qualified for the May 2014 ballot. Its supporters collected more than 6,700 signatures in support of the measure and submitted them to the county elections department in January.

This legislative end-around would render moot that work and the signatures of those who support putting the issue to a vote. This is hardly a new issue in agricultural circles and it seems to us that opponents of the ban should have been in front of the Jackson County effort, rather than coming in after the fact and attempting to prevent the democratic process from playing out.

Passage of SB 633 would be unfair to those who worked hard to place it on the ballot and an insult in no small way to Jackson County, with legislators in other counties telling us what we can and cannot have a say in. Ironically, many of the proponents of the bill are vociferous critics of statewide land-use planning because, as we've heard many times, it takes away local control. Hmmm.

The idea that we local bumpkins are not capable of making our own decisions also fails to take into account that we are instead leaving the decision of any future GMO bans to the Legislature. Even if we had total confidence in that august body, does anyone want to guess at the amount of money that will pour into legislative races from massive companies such as Monsanto and Syngenta, which have tens of billions of dollars in GMO sales every year?

The merits of the anti-GMO ballot measure are arguments for another day. But we can see no merit in a proposal that removes access to the ballot from a group of people who have already earned the right to have their issue heard and decided on — locally.