

Testimony in Support of SB 789



Thursday, May 11, 2023

Chair:

For the record, my name is Laura Masterson, farmer and owner at 47th Avenue Farm with farm locations in Portland, Lake Oswego, and Grand Island, Oregon. We run a Community Supported Agriculture program that feeds 250 families and sell fresh vegetables to many local restaurants.

I am testifying to urge you to support SB 789, a bill that would prevent the sunseting of a program that has protected the Willamette Valley's unique and lucrative brassica seed industry for 30 years. There are 2 other such protection areas in Oregon, several in Washington where canola is outright banned, and similar protections in countries around the world.

The need for these protection zones is clear - the Willamette Valley specialty seed industry brings in over \$15M per year and provides \$9.2M in direct and indirect labor income. Countries around the world rely upon the Willamette Valley to produce the majority of the world's brassica seed, including over 90% of cabbage seed, because most other regions with appropriate conditions for brassica seed production have been destroyed by cross-pollination from uncontrolled canola production.

Canola is a low-value rotational crop that cross-pollinates with brassica seeds, rendering them useless. Canola growers have little incentive to weed rogue canola plants in the field and along roadways like seed producers need to do in order to prevent cross breeding. And canola can tolerate a lot of loss to black leg and pests and still be harvestable - unlike vegetable crops.

If grown at a large commercial scale in the Willamette Valley, canola production would have pervasive impacts on disease and weed seed banks that would be difficult or impossible to reverse. This would render the Willamette Valley unsuitable for brassica seed production, as it has done in regions around the world.

My farm relies on the brassica seed industry for the crops we grow. Not only would we be affected by the collapse of the Willamette Valley's specialty seed industry, but growers and eaters around the world would face an increasing shortage of this basic necessity of farming - seeds.

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I urge the committee to keep the long-standing pinning program and canola limitations in place. Requests for canola planting have been at about the 500 acre limitation as it is, and the Oregon Department of Agriculture testified that it had not found the pinning program to be controversial or hard to administer. And the report commissioned by the legislature even recommended pinning and a canola cap. Why change this now?

Dan Hillburn, Administrator of the ODA Plant Division in 2012, told Oregon Live:

'[O]ne of the most interesting days in [his] career' was a 2009 telephone conference with experts who'd wrestled with the vegetable-canola conflict in France, England, Denmark and Japan. Each clearly believed the Willamette Valley's soil, water, climate and ability to isolate fields made it one of the best places in the world to grow seeds. But canola?

"They all said, in so many words: I don't know what the answer is, but don't blow it." (["For Oregon farmers, oil-rich canola is either promise or peril"](#) Oregon Live, Feb.18, 2012 by Eric Mortenson)

The committee has an important decision before it, but it should not be a difficult decision. Senate Bill 789 simply continues a controlled growing and pinning program that has been in place for 30 years, and is successfully used in Washington State for the same purpose. For the sake of the world's seed production, I urge the Committee to allow this sensible and tailored program to continue, and to vote yes on SB 789.

Thank you,

Laura Masterson

Laura Masterson, Owner
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