

Submitter: Ken Bezilla

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Measure: HB4059

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Girod, and members of the committee,

My name is Ken Bezilla, I'm the grower coordinator for Southern Exposure Seed Exchange in Mineral, Virginia, and I contract every year with more than a dozen seed growing family farmers in Oregon's Willamette Valley, as well as buying wholesale seed that has been grown in the Willamette Valley.

I am writing today in support of HB 4059-A, which maintains current protections for the Willamette Valley's highly productive and profitable brassica vegetable seed industry.

The Willamette Valley is usually blessed with mild winters and dry summers, excellent conditions for brassica seed crops such as kale, collards, radishes, cabbage, turnips, and rutabagas. Although our own seed company is based in Virginia, large scale production of brassica seed crops is more difficult in the Southeast's wet and humid summers, and so, like most seed companies, we contract with Oregon growers for brassica seed crops.

Like many seed companies, we are a signator to the Safe Seed Pledge, which states, in part, "we pledge that we do not knowingly buy or sell genetically engineered seeds or plants." Canola seed crops threaten to genetically contaminate other brassica seed crops, both by seeds escaping into the wild, and by cross-pollinating with non-canola brassica seed crops – the isolation distance for brassica seed crops needs to be a quarter mile or more.

Brassica seed crops in the Willamette Valley will also be endangered by the pests and diseases that canola production will bring. Oregon seed growers already have to be vigilant about testing their seed for blackleg (*Phoma lingam*) – they don't need the additional disease pressure that canola will bring.

Canola can be grown in other parts of Oregon, away from the Willamette Valley. Additionally, many alternative oilseed crops (sunflower, flax, safflower, etc.) can be grown in the Willamette Valley without endangering the brassica seed crops. (We also contract with Oregon seed growers for these alternative oilseed crops!)

I urge you to enact and vote yes on HB 4059-A so as to extend the current agriculture policy that protects Oregon's brassica seed crops, and to enshrine it in state law, so as to give Oregon's farmers a stable future for growing brassica seed

crops without the danger of contamination and damage from canola production.

Sincerely,

Ken Bezilla
Grower Coordinator
Southern Exposure Seed Exchange
PO Box 460
Mineral, VA 23117
540-894-9480
www.southernexposure.com