

Testimony opposed to HB 2882
Greg Loberg
2019 legislative session

I am the manager of West Coast Beet Seed Company located in Salem and we produce sugarbeet seed that is genetically engineered for resistance to Roundup herbicide. I have served on the Boards of several seed associations and on the Governor's 2014 Genetically Engineered (GE) Task Force.

There are ideological differences over whether or not GE crops can coexist with non-GE counterparts. The essence of the conflict is that opponents of GE traits often choose a zero tolerance for the presence of a GE trait and promote this in the marketplace, even where there is an established tolerance for the adventitious or other low level presence of GE material. Neither the private "Non-GMO Project" nor the USDA National Organic Program maintains a zero tolerance for the presence of GE material.

There are excellent models of coexistence in place in Oregon. The seed industry has adopted stewardship policies that are based on coexistence among all agricultural types, whether GE, conventional, identity preserved, or organic. The Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association (WVSSA) has developed a detailed and sophisticated isolation system to support coexistence among related crops. Both the WVSSA isolation system and stewardship policy are available on the association website.

West Coast Beet Seed Company has at least two growers who produce GE sugarbeets in the same farm operation that produces non-GE conventional crops and organic crops. We have found farmers always have done well working with each other and in accommodating cropping options on their own farms.

In addition our company has a stewardship program where we annually inspect past production fields and roadsides for the presence of volunteer plants from a preceding sugarbeet seed crop for five years or until we no longer observe them, whichever is longer, and we make sure these plants are destroyed.

The language of HB 2882 as amended allows for an action to be taken against the grower of a GE crop if the activities of that grower "created a foreseeable risk that genetic material from the genetically engineered crop would contaminate other agricultural crops." I anticipate that this language will be used to allege damage from the adventitious or other low level presence of a GE trait from sugarbeet in a Swiss chard or garden beet grown for seed. HB 2882 does nothing to address the fact that our GE, or non-GE for that matter, sugarbeet seed is sometimes contaminated by wind-blown pollen from Swiss chard or garden beet seed production. On the other hand, I am not asking for a government remedy when relatives of sugarbeet contaminate our crop, whether by pollen movement from wind, insects, equipment, or animals. We have found that coexistence is best managed by the well-developed practices currently in place, such as the isolation system of the WVSSA. A primary purpose of the isolation system is to "separate seed production fields of related species, or other crops with contamination potential, by distances adequate to minimize pollen contamination, thus maximizing genetic purity." The key is to maximize trait purity in an outdoor farming environment that has many variables. The Willamette Valley has a wealth of grower expertise with a climate suitable for reliable seed production. The risks to the genetic purity of sugarbeet seed are real, but so are the benefits of where our company produces seed and we want to continue.

This legislation will discourage the production of GE crops in our state, which limits choices for Oregon growers and seed companies. I urge your opposition to HB 2882.