

Testimony of Cultivate Oregon

Hello. Thank you for hearing and receiving my testimony. My name is Amy Wong and I am writing on behalf of the steering committee of Cultivate Oregon, a non-profit project of the Earth Island Institute that was formed after Measure 92, the statewide GE labeling initiative. Cultivate Oregon represents the thousands of Oregonians who supported GE labeling, who are also concerned about the effects of GE contamination in our state. Cultivate Oregon is committed to working on legislative solutions to GE issues that consider the needs of *all* farmers.

The Rogue and Willamette Valleys are prime examples of regions that could become organic seed supply centers but only if the region's farmers are not at risk of GE contamination. Counties need to be able to have local control over such decisions—not live in limbo like they do now. Oregon lacks statewide solutions to GE contamination and in 2013, legislators caved to pressure from international chemical conglomerates whose lobbying efforts led to the pre-emption of local control of GE crop cultivation.

After local control was pre-empted for all counties except Jackson County, as part of the PERS “grand bargain” legislation, then-Governor Kitzhaber promised a statewide regulatory solution. In 2014, the former Governor and the legislature created a GE task force to explore GE issues. However, the task force was not vested with any authority to make decisions, rather just compile a report. Regardless, the task force identified a strong need to clarify the state's role in regulating GE crops.

Unfortunately, despite a clear mandate from the legislature that the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) take steps to clarify the state's role, ODA has not done anything to regulate GE crops or implement Oregon-specific policies to protect farmers at risk from lax oversight once GE crops are released into the environment.

Now that Malheur and Jefferson Counties are facing an ongoing GE creeping bentgrass invasion, a result of an escape from a Scotts field trial, ODA cannot ignore this issue. On Jan. 8, 2017, the Oregonian published an article titled “*GMO grass that “escaped” defies eradication, divides grass seed industry*” in which former ODA Director Katy Coba was quoted as saying “We don't understand the ecological or the economic impact of this. We need to figure out the extent of the contamination.”

Despite the escape, the USDA capitulated to requests from Monsanto and Scotts to deregulate GE bentgrass earlier this year. As a result, Scotts and Monsanto are now excused from further remediation responsibility because, upon deregulation, the USDA lost the authority to make the companies clean up the contamination. The burden for doing so now shifts to individual Oregon farmers and landowners. And the nearly \$400 million grass seed industry is even more at risk of GE contamination.

It is time for Oregon to either establish GE protections at the state level, or once again allow communities to protect themselves through local control. HB 2469 restores local control and Cultivate Oregon supports this legislation.