



# OPINION: Let's protect what's good

Kenny Smith Jan 23, 2023

Farming culture runs deep in Oregon, and this year, we have a chance to protect a very special and important part of Oregon farming for good.

As president of the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association, which represents over 60 vegetable seed companies, I work with vegetable seed growers throughout the Willamette Valley who provide farmers with seeds for the vegetables you love. We provide high-quality seeds for farmers and communities around the country and around the world.

Our industry works hard to provide safe, reliable seed for the beautiful vegetables that Oregon is famous for, as well as catering to farmers from Europe to Japan. Our industry is worth approximately \$30 million a year, and it's growing every year.

Seed growing is crucial for food security, biodiversity, and a vibrant farm economy.

Unfortunately, a small group of politically connected farmers are trying to break a system that works, and replace it with a fix that works only for them.

Here's the story: For many years Willamette Valley seed growers and farmers have worked collaboratively to limit growing a particular crop: rapeseed/canola.

Rapeseed/canola is a low-value crop that easily contaminates other important Willamette Valley brassica crop fields like cabbage, bok choy and kale. Rapeseed pollen and seeds easily spread to neighboring fields and crops, and can ruin seed crops, bring in pests, and accelerate the spread of disease to vegetable crops.

Since it's a low-value seed, it just makes sense to limit it to places where it won't hurt other high-value crops.

Growers all over the Willamette Valley have worked together to strike the right balance between rapeseed/canola and other crops. So we are frustrated that this small group of politically connected farmers wants to buck our collaborative culture and dismantle the protections for high-value vegetable seed growing.

This just doesn't make sense.

The protection zones that limit rapeseed work well, and they balance the interests of different farmers and growers.

In other parts of Oregon and Washington, growers continue to collaborate, sharing planting maps and honoring the protected growing zones.

The reality is that rapeseed/canola cultivation can happen in many agricultural areas of Oregon where it will not endanger high-value seed crops.

Here at home in Oregon, we can 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 vegetable seed growing, and for the many crops that don't interfere with high-value seed growing, like grapes and grasses.

Vegetable seed farmers and their customers would prefer to work by agreement, as we have for many years and in many parts of the country. Now that this small group of rapeseed farmers has begun pushing to eliminate those agreements, we need stronger medicine: a state law that makes the protections permanent.

The Oregon Legislature can do just that, ensuring that Oregon's vital seed industry continues to thrive.

We are at a pivot point with protecting the Willamette for the vegetable seed-producing industry, and for the diverse array of vegetable seed crops that growers all over the world depend on. There is simply too much to lose.

Here, as with so many public policies, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

*Available at:* [https://www.valleytimes.news/opinion/opinion-lets-protect-whats-good/article\\_f2f97552-9b66-11ed-b760-e3f5d2c315e3.html](https://www.valleytimes.news/opinion/opinion-lets-protect-whats-good/article_f2f97552-9b66-11ed-b760-e3f5d2c315e3.html)