

Greetings Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Mary Alionis and I have been farming in Southern Oregon since 1991. I currently have a farm and store in Josephine County. I grow certified organic vegetables as well as certified organic seed crops, plus we lease land to beginning farmers to grow organic seed crops as well. On our farm this coming season we will be growing corn, beet and mustard seed, all of which are at risk for contamination if any genetically engineered crops are planted nearby.

I first became aware of beet seed growing around our two counties in Southern Oregon when in 2005 we were growing a crop of chard out to seed and a neighbor stopped by to ask us to remove it as he was growing out beet seed. I didn't think too much of it until 2013 when it became known that Syngenta was using our valley to test GE beet varieties, and were planting them out in small plots on a grid across the valley. This was not public knowledge until that point. The nature of test plots for GE crops is not just that their pollen is likely to contaminate standard seed crops, but also that they often use excess applications of chemicals to see what a crop can withstand. These plots were all over the Rogue and Illinois Valleys, near schools, farms, parks, and residential areas.

The Rogue Valley is home to a great many small-scale organic farmers, and is a premier seed development and seed-growing region. Our farms supply seed to many seed dealers, who then sell to farmers and gardeners across the nation. At a point in time when a large portion of our seed supply is grown in other countries, the Rogue Valley stands out as a place to grow seed here in the US. As a farmer I want to be able to grow and use seed grown in my country and not have to rely on imported seed, especially from countries where claimed organic practices are suspect.

When our two counties passed legislation to ban the planting of GE crops, we were poised to create a zone of more than 3300 square miles free from GE pollen contamination. We were poised to become a zone where seed free of contamination could be close to guaranteed. To create this GE-free zone in a region so well-suited to seed production is massive. This is a major accomplishment for farming and organic farming for our entire nation.

Since our two counties share waterways and share wind patterns, it is imperative that they both be GE-free zones. Josephine County is upwind of Jackson County. Jackson County is upstream of Josephine County. Our counties are intertwined. But. Our two counties are uniquely isolated from other counties by being encircled by multiple mountain ranges. This alignment of our two counties shows why it is imperative that counties and communities statewide be able to make their own decisions on GE seed and cropping issues. The passage of SB 863 eliminated that right for all but Jackson County, yet provided no protections in return. SB 1037 will restore those rights to our communities. Please support this measure.

Mary Alionis, Josephine County April 12, 2017 [Plus attachment]