

Testimony in support of SB 885
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Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association

When a gardener or a farmer plants a seed, it is with the expectation that the plant will look like the picture that is on the package, true to type. Specialty seed production, a significant industry in the Willamette Valley, is all about ensuring that quality. The Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association has developed out of the need for producers of specialty seed to ensure this quality through a geographical interactive map that allows users/members to remain geographically isolated from other fields that could cross pollinate and ruin the seed lot.

Oregon has developed a reputation for producing high quality vegetable seed, and like any reputation, once damaged, it is nearly impossible to restore. That is why I am highly concerned about the future of specialty seed production in the Willamette Valley, and the damage unrestricted canola production could do to the reputation of Oregon as a seed production area, not to mention Oregon agriculture itself.

Canola is in the same family as broccoli, cabbage and mustards just to name a few of the high value Brassicaceae seed crops, which means it will readily cross pollinate with these crops. If cross pollination happens, meaning the plants have pollinated with a species other than the desired one, the product will no longer have the quality that a customer expects when purchasing the seed. It is easy to think of unregulated canola as secondhand smoke to the specialty seed industry. A smoker has the right to smoke, but not the right to damage someone else. There are laws to protect against the potential damage that a smoker can do, just like there are laws limiting canola's impact.

I have been involved in the specialty seed industry since I was a kid. I grew up on a farm in Central Oregon that produced hybrid carrot seed among other crops. Central Oregon is also an important seed production area. Under OAR 603-052-0860, Central Oregon is a designated protected district where canola is not allowed to be produced. Central Oregon has been able to develop specialty seed industry free from the threat of disease and outcrossing that would certainly be ever present with unrestricted canola production. I graduated Oregon State University in 2015, shortly after I went to work in the Skagit Valley of Washington where I produced cabbage seed, spinach seed and beet seed among other crops. Skagit Valley is protected by Washington law under WAC16-326-040, which protects the area from canola production, and because of this, the seed industry in the Skagit Valley of Washington has been able to thrive.

Currently, I am an agronomist for Universal Seed Company based out of Independence. I also serve as the Vice President of the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association. The Willamette Valley until recently was protected from the danger of unregulated canola production. My career in specialty seed, and many others, could be put in serious jeopardy with unregulated canola production. Every paycheck I receive is due to the success of Oregon's specialty seed industry.

SB885 is a workable compromise between the specialty seed industry and the canola producers. SB885 partly mirrors the first legislative option that the ODA suggested in HB3882. This would protect the crown jewel of specialty seed that is the Willamette Valley, while also allowing a limited amount of canola to be produced with adequate safeguards and regulation. Please vote yes on SB885.

