

March 16, 2017

Timothy E. Winn  
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Testimony on HB 2469

To The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

I am a Fourth generation farmer and operate our family farm operation on about 600 acres Northeast of Corvallis, just inside the Eastern boundary of Benton County. We also operate 140 acres further North, less than a mile from the Northern boundary of Benton County. Operating in Benton County and having been exposed to the risk of a proposed county ordinance, which was intended to ban the use of GMO products of any kind, I have had to analyze the true effect that this type of county regulation might have. It is extremely clear to my family that any sort of legislation or regulatory action needs to remain at the state level and, therefore, I must oppose HB 2469.

On our farm we have produced sugar beet seed for over 50 years. Economic and environmental demands have forced the sugar beet industry more and more to depend on genetically engineered varieties. The result is that the seed we produce, and much of the seed that we plant for that end production contains, is GE seed. This one crop accounts for nearly 10% of our farm's gross income and a similar contribution to our bottom line. The proponents of the 2015 Benton County Ordinance that would have banned my sugar beet seed production had no care or understanding of the hardship that such a ban would put upon my family. We are seen as necessary collateral damage toward their goals. I suggest that if we keep this sort of issue resolution within the authority of our state legislation we will maintain a balanced and well informed set of regulatory policies that will treat all farmers equally and fairly.

In addition there is another aspect of allowing individual counties the authority to create their own ordinances, regarding GE crops, that I suspect none of the proponents has considered. Most of the fears of the supporters of GE crop bans, whether imaginary or real, center around concerns of contamination of other Non-GE plants ( crops or wild), through the transfer of propagative plant material or cross-pollination. The fact is that these concerns cannot be addressed by any non-physical boundary, such as a county line. Birds and mammals can carry seeds and other propagative plant material for several miles across county lines. Wind is a much larger issue. Many plant pollens can be carried for several miles by wind, and pollenating insects can carry pollen several miles as well. Therefore, if a true exclusion within a county is to be realized, it will be necessary to impose a buffer within the boundaries of each adjoining county of several miles. The assertion that counties could effectively address this type of crop issue is absurd. Passage of HB 2469 would result in a mess of inter-county conflicts and probably a rampage of lawsuits. As a taxpayer, I would prefer not to spend our resources in this manner.

It is my suggestion and preference that we keep the management of GE crop issues at the state level where our legislative representatives, together with our proven agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Agriculture can use solid science and fact to help resolve potential problems. Please consider my opposition to HB 2469.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tim Winn, Benton County, Oregon Farmer