



**Advancing the ethical development and stewardship of seed**

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2/8/16

Dear House Committee On Consumer Protection and Government Effectiveness,

I am writing to express my support for HB 4122 and allowing counties to regulate their agriculture as they determine best suits their interests. Agriculture is inherently tied to place and each region has a unique geography and culture that is reflected in the agricultural products it produces. For each of these region's agricultural economies to prosper, it is imperative that they be regulated in such a way that it supports the unique opportunities afforded each of these communities. Many agricultural regulations are already county-specific, from quarantines to production areas, and each is reflective of the unique challenges and opportunities that arise within those counties.

A growing opportunity for many of Oregon's farmers is the production of specialty seed crops, especially organic seed. The organic industry has grown at double digit rates every year and is projected to grow for the foreseeable future. With USDA rules requiring organic farmers to use organic seed when available, and Oregon's climate conducive to the production of many types of seed crops, the opportunity to become a major producer of specialty and organic seed is very real and very lucrative, as the current organic seed market is valued at \$300 million.

One of the largest threats to the specialty and organic seed industry is contamination by pollen from genetically engineered (GE) crops. With many seed companies now testing seed for GE contamination and rejecting lots found to be contaminated, many seed farmers are reluctant to produce seed in areas that also grow GE crops. With minimal control over the natural distribution of GE pollen in these areas, seed farmers have few options to prevent contamination. As a result, this threat stifles investment and growth of Oregon's organic seed industry and effectively limits farmer access to this unique opportunity.

As an organic seed farmer in Jackson County, I have been approached by several companies seeking GE-free seed of both corn and beets since the ban of GE crops in 2014, two crops that were previously the highest risk for GE contamination. My business is growing and I see many other farms in our region developing their seed production capacity as we collectively build a reputation for quality, GE-free seed. My hope is that other farming communities in our state can also, if they so choose, create GE exclusion zones which allow for the production of high-value seed crops that are GE-free. If this comes to pass, for many farmers a profitable and sustainable future awaits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Aguilar".

Sebastian Aguilar  
Board President  
Organic Seed Alliance