

Testimony before the House Agriculture & Natural Resource Committee

HB 3382

Submitted by Kathy Hadley

April 7, 2015

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kathy Hadley, and I am writing to encourage you to support HB 3382. I help run two diversified crop and livestock farms here in the Valley; one with my father Dean Freeborn in Rickreall, and one with my husband Troy in Silverton. We raise beef cattle and grow an assortment of crops, including fescue, ryegrass, wheat, oats, peas, hay, oilseed and other brassica crops.

I have been interested in canola for about 15 years. My required research project as part of my Masters in Agriculture degree from Oregon State University was largely centered around canola production in Oregon. My father and I participated in the first round of research trials, having several fields on the Rickreall farm in 2008 and 2009. We participated extensively in all of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Advisory Committees on this issue, and in 2012, helped form the Willamette Valley Oilseed Producers Association to organize all of the growers interested in canola and other oilseed crops. We are glad to be participating in the current OSU/ODA trials again.

HB 3382 would allow us to continue growing the same 500 acres of canola grown for research in the first 3 years of the moratorium, in years 4-6. Canola has become a very valuable tool in our cropping rotation on both farms I help run. Both operations are dryland farms, meaning we have no irrigation available, so the choices of crops to grow are much more limited. Canola thrives in dryland situations, receiving all of the water it needs during the fall and winter months. We can raise canola with no investment in additional equipment that is necessary with many other alternatives (e.g. many growers have needed to purchase rollers for their combine to adequately harvest radish seed). Traditionally our focus has been on grass seed, and having a broadleaf rotation crop allows us to utilize different chemicals to very effectively help control difficult grass weeds like annual bluegrass (Poa) or brome. The alternative would otherwise require multiple and less effective chemical applications to try to control a grass weed in a grass crop.

The biggest reason I am advocating for canola though – we can make good money growing it. Our net returns on canola exceeded those from our wheat fields, the spring grains and legumes, and even several of the grass fields. The demand for canola as a heart-healthy cooking oil domestically and abroad has bolstered market prices, and I fully expect this strong demand and market to continue. It is a crop we control and can market at any point, unlike all of the other proprietary crops we raise under contract. Canola is subject to the same rules as grain, so within 30 days of my delivery and sale to Willamette Biomass Processors last July, I had a check in hand. I am still waiting to be paid for the forage brassica I grew last year. Our yields in Rickreall with non-GMO hybrid varieties surpassed 4000 pounds to the acre, which is more than double the average yields achieved in Eastern Oregon, the Midwest, Canada, etc.

Our Silverton farm is located near Silver Falls State Park, at about 1000 feet in elevation, with very little top soil. We are very limited with our cropping rotations on this farm, with the principal crop historically being fine fescue. Even in less than ideal soil though, canola performed well last year. In fact, last year the field on our Silverton farm netted us over twice as much as the fine fescue fields, and that was with fine fescue markets at record prices and having an average crop.

Canola has received a lot of undeserved negative publicity. Much talk has been made of the isolation and cross-pollination issue. That topic has been exaggerated. Between our farms we raise 16 different varieties of fescue, all of which have isolation requirements to maintain their registered or certified status. We also raise other brassica crops and have been pinning them for over 10 years to guarantee the necessary isolation. Canola can be managed and isolated as necessary just like other crops are.

Canola has been accused of contributing to or even being the source of the Blackleg disease outbreak in the Valley. Blackleg has been around for decades, to which ODA records can attest, including the many years canola was not grown. Canola growers brought in certified seed that was both tested free of blackleg and treated with a fungicide to prevent disease. Canola is definitely susceptible to blackleg, although there has been more resistance bred in to canola varieties as they have been improved. Our other brassica crops this year and last were hit much harder with disease than we have seen in the canola. Either way, we have been treating our canola with fungicide applications to prevent and manage blackleg and other diseases. This often involves aerial applications due to the size of the crop (it is over 6 feet tall right now on our Rickreall farm). Although that is a very expensive application method, the value and health of the crop justifies it. We make similar applications to wheat to manage septoria and stripe rust, to grass seed to manage rust, etc – and similarly without those applications in those crops we would see dramatic crop losses. Managing disease in western Oregon is a fact of life. It is nothing to be taken lightly, but also is nothing unique to Brassicacea species or canola specifically.

Many agriculture groups have talked this session about voluntary co-existence with a number of crops. Canola is just another example of a crop that can be managed and grown with cooperation and collaboration between neighbors. Please support HB 3382 and allow us to continue growing this limited amount of canola acreage.

Kathy Hadley
Freeborn and Hadley Family Farms
Rickreall & Silverton, Oregon