March 5, 2015

Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
Testimony on HB 2674 and HB 2675

Chair Clem, members of the Committee:

My name is Clint Lindsey and my family has farmed in the Willamette Valley near Corvallis for generations.

I am writing today to ask that the legislature take action to regulate genetically engineered (GE) crops and seeds. HB 2674 and 2675 both contain concepts that could benefit farmers that are at risk of genetic contamination, legal liability and market losses from poorly regulated GE crops.

I have been involved in efforts to allow local farmers and communities to retain local control over seed and food production. However, in 2013, the Legislature took these rights away from most local communities through Senate Bill 863 and made the regulation of genetically engineered seeds the 'exclusive regulatory power' of the state. However, the Oregon Department of Agriculture says it will not take steps to address or prevent genetic contamination from GE crops unless the Legislature tells it what to do. Given the significant risk that organic and other non-GE farmers are from poorly regulated GE crops, the Legislature needs to act now.

Using 'control areas' and requiring GE companies to disclose what varieties of engineered seed the are selling in Oregon and in what amounts are both good ideas. The Oregon Department of Agriculture already uses control areas to keep canola out of the Willamette Valley and three other Oregon seed producing regions, and even has a 'control area' to keep genetically engineered herbicide-resistant bentgrass, out of the Willamette Valley restricting it in Central Oregon to protect wild bentgrass varieties and the grass seed industry. The state legislature should give ODA the authority to use similar 'control areas' to restrict other open-pollinated genetically engineered crops that can cross with wild plants or damage organic and other seed supplies.

Passing legislation to direct ODA to establish control areas where GE crops could be regulated would allow to require best practices such as: required isolation distances between GE and non-GE crops to prevent cross-contamination; mapping of GE crops so that non-GE growers of similar crops can avoid them; and establishing reserve areas where no-GE crops capable of hybridizing with non-GE crops would be allowed.

Many of Oregon's most important crops have no genetically engineered counterparts. Both our export and organic markets need to be reliably GE-free for our customers to continue buying from Oregon farmers. The primary GE crops

grown in Oregon are alfalfa, canola, sugar beets for seed and sugar, and some corn. We should be able to control genetically engineered varieties of these crops.

ODA knowing how much and where these and other GE crops are grown will allow them to make decisions about where control areas make sense, and finally protect Oregon's non-GE farmers from unwanted contamination of their crops and seeds.

Sincerely,

Clint Lindsey
1704 NE 67th Ave
Portland, OR 97213