

Testimony in support of SB 885
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Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association

I have worked as an agronomist for 26 years in the Willamette Valley. I am here today as the Representative of the Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association (WVSSA).

When a gardener or farmer plants a seed it is with the expectation that the plant will look like the picture on the package, true to type. Oregon has developed a reputation for producing just this type of high quality, true to type, vegetable seed, a reputation that if damaged will be nearly impossible to restore.

The foundation of this reputation is the ability to successfully isolate crops with the potential to cross pollinate. This ability flows from the rules and guidelines that members have developed over several decades of experience and research. These rules form the backbone of the WVSSA's Seed Quality Management Program (SQMP). The platform for managing this process is a Geographic Information System. The WVSSA is recognized as an industry leader in developing and implementing its rules.

The establishment of rapeseed protection districts and the longstanding prohibition on edible-type rapeseed (canola) production in the Willamette Valley except by special permit created conditions under which the robust vegetable seed production industry has thrived here to the point where it can be found almost anywhere these crops can be grown in the Willamette Valley. Similarly Washington's Skagit Valley, another vegetable seed production area in the Northwest, has thrived because of a Washington law that prohibits canola production in its area.

Canola may share the same basic genetic family as vegetable seed brassicas like rutabagas, turnips, and mustards to name a few but it does not carry or express the same vegetable characteristics. Canola's prolific nature combined with its genetic commonality poses a serious risk to the identity preservation of vegetable varieties that is essential to the vegetable seed industry.

The WVSSA has identified five basic conditions that must be satisfied, in order to allow canola production within the production district:

1. A single, uniform, all-encompassing protection district
2. Canola production by permit only
3. Conform to industry established guidelines
4. Limits on the amount of canola grown
5. Risk mitigation

The recent allowance of 500 acres has placed canola in about 8-10 separate locations each year. As a demonstration of the limited capacity for more acreage the WVSSA's informational binder includes three maps of the Willamette Valley production area to demonstrate the negative impact increasing the number of yearly canola production sites will have.

Through SB 885 the WVSSA is supporting legislation that would codify the continued production of 500 acres of canola annually. To the specialty seed industry SB 885 is a workable compromise that recognizes the interest in canola while protecting the jewel in the world's seed supply that is the Willamette Valley. Please vote yes on SB 885. Thank you.

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