



May 16, 2023

House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Oregon Legislature

Comments submitted electronically via [Oregon Legislative Information System \(oregonlegislature.gov\)](http://oregonlegislature.gov)

RE: SB 789: Makes permanent certain restrictions on growing canola within Willamette Valley Protected District.

Chairman Helm, Vice-Chair Hartman, and Members of the Committee,

The Pacific Northwest Canola Association appreciates the opportunity to testify remotely, and is submitting the following information in **opposition to SB 789**.

The Pacific Northwest Canola Association (PNWCA) is a member-based organization representing all sectors of the canola industry in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Washington. That includes farmers, crop advisors, processors, seed suppliers, state and county agencies, and every entity playing a part in the canola industry. We collaborate with canola growers, the four land grant universities (faculty, staff and students), and industry partners in an effort to learn and disseminate information about canola production in the 4-state region.

My background is in soil science and agronomy with degrees from Kansas State and Washington State University. I have worked with canola for 16 years, including at Washington State University for 12 years as the Extension and Outreach coordinator for a program that is still going today – the Washington Oilseed Cropping Systems Project – and funded through the WA State legislature. When I started that role in 2007, there were less than 10,000 acres in Washington. Five years later, there were 14,000 acres. It took more than 10 years to reach 45,000 acres. My point in sharing these numbers is to drive home a response to a comment that has been made numerous times by those in support of SB789 – *“if the restrictions are lifted there will be a flood of canola into the Valley, ruining the (specialty) seed industry and organic agriculture.”*

Based on my experience, I can guarantee you that canola acres will not ramp up overnight, and growers will not be planting the entire farm to canola, whether that is small or larger acreage. Even with an interdisciplinary team of 15-20 researchers and grad students on the WSU project in any given year, collaboration with UI and OSU, and an extraordinary amount of education and outreach, it took a significant amount of time to lay the groundwork for farmers to feel comfortable about adding canola to their rotation. There are farmers who have canola on a portion of their farm every year, and still others who choose not to grow it, whether that is because of weather, markets, or other factors. As executive director of the PNWCA since 2017, I have observed that is the case in all 4 states we represent, including Oregon. When it comes to variety selection, canola farmers in the Valley are currently growing conventional, non-GM hybrid canola that is high yielding and successful. There is no reason for them to grow GMO canola when non-GM performs better than GMO varieties currently available.

Another comment made by supporters of SB789 is something along the lines of “canola can be grown anywhere, we don’t need to grow it in the Valley.” In the Valley specifically, farms without irrigation

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don't have nearly as many rotation options as those that do. Winter canola fits well into dryland rotations in the Valley as it does not require as much water as other crops, yet still produces the highest yield in the entire 4-state region. As a broadleaf crop, canola provides an excellent opportunity to control weeds, break disease and pest cycles from other crops, and improve soil health. The taproot structure creates macropores in the soil which result in improved water infiltration, and reduced runoff and erosion. Local and regional demand for canola oil and livestock feed allows for a full economic circle within this area – a bonus in today's agriculture. On a larger scale, despite growth in canola production, the U.S. still imports 69 percent of its canola oil for domestic consumption. Canola production in the Valley makes scientific sense, economic sense, and production sense. Capping production at 500 acres does not make sense.

I would like to reiterate and add to what was said last week by Dr. Mallory-Smith and others: there is science-based, peer-reviewed results based on five years of research that canola CAN co-exist with other crops, specifically other brassicas. Canola is an *opportunity* crop, not an 'issue.' With proper isolation distance and a robust pinning system, canola can provide much-needed economic and agronomic diversity to farmers who choose to grow it, and at the same time not interfere with specialty crop production.

We encourage you to watch the videos mentioned in our previous testimony, and learn more about canola production and what it means to farmers and the entire canola industry:

["Building Soil Health with Canola Production"](#) and
["Canola in the Pacific Northwest: From Farm to Table"](#)

Science should *never* take a back seat to politics when making decisions that will truly impact the livelihood and sustainability of farms and farmers in the Willamette Valley.

The PNWCA **opposes SB789**, and urges the Committee to oppose it as well.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Sowers".

Karen Sowers, Executive Director

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