



## Advancing ethical seed solutions to meet food and farming needs in a changing world

PO Box 772 • Port Townsend, WA 98368 • 360-385-7192 • [www.seedalliance.org](http://www.seedalliance.org)

April 11, 2017

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Environment & Natural Resources Committee:

I'm writing to express Organic Seed Alliance's (OSA) support for **SB 1037**, which aims to restore a local government's authority to establish seed-growing sanctuaries that protect the genetic integrity of organic seed.

We believe that local governments should have the authority to regulate seed as their communities determine best. Agriculture is inherently tied to place, and each region has a unique geography and culture that's reflected in their products. For each of these region's agricultural economies to prosper, it's imperative that regulations support the unique opportunities afforded by each community. Many agricultural regulations are already county-specific, from quarantines to production areas, and each is reflective of the unique challenges and opportunities that arise within those counties.

A growing opportunity for many of Oregon's farmers is the production of specialty seed crops, especially organic seed. The organic industry continues to grow at double-digit rates and is projected to continue to grow in the foreseeable future. The US Department of Agriculture's national organic standards require that organic farmers use organic seed when available. The supply of organic seed continues to lag behind broader growth in the organic market. The supply shortage presents a challenge but also a remarkable economic opportunity for Oregon's skilled commercial seed farmers and rural communities. Oregon's climate makes it stand out as one of the best places in the world for producing commercial specialty crop seed. As organic seed production increases, the opportunity to become a major producer of organic seed remains a very lucrative opportunity for growers in the region.

One of the largest threats to the specialty and organic seed industry is contamination by pollen from genetically engineered (GE) crops. Many seed companies now test seed for the presence of GE traits and reject seed lots when contamination is found. Seed farmers are understandably reluctant to produce seed in areas that also grow GE crops. With minimal control over the natural distribution of GE pollen in these areas, seed farmers have few effective options for preventing contamination. This threat therefore stifles investment and growth in Oregon's organic seed industry and effectively limits farmer access to this economic opportunity.

I'm an organic seed farmer in Jackson County who's been approached by several companies seeking GE-free seed since the county ban on growing GE crops was passed in 2014. In particular, I'm being asked to grow corn and beet varieties: two crops at high risk of GE contamination. My business is growing and I see other farms in our region developing their seed production capacity as we collectively build a reputation for quality, GE-free seed. But this growth will only be possible for high-value seed crops if the financial risks – the costs and burdens associated with growing GE-free seed – are eliminated.

We encourage you to support **SB 1037** to restore local government authority over seed and protect highly valuable agricultural markets that support the success of Oregon's organic seed producers and bolster the state's rural economies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Aguilar".

Sebastian Aguilar  
Board President, Organic Seed Alliance  
Farmer, Chickadee Farm  
Talent, Oregon