

May 18, 2023

Support for SB789

Dear Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Hank Keogh and I am an organic specialty seed farmer in Corvallis. I also sit on the board of Friends of Family Farmers, which represents 1600 farmers across the state, and strongly supports SB 789. I participate in the WVSSA pinning map.

I have been involved with this issue since 2012. About that time the oilseed processing plant had just been built in Rickreall with the idea of growing canola in the Willamette Valley without any risk or impact assessment, kicking off this debate with the cart before the horse. At that time, Friends of Family Farmers stopped this surprising and shortsighted move with an injunction.

In 2012, I brought my tractor to the capitol and parked it next to Universal Seed's custom combine. I spoke about my concerns about how canola would bring increased pests, diseases, and would be a cross contamination issue with the brassica crops that I grow. I pointed out that canola could easily go feral and become a pervasive weed along Oregon's highways and waterways, and that this would compound the pest, disease, and cross contamination issues. I brought these issues up again in 2013, 2015, 2019, 2020, and now here we are again.

Over the past decade, I have watched new patches of yellow flowered brassicas spring up along roadsides. Representatives, I invite you to look for yourselves. If you see tall yellow flowers in the median, or in the ditch this time of year, that is likely canola. That is seed that fell off a truck and has gone feral. That is a pest and disease reservoir, and a cross contamination issue for brassica seed crops. Who is responsible for managing these feral populations? How would they increase if canola were grown unchecked?

Canola contamination is a one-way street. Specialty seed varieties represent decades of careful plant breeding. Isolation between two seed crops has historically been mutually beneficial because cross contamination is mutually destructive. (If a turnip and a bok choy are allowed to cross, both seed crops are ruined.) This is not the case with crossing between canola and specialty seed crops. Cross contamination would be inconsequential to oilseed, and would render the seedcrop inedible and unsalable. Cross contamination from canola would be devastating to specialty seed.

I also want to address a question that came up a couple times during the hearing last week, that I thought was not adequately answered: Why are other brassica commodity crops like forage turnip and oilseed radish being allowed while canola is being "singled out" or "targeted" with restrictions?

As I see it, the difference is scale. Seedcrops of forage turnip and tillage radish, while similar to canola in value and management practices, have never been grown in large enough acreage in the valley to become a big problem. This is not to say they are not a problem at all - they do bring

disease, pest, and cross contamination issues. However, this is manageable through the WVSSA pinning system, and by simply a limited acreage.

Canola is different because if left unregulated, it can and will be grown at such a massive scale that it will quickly overwhelm the system, and become the only brassica grown in the valley. In the hearing, I heard testimony with the goal acreage of 5000 acres. That is ten times the current limit. Canola has already overwhelmed other seed growing regions of the world. Prime seed production areas of France, China, and Australia have had their specialty brassica seed production regions ruined because they have been overrun with canola. Will the Willamette Valley have the same fate?

This brings me to the 500 acre "umbrella" that we have now. This umbrella is keeping us dry from the rain of pests, diseases, and cross contamination issues from canola. The only way to know the true "maximum" number is by a failure test. Do you find the maximum weight load of a bridge by driving more and heavier trucks over it until it breaks? No. Same with a complex biological system that is the Willamette Valley. The only way to know how much is too much is in retrospect, at which point it will be too late. Don't throw away the umbrella because you think you're not getting wet.

Please support SB 789 and keep the Willamette Valley a special place to grow seeds for food, not seeds for oil.

Hank Keogh

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