

February 9, 2016

Written Testimony from Don Tipping regarding my support of HB 4122

Dear Chair Shemia Fagan and other representatives,

Thank you for taking the time to address this issue that concerns many family farmers in Oregon. My name is Don Tipping and I have been farming organically here in Oregon in Josephine County since 1996. Seven Seeds Farm produces certified Organic seeds of vegetables, flowers and herbs that we distribute through Siskiyou Seeds, LLC nationwide and internationally. We are certified through the Oregon Department of Agriculture and in compliance with the USDA National Organic Program (NOP), which outlines that organically grown products must be free from genetically modified (GM or GMO) crop relatives. Siskiyou Seeds contracts with over 10 other certified organic family farms in Jackson and Josephine county. The gross sales of Siskiyou Seeds LLC have been increasing at 20%+ per year and we have become a significant employer in our rural community.

Among the many crops that we grow for seed are table beets and Swiss chard, which are botanically classified as *Beta vulgaris* that will readily cross-pollinate with sugar beets (also *Beta vulgaris*) that may contain GMO traits. Being wind pollinated these crops can send pollen many miles from where they are being grown. In USDA studies related to the APHIS deregulation process, beet and chard pollen has been found up to 12 miles from the point of origin. Incidentally the USDA APHIS was sued by the Center for Food Safety in 2009-10 wherein a federal judge determined that the USDA prematurely authorized the deregulation of GM sugar beets and ordered Syngenta and their subsidiaries (including Beta Seeds and West Coast Beets) to destroy any plants that contained GM traits. This decision was appealed and upheld by a higher court until the US Secretary of Agriculture somehow overrode the decisions of multiple federal judges.

Consequently, Syngenta planted numerous (up to 36 by some counts) plots of GM sugar beets in the Rogue Valley in both Josephine and Jackson Counties in 2011-14. 40 Concerned farmers (both conventional and organic) created the Southern Oregon Seed Association (SOSGA) to find win-win solutions aiming at co-existence. We modeled SOSGA after the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association and the Skagit Valley (WA) Seed Association. We met numerous times with representatives from Syngenta (the Swiss company responsible for planting GM sugar beets) numerous times at the OSU Extension Center in Medford until they (with Danielle Farmer, a Syngenta lobbyist and PR representative who flew out from Washington DC) dramatically walked out on our meeting, ending our ability to communicate with them. They refused to be transparent about where they were producing GM sugar beets. As a result it was difficult to impossible for other growers of *Beta vulgaris* beets and chard to know where potential sources of contamination might be being grown. Cross pollination from GM sugar beets would effectively render a certified organic crop of beets or chard worthless as the allowable limit (still in

negotiation among the USDA NOP) of GM contamination at 0.09%, or 1 in 10,000 seeds.

As a result we have destroyed a Swiss chard crop because we discovered a GM sugar beet crop being grown less than ½ mile away from one of our contract grower fields. I also have been limited in which farmers that I am able to enter into seed growing contract relationships, creating another source of lost revenue as I then must go out of state to find a grower of clean seed.

All of this controversy and confusion led to the successful citizen driven initiatives in Jackson and Josephine counties in 2013/14 in which a majority of voters agreed to ban the open cultivation of GMO crops. SB 863 pre-empts all Oregon counties (except Jackson county) from influencing agricultural regulation.

Please support HB 4122 to overturn the limiting and sweeping effects of SB 863 on the diverse needs of Oregon's agriculture, in particular that of family farms. Syngenta is a Swiss multi-nation chemical and Ag. Corporation that bought up Beta Seeds and West Coast Beet Seeds (see Reuter's article here: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syngenta-ag-m-a-chemchina-idUSKCN0VB1D9>)

I feel it is important to note a detail from the article, "China made its boldest overseas takeover move when state-owned ChemChina agreed a \$43 billion bid for Swiss seeds and pesticides group Syngenta on Wednesday, aiming to improve domestic food production. The largest ever foreign purchase by a Chinese firm, announced by both companies, will accelerate a shake-up in global agrochemicals and marks a setback for U.S. firm Monsanto, which failed to buy Syngenta last year."

This buyout which is still in process makes Syngenta / ChemChina the largest Biotech Seed / Chemical in the world, bigger than Monsanto. Clearly they are trying to influence the outcome of HB 4122 with lobbyists from the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregonians for Food and Shelter, the Cattlemen's Association and more for the benefit of their ability to sidestep agricultural regulations that support small family farmers in favor of multinational Agribusiness. The truth could not be clearer.

Organic agriculture is the fastest growing sector of the food industry growing at 19% per year with \$237 million in sales in Oregon for 2014, a 97% increase from 2008. It would behoove our legislators to support this rapidly growing sector of agriculture in that highlights the value of the triple bottom line of economics/ sustainability and justice.

As our elected representatives, I urge you take action to support the viability of family farms that have historically been the rural backbone of our great state.

Sincerely,

Don Tipping, Owner operator of Seven Seeds Farm & Siskiyou Seeds, LLC

