



SIERRA CLUB

OREGON CHAPTER

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

February 28, 2024

RE: Support for HB 4059-A Relating to brassica production in the Willamette Valley Protected District

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod, and Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources,

On behalf of the more than 74,000 members and supporters of the Sierra Club Oregon Chapter, we write in support of A-Engrossed House Bill 4059, which retains limits on producing canola in the Willamette Valley Protected District (WVPD). The Sierra Club Oregon Chapter urges continued, ongoing, strong protection of the WVPD.

In evaluating the prior HB 4059-7, we were apprehensive about the ongoing business viability of farmers currently growing brassica seed crops in the Protected District. Allowing the production of Brassica napus and Brassica rapa would have severely threatened their business model, since Brassicas, especially canola, are precariously and perniciously susceptible to transgenic contamination.

We are heartened by the Committee's decision to authorize people to grow canola in the Willamette Valley Protected District only when compatible with the growing of other crops, including but not limited to the maintenance of isolation distances between canola and other crops that equal or exceed the customary isolation distances in the WVPD between specialty seed crops of the genus Brassica and other crops.

Canola production is to remain limited to a maximum of 500 acres. We applaud the Committee's decision to extend the sunset on provisions relating to limits on Willamette Valley Protected District canola production to January 2, 2028. We hope that during this period the Committee will make these provisions permanent.

Please note, we strongly support regulation of novel genetically engineered crops in order to protect farmers, consumers, wildlife, and the environment from transgenic contamination and its possible health consequences.

We assert that the WVPD is an extremely valuable land area in Oregon that a) supplies seeds for food production worldwide, and b) sustains Oregonians' right to farm crops without GMO contamination. Such contamination has already caused farmers to lose billions of dollars.

It is well known that GE contaminated crops can be almost impossible to eradicate. In addition, GE plants are often engineered to resist glyphosate and other highly toxic herbicides, making eradication of GE contamination extremely challenging and expensive, particularly if and when legal remedies are sought.

Another factor related to GE plants is their impact on our pollinator populations. In the 1980s, Bayer Crop Science invented synthetic neonicotinoid compounds that could be applied to the seed of a plant that would remain effective for the plant's entire lifespan. By 2004, Bayer had agreements with the top genetically engineered seed companies to coat their seeds with massive amounts of neonics. In the US, seed treatments aren't regulated as pesticides. Seed treatments were measured in overall neonic use only until 2014.

Use of coated GE seeds has impacted bee colonies throughout the country. Some scientists are calling it an insect apocalypse, devastating bird populations, impacting human health and threatening the future of foods that rely on pollinators. The U.S. agricultural landscape is now 48 times more toxic to bees than it was 25 years ago. Bee pollination is absolutely critical to seed crops. *Source: Organic Consumers Association*

As the Center for Food Safety asserts, “to sacrifice a first-class seed growing location, and the livelihoods of small farmers built on growing brassica seed, supplying highly nutritious food, would be a mistake. At a time when the climate crisis is changing how and where we can farm, it would be incredibly bad policy not to protect this vital area for brassica seed production.”

Oregon has a statewide preemption preventing counties, other than Jackson County, from protecting agricultural production from GE contamination, making ongoing and explicit preservation of WVPD an even more critical permanent measure.

The Sierra Club Oregon Chapter subscribes to the precautionary principle, which has four central components: taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty; shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity; exploring a wide range of alternatives to possibly harmful actions; and increasing public participation in decision making.

We assert that the precautionary principle should be employed in the Legislature’s continued agricultural study on issues related to brassica production in the Willamette Valley Protected District. If the WVPD is compromised or contaminated, it would cause irreparable harm to a wide sector of agriculture that now provides healthy seed stock to a global market, and supports a unique thriving economic agricultural seed sector that enables healthful food that nourishes millions of eaters. The safety of genetically engineered crops is not established, but the use of glyphosate, dicamba and other treatments on food should not be perpetrated on people who want a choice in the food they personally consume and feed themselves, their children, and animals.

Therefore, we assert that the precautionary principle demands continued, ongoing strong protection of the WVPD as a unique Oregon bulwark against unknown or perilous consequences to a vital agricultural sector and the millions who rely on it.

In conclusion, we support HB 4059-A which protects the WVPD until January 2, 2028 from future planting of GE canola. Indeed, we urge the Legislature to make protection of the WVPD secure and permanent.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Damon Motz-Storey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Damon" written in a smaller, more legible script than the last name "Motz-Storey", which is more stylized and overlapping.

Damon Motz-Storey, Chapter Director
Sierra Club Oregon Chapter