



## **PLEASE OPPOSE HB 2319**

### **HB 2319 — Relating to commodities containing genetically engineered material**

*Testimony to House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources*

*26 March 2013, HR – D*

Honorable Committee Members:

Oregonians for Food & Shelter (OFS) is a grassroots coalition of farmers, foresters, and other technology users focused on natural resource issues involving pesticides, fertilizer, and biotechnology. We are writing you today in opposition to HB 2319 which would put the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in charge of “protecting” non-genetically engineered (GE) crop growers from GE material from neighbors. It allows ODA to have GE crops removed if they are perceived as a threat to neighbors, and gives them authority to collect civil penalties up to \$10,000.

While it may seem like a reasonable idea on the surface, HB 2319 is filled with flaws and inaccurate assumptions that could lead to unintended consequences. In Section 1 of the bill “farm practice” is defined as excluding, “*the planting, growing or harvesting of an agricultural or horticultural commodity containing genetically engineered material.*” Defining the growing of GE crops as not being a farm practice is patently absurd. This is a clear swipe at the Right to Farm and Forest Law which is in place to help protect the practices that farmers use to economically grow a crop.

In the US, over 172 million acres are planted in biotech crops. Over 90% of US corn, soybeans and cotton are biotech varieties and significant amounts of sugar beets, canola, papaya, and alfalfa are GE as well. With an unprecedented 100-fold increase worldwide between 1996 and 2012, biotech crops are the fastest-adopted crop technology in the history of modern agriculture. To suggest that growing these crops is not a farming practice is not statistically or practically correct.

With this new inaccurate definition of a farm practice in tow, the bill asks ODA to protect “real” farm practices from their GE growing neighbors. This presumes that GE crops are something that need to be protected from. GE plants are evaluated by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), which is part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to determine if they are a risk to other crops as a plant pest. All of the commercialized GE crops have undergone this review and determined to be no more of a risk than their non-GE counterparts. HB 2319 would attempt to undermine that review and require ODA to treat GE plants as if they were a pest.

GE crops pose no unique risk to neighboring crops that their non-GE counterparts. For example, the adventitious presence of GE material does not affect USDA Organic status. So, as long as an organic grower takes the proper precautions as required under the USDA rules, they are at no risk of losing certification. In fact, not a single farmer has ever lost their organic certification due to the adventitious presence of GE material. The issue of cross-pollination is a concern for seed growers regardless of if it is from GE or conventional plants. When growing seed, this cross-pollination must be managed to ensure a

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seed will grow to type. Farmers use pollination timing, physical barriers, and distance isolation to help ensure this.

HB 2319 is a solution in search of a problem. A diverse agricultural sector is key to the success of Oregon's economy. Whether conventional, organic, or GE, farmers must work together to coexist. Demonizing one group merely on the basis of the plant was bred is not the way to move forward.

Please oppose HB 2319.

Thank you for your consideration.

Scott J. Dahlman

Executive Director