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March 15, 2017

To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Re: Hearing on House Bill 2469

Dear Members of the Committee,

Yes on HB 2469: Support Local Laws to Protect Farmers Growing Traditional Crops from Genetically Engineered Crops

We support House Bill 2469 because we believe **local communities deserve the right to protect family farmers growing traditional crops from the contamination impacts of genetically engineered crops**. While only a small fraction of Oregon's agricultural output is tied to genetically engineered crops, these crops can have significant adverse effects on farmers growing traditional crops that are not genetically engineered. When SB 863 was passed in the 2013 special session to pre-empt local seed laws, there was a commitment to take action at the state level to protect farmers growing traditional crops. However, no action has been taken, and those most vested in genetically engineered crops have continued to block any meaningful effort to protect farmers growing traditional crops from the impacts of genetically engineered crops.

Why do we need to protect family farmers from genetically engineered crops?

Genetically engineered crops are very different than traditional crops because they are: 1) legally patented and typically owned by large corporate seed companies who can sue farmers, and 2) consumer rejection of genetically engineered crops both domestically and overseas means contamination can cause serious economic losses for Oregon farmers.

Pollen from common genetically engineered crops, such as sugar beet and canola, are known to spread for miles from the fields. If pollen from a genetically engineered crop cross-pollinates a traditional crop even miles away then the seeds that result will contain genetically engineered genes. High profile contamination events over the past decade have caused billions of dollars in economic damage to US farmers growing traditional crops, and the lack of concrete protections leaves many Oregon farmers at risk, including those growing specialty and cover crop seed, wheat, corn, potatoes, apples and alfalfa.

In addition to economic harm, GE-contaminated crops are legally patented in the same way as the genetically engineered crop they came from and this has very serious consequences for farmers whose crops are contaminated. A farmer who learns that even a small percent of their seed crop has been cross-pollinated cannot legally sell their seed crop or use it to replant their next crop.

Many of those opposing HB 2469 have claimed they favor a statewide approach for regulating genetically engineered crops, but they have offered no specific solutions, leaving in place a status quo that for over a decade has left farmers growing traditional crops unprotected.

HB 2469 allows local regulations without prescribing a 'one size fits all' solution

Pre-empting local communities from adopting local laws based on local growing conditions does not make sense. In the continued absence of state action, local rules are the only way to provide meaningful protections for farmers threatened with contamination from genetically engineered crops. Local governments and local farmers deserve the right to shape

locally appropriate protections. As has been shown in Jackson County, such local farmer protections are consistent with Oregon's 'right to farm' law.

Without concrete protections in place, over time farmers in Oregon will lose the ability to raise seeds and crops that are not contaminated by genetically engineered pollen or seed that has crossed their property lines. Regardless of whether one supports genetically engineered crops, it is clear that there is tremendous value in preserving traditional seed stocks. Allowing local communities to create traditional crop seed protection areas not only protects farmers growing traditional crops, it helps to protect the ability of Oregonians to have the option of purchasing locally produced seed and food that is not genetically engineered.

I wish these comments to be submitted as testimony for public hearing.

Stacy Ann Kraker
Director of Communications and Marketing
Organically Grown Company

Organically Grown Company (OGC) was founded over 30 years ago and today is the largest distributor of organic fruits and vegetables in the Pacific Northwest. Our business is owned by regional farmers and employees. Currently, OGC works with more than 500 grower/vendors and serves over 250 natural and fine food stores and restaurants located throughout western Oregon and Washington, as well as retail and wholesale accounts in other western states and Canada.