

May 11th 2023

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 789

Chair Helm, members of the committee, thank you for considering my testimony today.

There are 63 million acres in Oregon, almost 16 million acres of farmland. According to The National Ag Statistics Service there are only about 607,000 acres of crop land in the counties that make up the Willamette Valley Protected District. The deregulation and expansion of canola acreage in the Willamette Valley will destroy the specialty seed industry as we know it.

Five Hundred acres seems like a paltry sum until you consider the vegetable seed industry standard 3 mile isolation distance creates a 22,000 acre pollination footprint for each canola site. Ten canola fields create a 220,000-acre pollination conflict zone. A full third of available cropland in the Willamette Valley Protected District. Canola already has access to 99 percent of Oregon and 96 percent of its cropland. Further expansion of acreage is not warranted unless the desired result is destruction of the brassica seed production industry.

More than half of the canola fields that have been licensed over the last three years have needed to have pollination conflicts resolved before being licensed, Clearly conflict exists and the current regulatory scheme has worked to resolve it. I have seen that there are some proposed amendments to SB 789. These amendments would fundamentally alter the regulatory scheme that has worked. As such they are insufficient. Simply, the standards of OSU when it comes to isolation guidelines and distances for Brassicas are outdated and inadequate for the modern specialty seed industry.

While growing turnips, or for that matter any brassica, and canola side by side or in close proximity may create a product that is fit for an oil mill or cattle feed it is not a sustainable practice for producing multiple generations of high quality vegetable seed without compromising the genetic purity of the resultant seed. That outcrossing will come emerge in subsequent generations ruining the suitability of the seed for vegetable production. This robust set of guidelines the industry developed has facilitated the Willamette Valley into becoming one of the last bastions of high quality, genetically pure brassica seed in the world.

SB 789 would maintain the status quo on the production of canola in the Willamette Valley Protected District. This is what coexistence looks like. The specialty seed industry gets the protections it needs to protect the robust industry it has become with world class genetic purity and canola production is allowed to continue. If coexistence will not work for the canola industry then we should consider a return to the Willamette Valley Protected District where production of canola was outright forbidden. Please support SB 789 and defend the rights of specialty seed producers in the Willamette Valley.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Ortiz

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