



Yes on HB 4122: Support Local Laws to Protect Farmers Growing Traditional Crops from Genetically Engineered Crops

We support House Bill 4122 because we believe **local communities deserve the right to protect family farmers growing traditional crops from the contamination impacts of genetically engineered crops.** While only a small fraction of Oregon's agricultural output is tied to genetically engineered crops, these crops can have significant adverse effects on farmers growing traditional crops that are not genetically engineered. When SB 863 was passed in the 2013 special session to pre-empt local seed laws, there was a commitment to take action at the state level to protect farmers growing traditional crops. However, no action has been taken, and those most vested in genetically engineered crops have continued to block any meaningful effort to protect farmers growing traditional crops from the impacts of genetically engineered crops.

Why do we need to protect family farmers from genetically engineered crops?

Genetically engineered crops are very different than traditional crops because they are: 1) legally patented and typically owned by large corporate seed companies who can sue farmers, and 2) consumer rejection of genetically engineered crops both domestically and overseas means contamination can cause serious economic losses for Oregon farmers.

Pollen from common genetically engineered crops, such as sugar beet and canola, are known to spread for miles from the fields. If pollen from a genetically engineered crop cross-pollinates a traditional crop even miles away then the seeds that result will contain genetically engineered genes. High profile contamination events over the past decade have caused billions of dollars in economic damage to US farmers growing traditional crops, and the lack of concrete protections leaves many Oregon farmers at risk, including those growing specialty and cover crop seed, wheat, corn, potatoes, apples and alfalfa.

In addition to economic harm, GE-contaminated crops are legally patented in the same way as the genetically engineered crop they came from and this has very serious consequences for farmers whose crops are contaminated. A farmer who learns that even a small percent of their seed crop has been cross-pollinated cannot legally sell their seed crop or use it to replant their next crop.

While those opposing HB 4122 claim they favor state regulations for genetically engineered crops, they have offered no specific solutions, leaving in place a status quo that for over a decade has left farmers growing traditional crops unprotected.

HB 4122 allows local regulations without prescribing a 'one size fits all' solution

Pre-empting local communities from adopting local laws based on local growing conditions does not make sense. In the continued absence of state action, local rules are the only way to provide meaningful protections for farmers threatened with contamination from genetically engineered crops. Local governments and local farmers deserve the right to shape locally appropriate protections. As has been shown in Jackson County, such local farmer protections are consistent with Oregon's 'right to farm' law.

Without concrete protections in place, over time farmers in Oregon will lose the ability to raise seeds and crops that are not contaminated by genetically engineered pollen or seed that has crossed their property lines. Regardless of whether one supports genetically engineered crops, it is clear that there is tremendous value in preserving traditional seed stocks. Allowing local communities to create traditional crop seed protection areas not only protects farmers growing traditional crops, it helps to protect the ability of Oregonians to have the option of purchasing locally produced seed and food that is not genetically engineered.