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March 5, 2015

House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
Testimony on HB 2674 and HB 2675 and regulation of genetically engineered crops

Chair Clem and members of the Committee:

Provender Alliance is a regional non-profit organization representing retailers, manufacturers, brokers, distributors and consultants in the natural products trade. We represent hundreds of businesses and thousands of employees of those businesses.

Our members depend on the integrity of organic and non-GMO seed and food supplies, which are at growing risk from poorly regulated genetically engineered crops. Once genetically engineered crops are 'deregulated' by the federal government, there are no protections in place to protect Oregon organic farmers and non-GMO seed and food supplies from contamination. Because of this, we are urging you to enact meaningful state regulation of genetically engineered crops of the types envisioned in HB 2674 and HB 2675.

The Oregon Legislature in 2013 placed 'exclusive regulatory power' over genetically engineered crops and seeds under the state's jurisdiction. But the Oregon Department of Agriculture does not take any steps to protect organic and other at-risk farmers from GE crops that could contaminate their crops. This Legislature must show leadership on this issue.

In 2013, the Legislature also authorized and funded a task force on genetic engineering which identified a number of 'key policy considerations.' These included the need to clarify the role of the state in regulating genetically engineered crops, the need to protect Oregon's organic and other non-GMO markets, and filling in Oregon-specific data gaps regarding the use of genetically engineered crops. Both HB 2674 and HB 2675 attempt to address these very real policy needs.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is already using control areas to protect seed growers from canola, and has another area that keeps a genetically engineered herbicide-resistant variety of bentgrass out of the Willamette Valley to protect grass seed growers. The state legislature should give ODA the authority to use similar 'control areas' to restrict other open-pollinated genetically engineered crops that can damage organic and other seed supplies.

Passing legislation directing ODA to set up control areas or other designations where GE crops could be regulated would allow ODA to protect the non-GE farmers, markets and seed supplies so important to our trade. At a minimum, ODA should: require isolation distances between GE and non-GE crops that can hybridize in order to prevent cross-contamination; establishing reserve areas where no-GE crops capable of hybridizing with non-GE crops would be allowed; and, gather data on the quantities, types and locations of GE crops grown in Oregon to facilitate informed decision making and on-the-ground protections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Susan Schechter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Susan Schechter
Executive Director
Provender Alliance