



“Making Every Resource Count”

Oregon Wheat Growers League 115 SE 8th Street, Pendleton, OR 97801 (541) 276-7330 www.owgl.org

**TO: Representative Jeff Barker, Chair
Members of Senate Judiciary Committee**

FR: Blake Rowe
CEO, Oregon Wheat Growers League

RE: OWGL Urge Your NO Vote on HB 2739

The Oregon Wheat Growers League is proud to represent the nearly 2000 farms across Oregon that produce wheat, one of our State’s largest and most valuable crops. Wheat is grown in 30 of Oregon’s 36 Counties and, with nearly 90% of our production going to export markets, it is one of Oregon’s most important export crops. Wheat contributes hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and indirect value to Oregon’s economy, especially Oregon’s rural economy.

As you probably know, there is no GE wheat in commercial production in the world. We are fine with that because our export markets, and many of our local organic and specialty wheat markets, are not currently receptive to GE wheat.

That said, our growers are very supportive of biotechnology and its potential to improve yields, improve wheat quality, help us adjust to climate change, respond to changes in pests and diseases, and reduce our environmental footprint. We may not have GE wheat in production right now, but we are convinced that innovation through biotechnology and genetic engineering techniques are an important part of our future. We are actively working with our public wheat breeding program at Oregon State University to test some of the newer technologies like CRISPR and gene guns to see if they can help us bring improved wheat traits and wheat varieties to our growers that would still be acceptable to our customers.

We have had some personal experiences in the last few years with GMO wheat turning up where it shouldn’t be. With great effort from our growers, USDA, ODA, our national wheat organizations, our supply chain, our biotech providers, including Monsanto, and our customers here and overseas, we have not only survived these experiences, but we have learned and improved. Our regulatory programs have been reviewed and strengthened. Our relationships with customers, exporters, grain handlers, and suppliers are stronger. Our communications efforts have improved. Our markets continued with minimal disruption.

We have wrestled with some tough questions since 2013. Do we want more GE events? Absolutely not. Is our current regulatory system for developing new genetically engineered crops and traits perfect and without risk? No. Does it do a reasonable job of insuring biotechnology innovations are safe for consumers and the environment? Yes.

Considering our experiences, we asked ourselves what benefits HB 2739 might offer to our growers. Would it block innovation and the ability of our growers to access new traits, biotech or otherwise? Yes. Would it make it nearly impossible for our wheat breeding program at OSU to partner with others to access new wheat traits? Yes. Would it make it hard for our growers to purchase approved GE varieties to grow in Oregon? Yes. Would it help us deal with any future GE events that might affect our markets? No, unless more lawsuits somehow becomes helpful.

We hope you will join us in opposing HB 2739.