

8 March 2023

To: Senate Natural Resources Committee

From: Hank Keogh

Re: Support for SB 789

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod, members of the Senate Committee On Natural Resources,

My name is Hank Keogh, and I am a specialty vegetable seed farmer in Corvallis, Oregon.

I signed up to testify virtually at the hearing. Thank you for sharing my testimony with the Committee.

I support SB 789 because after ten years the science and economics have not changed. It is time to make permanent protections for specialty vegetable seed production in the Willamette Valley.

I have been involved with this issue since 2012. About that time the oilseed processing plant had just been built in Rickreall with the idea of growing canola in the Willamette Valley without any risk or impact assessment, thus starting off this debate with their cart before the horse. At that time, Friends of Family Farmers stopped this surprising and shortsighted move with an injunction.

The Willamette Valley is one of the last remaining regions in the world suitable for large-scale vegetable specialty seed production, including the majority of the world's brassica seed supply. Increased and unpinned canola acreage could irreversibly damage this industry.

The recent assessment by non-partisan firm Highland Economics was unambiguous that the high-value brassica seed industry is worth far more to Oregon than low-value canola in terms of revenue and job creation. The assessment unequivocally underscores the need for permanent protections and also cites several canola alternatives that do not pose the same threat.

Canola contamination is a one-way street. Specialty seed varieties represent decades of careful plant breeding. Isolation between two seed crops has historically been mutually beneficial because cross contamination is mutually destructive. (If a turnip and a bok choy are allowed to cross, both seed crops are ruined.) This is not the case with crossing between canola and specialty seed crops. Cross contamination would be inconsequential to oilseed, and would be devastating to specialty seed.

Limiting canola production in the Willamette Valley will limit the spread of feral canola along roadsides and waterways. When a few seeds fall off a truck, a roadside patch can be born. In the spring you can already see some yellow flowered feral canola patches up and down the major roadsides in the valley. These patches create reservoirs of disease, and pose increased risk to cross-contamination of specialty seedcrops. Currently it is no one's responsibility to manage roadside canola populations.

Because the local canola processing plant in Rickreall has closed, now all canola must be trucked to Washington state to be processed. This will increase the spread of roadside feral canola populations, and transfer a portion of the already small potential economic benefits and job creation of canola production away from Oregon to out of state.

Oilseed alternatives to rapeseed are available. These oilseed crops provide many of the same benefits to farmers and could be grown more widely with far less danger to speciality seed crops. These include flax, safflower, sunflower, yellow mustard, and camelina.

I urge you to vote YES on SB 789 to ensure the Willamette Valley remains a vegetable seed capital of the world, a special place for growing high-value seeds, and an economic powerhouse for our state.

Sincerely,

Hank Keogh
Co-owner, Avoca Seed LLC
Corvallis, Oregon