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Testimony in Support of HB 4100
House Committee on Rules
Ivan Maluski, Director, Friends of Family Farmers

Chair Hoyle, members of the Committee:

On behalf of Friends of Family Farmers, Oregon's largest sustainable agriculture organization, I offer this testimony in support of HB 4100 to refer to voters a measure to require labeling of genetically engineered foods sold in Oregon. Our members include both conventional and organic farmers across the state. We also operate Oregon's only landlink service, which connects beginning farmers to established operations for training, leasing and farm ownership opportunities.

As an organization that represents and works with family farmers across Oregon, we favor transparency in our food system, and as such, believe consumers have a right to know how their food is produced, including whether it has been genetically engineered. We've found that concern over how widespread genetically engineered food has become, despite the lack of information contained on product labels, crosses party lines and crosses rural and urban boundaries.

A consistent theme we hear among many farmers is that the current federal system of regulation for genetically engineered crops and foods lacks transparency and meaningful oversight. This causes economic uncertainty for farmers, and it breeds mistrust in the marketplace among consumers. Genetically engineered food crops are controversial among farmers, in part because of concerns they hear from customers. We would argue that the vast majority of farmers in Oregon have nothing to hide, and in fact have much to gain or at least nothing to lose, by requiring the labeling of genetically engineered food.

It is important to note that the measure HB 4100 would create does not tell farmers what that can and can't grow. It only applies to processed foods and raw agricultural commodities intended for human consumption in Oregon. If you look at the list of Oregon's biggest cash crops, the top money producers like greenhouse and nursery products, cattle and calves, hay, dairy, wheat, and grass seed would not be impacted by the bill because they are either not genetically engineered, or are not intended for human consumption. And many other big Oregon crops, like hazelnuts, berries, fruits, and most vegetables are also not produced with genetic engineering. Even prominent food-processing companies like NORPAC and Truitt Brothers have made commitments to not grow crops that are genetically engineered.

As new GE crops are proposed, many are raising concerns among family farmers. Genetically engineered wheat has gotten a lot of attention due to its risk to Oregon exports. But more recently, the USDA's likely approval of a Canadian company's proposal for a non-browning genetically engineered apple has been highly controversial among Northwest apple producers out of fears that apple sales will decline, and the financial risk associated with that.

We believe HB 4100 will provide an important tool to increase transparency, allow Oregon consumers to make informed choices, and provide another way for Oregon to distinguish itself for growing and producing high quality food that Oregonians and people across the nation and world can trust. We respectfully urge your support.