

# Leading Oregon Agricultural Experts on Balanced Protections for Brassica Seed Production

## SB789: A PRAGMATIC, BALANCED SOLUTION

The Willamette Valley is one of the last regions on earth suitable for large-scale brassica seed production. Willamette farmers grow over 90% of the world's supply of many brassica seed varieties in a \$24M per year industry, supplying growers around the world. Regions with similar growing conditions in Europe and Australia have been made unusable for seed production because canola has been grown at large scales. SB789 maintains the status quo for the Willamette Valley Protected District – keeping in place an acreage limitation and pinning system that have been used for 30 years to ensure that canola does not contaminate seed fields, increase pest spread, and decimate the seed industry. Failure to pass SB789 would end the 30-year protections and allow unlimited canola growing. This would irreparably damage, or destroy, a high-value industry without justification.

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For several years I was involved in the effort to find a win-win solution to this canola vs. specialty seed controversy. We brought together experts from OSU, industry, and other parts of the world where this debate has played out. Ultimately, we were unable to find a solution that would benefit both sides equally. As things stand, the two farming systems are incompatible.

The Willamette Valley is the biggest and most important specialty seed growing area on the planet – for a reason. There are few places on earth that combine a suitable climate, good soils, and lots and lots of space so seed crops can be separated by distances necessary to prevent cross pollination. It is a treasure that deserves protection as much as the natural wonders that we protect with national parks. It really should be a world seed production preserve.

Luckily, there are lots of types of agriculture that are compatible with specialty seed production, e.g. nursery, grass-seed, hazelnuts, fruits & berries. Unfortunately, canola is not one of them. However, there are lots of places around the world where canola can be grown without interfering with other types of agriculture.

**Dan Hilburn (Ret.) Director of Plant Programs, Oregon Department of Agriculture**

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Canola, a plant in the Brassica family that (depending on the genus of the canola plant: *B. napus* or *B. rapa*), can cross with other Brassicas, including rutabaga, Siberian kale, Chinese cabbage, pak choi, tat tsai, tat soi, mizuna, turnip, etc. If canola production was permitted in the Willamette Valley, it would need to be treated as a seed crop, which would include pinning according to seed growers' understanding of acceptable distances between crops, and special care to prevent volunteer plants along field edges and roadways. SB 789 continues the rational measures of 1) limiting canola seed production and 2) requiring isolation similar to what is used in seed growing regions around the world, and were also the 2 recommendations of Mallory-Smith et al. HB2427 report.

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Canola is a weedy, lower-value plant that loves to interbreed. There are numerous examples in the literature of cross pollination and seed contamination events that have obliterated the cultivation of Brassica pure specialty seed crops due to cross pollination events and seed contamination from canola. For example, Japan, Australia, U.S., Canada, and some areas of Europe where canola for oil has been cultivated.

**Dr. Ray Seidler (Ret.) Senior Research Scientist and former leader of the first US EPA Biotechnology Risk Assessment Program, centered in Corvallis**