

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Hearing date: April 12, 2017

Testimony from Rhonda Fry, Manager of Oceana Foods, Newport in support of SB 1037

(Oceana Foods is a member-owned and operated store serving Lincoln County since 1977. We currently have about 500 members.)

Ever since people have collected seeds and planted them, productive crops have been improved through human selection of seeds from each crop's best plants. This process produced plants that were best suited for the weather in that particular location. Plants that flourished were also more resistant to insects, fungi, and weed infestations. Countless generations of plant selection, and seeds, were passed down through families and communities.

When seed companies began creating new seeds through gene manipulation in the laboratory, the most common goals were resistance to pesticide use, and to make the plants be their own pesticide. These varieties were created to have genetic material toxic to pests. Then, seed companies received patents for their new creations. This was the first time that companies were able to patent life. Along with patents came the potential for patent infringements.

Pollen from plants drifts with the wind, with the flow of water, and the movement of animals, birds, and bees. If pollen from a patented plant drifts to an adjacent field, or up to several miles away, there will be cross-pollination. The seed from the cross-pollinated plant will have the patented genetic material.

Many farmers want to protect their plants from unwanted genetic material for two reasons: they may want to protect their own seed breeding, and they do not want their plants to have the patented genetic material. Since there is no way for the farmers with the patented seeds to keep their pollen from drifting, there is no way to protect the farmers who do not want the drift. It is, in effect, genetic pollution. Many farmers have even had the ownership of their own crop brought into question during litigation over patent infringement. It is important to note that the patented genetic material cross-pollinated their crops against their will.

Seeds produced through laboratory genetic engineering have not been adequately evaluated for safety by independent laboratories. In fact, most of the studies submitted to government agencies have been from the producers of the seeds. Some independent research has shown abnormalities in animals fed foods from these seeds. No one knows the effects that this decomposing plant material may have on the soil or what the unknown consequences might be

for the wildlife that may eat this plant material. Many people throughout the world do not want to eat these “genetically engineered” foods and many countries have banned it.

It is important to me that we protect the crops that do not contain these genes. Since there is no way to contain genetic drift, the only solution is to not allow the planting of these “genetically engineered” crops. Since many countries throughout the world do not allow the import of these crops, and test imports for this genetic material, it is important for export purposes that unintended pollination be prevented. The Organic produce farmers are especially at risk, since the Federal Organic Standards specifically detail that “Genetically Modified Organisms” are not allowed to be present in crops sold as Organic. A total loss of crop value would occur with unwanted genetic drift.

In closing, there has not been a significant benefit to “genetically engineered” crops. In fact, their use has increased the amount of pesticides used. This pesticide use affects the water that we depend on and increases the amount of chemicals that we are exposed to. This is why I think it is so important to support SB 1037.