Dear Members of the Oregon House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

For three consecutive years I have grown unique varieties of wheat for export to New Zealand. All varieties are non-GMO and have to remain such if they are to be accepted into New Zealand. My property is now located far enough away from another wheat grower that I am reasonably safe from contamination by another wheat crop.

To ensure the purity of this export crop I need Oregon's laws to allow the creation of GMO free crop zones. My wheat, or any other non-GMO crop, will not hinder the crop production or sale of a GMO crop. However, a GMO crop, if it pollinates a non-GMO crop, will permanently alter my seed such that I cannot use the seed to replant with the assurance that it will be non-GMO, and it devalues my non-GMO crop because it is no longer saleable as a non-GMO crop.

This is a biological process, not a political one. When foods are genetically modified, the genome of the food itself is altered. The genome is the entire suite of genes present in a particular organism. The genome is the genetic makeup for that organism. When you have an entire crop that has been genetically modified, you have lost the original genetic makeup of that crop. Through plant breeding we alter the frequency of certain alleles for a gene. (An allele is a different form of a gene. An example of a different form may be an alteration in the sequence of amino acids.)

This is not the same as “recombinant” or genetically modifying a food. Using genetic modification has a number of inherent problems. Gene expression can be increased, decreased, accelerated, slowed down, turned on or off, made to affect protein life spans, and to affect other controls. The subtle forms of genetic modification of our foods are showing up as allergies. Less subtle consequences to life are still being debated, but this debate may well be propagated by political motivations.

The damage to our environment is well documented. GM organisms spread outside of targeted areas, and contaminate their wild or weedy relatives. The preference for GMO crops for the purpose of accommodating increased use of pesticides has the consequences of herbicides harming soil, water, untargeted organisms, etc. I'm assuming you've heard the environmental problems the GMO industry has created so I won't go into detail about that.

Industry lobbyists will tell you a different story line. They will provide data showing trials and studies (conducted by the industry or specialists who are structuring the studies to produce desired results) that indicate there are no effects from consumption of GMO foods or effects of the pesticides, herbicides that are "needed" to assure an increasing food supply.

As a representative you are subject to some of the best salesmanship by lobbyists that money can buy. And buy it, the industry did.

I cannot hope all the laws of Oregon pertaining to agriculture, food, and the environment will not be influenced by the chemical/GM industries, but I do hope you will create laws that give farmers who want to grow GM free plants and animals the right to do so without undue burdens.

The details of the laws may be complex, but that may be what it takes to allow these inherently opposite types of agriculture (industrial and sustainable/nonpoisonous) to both have equal opportunities for expression.

Sincerely, Karen Riener

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