

September 23, 2013

Dear Governor Kitzhaber, Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek:

The undersigned small farm, organic industry, public interest, food safety and conservation organizations represent hundreds of thousands of Oregonians and are writing to express our deep disappointment in the inclusion of the local seed and food pre-emption bill (SB 633) in the PERS/tax reform package up for consideration by the legislature September 30.

This legislation was strongly opposed by our organizations during the regular session and has no place as a bargaining chip in the larger tax and public pension reform discussion. It strips away the rights of local communities to make locally appropriate decisions about food and agriculture and is a direct affront to Oregon's respected organic and natural food trade which is a significant economic contributor in this state. This sector has been experiencing double-digit growth most every year for the last decade, but is increasingly threatened by the lack of any coherent or effective state regulations around genetically engineered (GE) foods and crops, and the failure of federal oversight in this arena. As the recent GE wheat contamination discovery in eastern Oregon demonstrated, Oregon's farmers face serious economic losses when their products are rejected by consumers and major export markets due to the threat of GE contamination.

It is particularly disappointing that this decision was made during Organically Grown in Oregon Week. As noted in Governor Kitzhaber's proclamation declaring September 15 - 21 to be Organically Grown in Oregon Week, Oregon ranks 5th in the nation for its number of organic farms, with more than 444 certified operating on over 156,000 acres as of 2010. SB 633 poses a significant risk to the organic industry, and offers no guarantee that the state will protect the organic industry or consumers from GE contamination or exposure.

We understand the importance of your larger efforts to stabilize the state budget, but agreeing to controversial legislation being pushed by out-of-state, anti conservation interests in order to secure votes for unrelated legislation is not the Oregon way. We urge you to withdraw SB 633 from consideration in the tax and public pension reform package.

Sincerely,

Ivan Maluski
Friends of Family Farmers

Chris Schreiner
Oregon Tilth

Natalie Reitman-White
Organically Grown Company

Andrea Durbin
Oregon Environmental Council

George Kimbrell
Center for Food Safety

Rhett Lawrence
Sierra Club