

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources

HB 3382

Submitted by Kathy Hadley

May 11, 2015

Chair Edwards 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 a variety 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 research project as part of my Masters in Agriculture degree from Oregon State University discussed canola production in Oregon. My father and I participated in the first round of research trials having fields on the Rickreall farm in '08 and '09. We participated extensively in all of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Advisory Committees on this issue, starting in 2005 when the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association (WVSSA) petitioned the department to restrict canola in the Valley. Prior to 2005, the canola regulations separated edible oil from the inedible industrial varieties. In 2012, I was involved with forming 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 in years 4-6 of the moratorium. This bill will not impact completion of the current research program. I support and appreciate all of the work OSU has done thus far, and would not support something that interrupted or impacted those efforts. The additional 500 acres in years 4-6 would remain significantly restricted compared to any other crop, under the management of ODA and OSU. The moratorium was set to expire January 2nd, 2019, and this bill actually extends that time frame to July 1st of that year. Afterwards, the regulation of canola would go back to the ODA or require further legislative action, just as with HB 2427 passed in the 2013 session. This bill itself will not impact the acreage of canola or policy decisions surrounding that acreage past the moratorium period in question.

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 require multiple and less effective chemical applications to try to control a grass weed in a grass crop. Also, canola does not have hard seeds like many other brassicas, so it is very easy to control as a volunteer. It readily sprouts and is easily controlled and eliminated like any other broadleaf when following with a grass species, as would be a typical cropping rotation. OSU will be reporting on this aspect as part of their research. They had a trial this year in my 2014 canola field, currently in ryegrass, which demonstrated how easy it was to eliminate the volunteer canola. I invite members of the committee out to see our fields from last year – there are no volunteers anywhere in the field, borders, or nearby roadsides, with no additional management outside of our normal practices for raising wheat and grass seed.

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 strong and increasing demand for canola as a heart-healthy cooking oil domestically and abroad has bolstered market prices, and I fully expect this robust 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 was finally just paid last month for the forage brassica I also harvested last summer. 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 focus here in the Valley has been and will continue to be raising non-GMO hybrids, as they significantly out-yield their GMO counterparts. Also we recognize the concern over cross-pollination with weedy brassicas, etc., and are happy to continue to grow conventional and hybrid varieties to negate that concern.

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. In fact, our canola fields this year are involved with encroachment agreements through the WVSSA with two separate member companies. One company focuses on specialty brassica seed for forage markets, and the other grows vegetable seeds. The encroachment agreements allow for their fields to be within the requisite 3 miles of our canola. Several other canola growers have encroachment agreements signed with WVSSA companies as well, so at least some WVSSA members are not only open to co-existence, but willing to have their fields closer than their association stipulates.

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 were impacted much more 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. 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 –similarly without those applications those crops would see dramatic 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)