



TESTIMONY

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

February 14, 2017

Oregon Farm Bureau Supports HB 2364

The Oregon Farm Bureau Federation (OFB) is the state's largest general agriculture association, representing 7,000 farming and ranching families across the state and all methods of agricultural production.

OFB respectfully requests the Committee support this technical fix to HB 2509 (2015). As background, Chair Brian Clem led a workgroup during the 2015 Regular Session to consider agricultural coexistence issues. HB 2509 is the product of that workgroup. The workgroup consisted of a broad range of stakeholders, and while the original focus was on genetically engineered crops, the group determined that the principle of coexistence applies broadly across a diversity of commodity types and production methods in Oregon.

HB 2509 (2015) was the consensus agreement—promoting coexistence between farmers as opposed to prescriptive mandates that pit farm families against each other. HB 2509 helps to promote coexistence by allowing individual farmers to work out issues collaboratively with their neighbors and provides a mechanism to help farmers find common ground with the help of a third-party mediator and avoid future conflict.

When the Legislature passed HB 2509 in 2015, the bill included the corresponding statute, ORS 36.280. ORS 36.280(1)(a) states:

“(1) If a person that is engaged in a farming practice, as defined in ORS 30.930, has a reasonable belief that the planting, growing or harvesting of an agricultural or horticultural commodity on nearby land might interfere with or is interfering with the farming practice, and the person responsible for the planting, growing or harvesting disputes that it might interfere with or is interfering with the farming practice, the State Department of Agriculture shall, if requested by either party to the dispute:

(a) Provide mediation program services under ORS 36.270 to assist the parties in attempting to reach a voluntary resolution of the dispute...”

In 2015, HB 2444 was also passed as a “clean up” bill, repealing ORS 36.250 and ORS 36.270. The passage of these two bills effectively authorized an expanded ag mediation program through the ODA and then inadvertently repealed the department’s authority to provide mediation assistance through the same statute. OFB participated in the rulemaking process in 2016, where the technical issue with the law was identified.

With over 225 commodities, Oregon is blessed with abundant diversity. Farmers of all types—conventional, GMO, organic and Identity Preserve—have managed to coexist in Oregon for over 100 years. HB 2364 provides an important technical fix to allow for full implementation of the ag mediation program that was passed in the 2015 Regular Session to facilitate dialogue between neighboring farmers.

OFB respectfully asks for your support of HB 2364, a technical fix to an important law. Coexistence is possible, and mediation is the mechanism to address potential agricultural conflicts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Dresler at jenny@oregonfb.org or 503-810-4174 with any questions regarding HB 2364.