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On Behalf
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and
Water

Measure: SB789

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. Over 90% of some brassica seed varieties, like cabbage, are grown in the Willamette Valley. Increased and unpinned canola acreage could irreversibly damage this industry.

A 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.

This economic assessment differs from past studies as it takes cross-contamination and economic harm into account, not just pest and disease pressures.

In Oregon, we protect what's good, so it can keep being good – providing jobs, keeping the soil healthy, and ensuring a sustainable food future for Oregon and beyond.

Like the incentives to build cars in Detroit or grow oranges in Florida, protecting key industries is a cornerstone of smart economic policy. In the Willamette, that means protecting land for high-value seed growing, and for the many crops that don't interfere with high-value seed growing, like grapes and grasses.

Rapeseed/canola, a low-value crop, endangers our valuable seed crop industry, and should be grown elsewhere. Rapeseed/canola cultivation can happen in many agricultural areas of Oregon where it will not endanger high-value seed crops with the risk of genetically engineered cross-contamination, and pest and disease spread.

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.

For many years, protections for high-value seed crops have ensured stability and profitability for Oregon seed growers, and access to the profitable global market for our seed sellers. Rolling them back is bad for business, and creates an unpredictable, unstable environment for seed growing.

A few politically connected farmers are pushing to grow rapeseed/canola in the Willamette protected zone. But we should not open Pandora's Box: once cross-contamination and pest spread happens, it cannot be reversed. The risk to our seed industry is just too great to gamble with. Once contamination happens, our seed cannot be sold on the global market, and we lose precious seed varieties that have been cultivated for generations to ensure food security.

We are at a pivot point with protecting the Willamette for this key industry, and for the biodiverse seed varieties that growers all over the world depend on. We must extend the protections indefinitely and protect what's good. There is simply too much to lose. Here, as with so many public policies, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

SB789 is a wise extension of the current policy, enshrining the current protections and collaborative system in state law