

Thank you Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen, and members of the committee. For the record, I am Pam Marsh, Representative from House District 5, Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, Jacksonville and the fertile Applegate Valley.

In May 2014, I proudly cast a vote in support of Measure 15-119, a local initiative to ban genetically modified (GMO) crops in Jackson County. The measure passed with 2/3rds of the vote – a phenomenal outcome for a David vs Goliath, grassroots effort. Like other voters, I understood that the traditional and organic seeds and crops grown by our local family farmers were vulnerable to the threat of possible cross pollination from genetically modified seeds. Our productive Rogue valley lands provide a perfect growing environment. But the strong winds that course through the narrow valley can easily carry GMO contamination, making the seeds and crops that are touched unsellable.

Three years after the vote, my neighbors are thriving. Like their peers in other GMO-free regions, Jackson County farmers are exploiting a growing local, national and even global demand for non GMO seeds and crops.

Unfortunately, all of those other regions are someplace other than Oregon. Legislation passed in 2013 preempted cities and counties from settling their own rules over seeds, effectively blocking local ordinances around GMOs. Senate Bill 1037 will remove that preemption and allow local governments to protect GMO-free agriculture by regulating or preventing the production or use of non-GMO seeds and plants.

I have been a fan of Jackson County's ban since it was enacted. But now, as a member of the legislature, I have a much broader perspective on the issue. I currently serve as a member of the House Economic Development and Trade Committee. With that assignment, I now see everything, including this issue, through the lens of economic development. Clearly, a community's ability to develop its agricultural sector through the strategic use of GMO-free zones

could be a tremendous tool for many of our rural counties. Mounting evidence demonstrates the strengths of the non-GMO market: When Oregon wheat, a significant agricultural export, was threatened by GMO contamination, we saw a near crisis in the industry, since global markets require a GMO-free product. Seeking market share, General Mills recently re-introduced Cheerios as a non-GMO food. And just recently, the Business Wire stated:

“The global non-GMO foods market is growing at a steady pace. The increase in the number of health-conscious people and increasing demand for non-GMO food products by the middle class families are the primary reasons for the growth of the market. The rising demand for organic food products has also increased the demand for non-GMO food products from consumers.”

It seems short sighted at best to constrain communities that wish to pursue this expanding sector. Conversely, empowering local residents and elected officials to make the decisions that fit their communities and fuel growth in their economies makes good sense.

You have a long line up of experts to speak on this issue today and I will defer questions to them. Thank you so much for your consideration of Senate Bill 1037.