

Testimony in opposition to SB 1037

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I am the manager of West Coast Beet Seed Company located in Salem. I am on the Boards of several seed associations and served on the Governor's 2014 Genetically Engineered (GE) Task Force.

The GE Task Force was charged with identifying challenges, areas of agreement and disagreement, and what other jurisdictions have done or have proposed doing to address the concerns over the presence of GE crops.

After a dozen meetings from April to November of 2014 we established what we already knew, namely, that there are ideological differences over whether or not genetically engineered crops can coexist with non-GE counterparts. There are excellent models of coexistence in place that opponents of biotechnology will not accept, instead promoting positions of exclusion. One of those is a history of over 37 years of crop mapping at the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association.

Governor Kitzhaber supported state preemption of local regulations on GE crops, but indicated that he did not believe voluntary coexistence was adequate. At the conclusion of the GE Task Force the governor proposed legislation in 2015 to move from self-regulation in a voluntary system to mandatory government regulation. At that time some legislative approaches were introduced that would allow state government to displace voluntary coexistence among growers. The concepts included ideas such as "control areas" and "market production districts" administered by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). At the conclusion of vigorous arguments from both sides, these concepts were not advanced. At the core of the argument was insistence from GE opponents of a zero tolerance for the presence of a GE trait in non-GE agriculture and from GE proponents a strong desire maintain choices for farmers. What we did gain was a stronger mediation process for when conflict could not be resolved by neighbors talking to one another.

Should Senate Bill 1037 advance into law, state-wide preemption is no longer effective and Oregon loses uniform regulations across the state. Farmers already deal with numerous uncertainties around markets and weather and this would be a significant new uncertainty. In particular local citizens that lack an economic stake in farming or the necessary knowledge of existing farming and industry practices become empowered to restrict farmers and by extension the people they do business with. If the GE Task Force and Oregon legislature were unable to reach a consensus on many aspects of coexistence, can we reasonably expect local citizens to do better? I do not have that expectation.

I urge your opposition to SB 1037.