

Reversal of Oregon's GMO pre-emption debated

Opponents argue local restrictions create uncertainty

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Nearly four years after barring local governments from regulating genetically engineered crops, Oregon lawmakers are thinking of reversing that policy.

The Oregon Legislature pre-empted all local ordinances over seed in 2013 but is now considering House Bill 2469, which would create an exception allowing local restrictions for genetically engineered crops.

Critics of the bill worry it will pave the way for outright bans on genetically modified crops, or GMOs, such as the prohibition passed in 2014 by Jackson County voters.

Jackson County's GMO ban was allowed to go forward because the initiative was already on the ballot when the state pre-emption policy was enacted.

Barry Bushue, president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said it's unfortunate that some people would rather forbid farmers from growing certain crops rather than letting them resolve conflicts with neighbors amicably.

"I urge you to reject the notion that one grower should be prioritized by the government over another," said Bushue said at a March 16 hearing before the House Agriculture Committee.

Fewer than 1 percent of organic farmers have reported losing crop value due to GMOs and none of them were in Oregon, Bushue said, citing a nationwide USDA survey.

Also, no growers have taken advantage of a mediation program aimed at resolving conflicts among conventional, organic and biotech crops, passed by Oregon lawmakers in 2015, he said.

Steve Strauss, an Oregon



EO Media Group file photo

The Oregon Legislature pre-empted all local ordinances over seed in 2013 but is now considering House Bill 2469, which would create an exception allowing local restrictions for genetically engineered crops.

State University professor who studies biotechnology, said lawmakers should ask themselves whether they want Oregon agriculture to be known for innovation or for exclusion.

Scientists are developing new crops with gene editing, which doesn't involve transferring DNA from one organism to another but could nonetheless be restricted under HB 2469, he said.

Opponents of HB 2469 argue the possibility of local restrictions on genetically engineered crops will create uncertainty for farmers, particularly if they cultivate crops in multiple jurisdictions.

Tim Winn, who produces biotech sugar beets in Benton County, said proponents of GMO bans see farmers like him as "necessary collateral damage."

"I urge you to please not take my options away," he said.

Supporters of the bill claim that local governments should again be permitted to set their own rules because the state government has taken no action on GMOs since the 2013 pre-emption policy was approved.

"We were led to believe cross-contamination would somehow be addressed through the Department of Agriculture," said Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, who sponsored HB 2469.

The USDA has acknowledged that damages from

GMO contamination occur but claims it lacks the authority to prevent such problems, said Amy van Saun, a legal fellow at the Center for Food Safety, a nonprofit that supports greater biotech regulation.

It would be great if the state government tackled the problem, but it's shown no such intention, she said.

"It's not coexistence when only one side bears the burden and the costs," van Saun said.

Growers of conventional and organic seed would be unreasonable to ignore the potential legal liability of selling crops contaminated with patented biotech traits, said Elise Higley, director of Our Family Farms Coalition, which supports HB 2469.

Contaminated seed would also be rejected by buyers who want a GMO-free product, ultimately making it more expensive as it becomes more rare, she said.

"GE farmers end up winning by default and our traditional seed supply diminishes," Higley said.

Proponents of HB 2469 also discounted arguments against local GMO ordinances, such as the possible confusion from various county-by-county rules.

"So what if there's a patchwork? There are all kinds of patchworks with different policies and they're working just fine," Higley said.

Legislators seek ways to make ODOT more accountable

Lawmakers told to give authority over agency director back to commission

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Four former chairmen of the Oregon Transportation Commission said Wednesday that the commission should regain authority over the state transportation director.

The suggestion was one of a handful the former chairmen gave as ways to enhance accountability for Oregon Department of Transportation projects and contracts.

The chairmen were invited to speak with a new subgroup of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization. The committee is charged with crafting a transportation package worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Legislative leaders hope to pass the package during the 160-day session, which began Feb. 1 in Salem.

About a month ago, the leaders of the transportation package committee asked Rep. Andy Olson, R-Albany, to lead a team of four other lawmakers to come up with policy recommendations for making ODOT more accountable for the agency's spending.

The group invited the former OTC chairmen Wednesday to gain insight on how to improve accountability at ODOT.

The meeting was initially closed to the public, but Olson allowed a reporter to attend Wednesday. The committee's four other topic work groups have held public meetings at the Capitol since the beginning of the session.

Olson said he initially closed the meetings out of concern that the public eye would discourage frankness, but legislative leaders have committed to keeping the process open and transparent.

ODOT has been criticized for its history of projects that have been overdue and over

budget. A recent \$1 million management performance audit by New York-based McKinsey & Co. was intended to respond to that criticism and show ODOT is prepared to effectively manage an influx of new highway funding.

The firm's report, released Jan. 30, portrayed an agency lacking in dissent and accountability, wasting money and needing greater oversight and guidance.

Two weeks before that, OTC chairman Tammy Baney, in a letter to Gov. Kate Brown in January, complained the commission needed more oversight of the director.

"The director carries out the administration of the day-to-day operations," Baney said in a January phone interview with the Pamplin Media Group/EO Media Group Capital Bureau. "There isn't a place for us to have a voice in how that is going."

Baney requested that the governor include the OTC in the director's performance evaluation. She apparently was unaware at the time that Director Matt Garrett has not had a performance evaluation since his tenure began in 2005, according to Garrett's office.

Until 1999, the commission had authority to hire and fire the director, and the director reported to the commission.

After years of pressure by Gov. John Kitzhaber, the Legislature in 1999 took that authority away and gave it to the governor, former OTC Chairman Stuart Foster told lawmakers Wednesday.

Minutes from the 1999 legislative meetings on the bill give no indication of the reason for the change. In

2011, Kitzhaber, then in his third term, commandeered control of the Department of Education, becoming the first governor in the nation to assume the title of superintendent of schools.

"I think it was a huge mistake," Foster said of taking away OTC's oversight of the director. Foster served as commission chair from 2003 to 2007.

Mike Hollern, who served on the OTC most recently from 1987 to 1993, compared the commission to a board of a

company. "You are running the place, and you are responsible to the shareholders, and then all of a sudden, someone else is appointing the director," Hollern said.

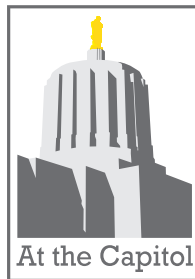
Given that commissioners are volunteers and they can't hire and fire the director, "I'm not sure it's worth the effort," Hollern said.

Foster said a conflict within the OTC is the governor's appointment of commissioners who also serve on the commissions of counties or are city employees.

He said it's difficult for people in those positions to be unbiased when voting on projects that could affect their regional areas. He said the governor should choose appointees with "a statewide perspective."

The former chairman, which also included Henry Hewitt and Steve Corey, also recommended tying increases to the gas tax to the consumer price index. Gas tax revenue pays for road projects in Oregon.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.



At the Capitol

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
A little afternoon rain	Cloudy, a little rain; breezy	Partly sunny	Some sun, then clouds and chilly	Occasional rain in the afternoon
51° 45°	59° 32°	50° 30°	49° 35°	53° 38°
51° 44°	60° 33°	54° 30°	53° 35°	54° 38°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE HIGH LOW
Yesterday 51° 39°
Normals 55° 35°
Records 72° (2010) 3° (1906)
PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.13"
Month to date 1.06"
Normal month to date 0.66"
Year to date 4.98"
Last year to date 3.35"
Normal year to date 3.17"

HERMISTON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE HIGH LOW
Yesterday 55° 39°
Normals 58° 34°
Records 73° (1941) 20° (1930)
PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.05"
Month to date 0.51"
Normal month to date 0.50"
Year to date 3.97"
Last year to date 2.12"
Normal year to date 2.74"

SUN AND MOON

	Last	New	First	Full
Sunrise today		7:04 a.m.		
Sunset tonight		7:04 p.m.		
Moonrise today		none		
Moonset today		9:50 a.m.		

Mar 20 Mar 27 Apr 3 Apr 10

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Periods of rain today; breezy tonight with periods of rain.
Eastern and Central Oregon: Mainly cloudy today with a shower in spots; warmer in the south.
Western Washington: Periods of rain today; any time across the south, in the afternoon elsewhere.
Eastern Washington: A shower today; however, a bit of snow with little or no accumulation in the mountains.
Cascades: Mostly cloudy, a little rain this afternoon.
Northern California: Clouds and sun today; a couple of showers, but dry in the interior mountains.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	49	44	r	50	36	r
Baker City	63	46	pc	62	28	r
Bend	60	49	r	55	27	sh
Brookings	56	50	r	53	41	r
Burns	61	41	pc	54	26	r
Enterprise	57	47	pc	56	25	r
Eugene	55	48	r	52	32	r
Heppner	51	46	r	59	29	r
Hermiston	51	44	r	60	33	c
John Day	65	54	pc	61	31	r
Klamath Falls	63	47	c	55	33	r
La Grande	61	50	pc	63	29	r
Meacham	59	50	pc	60	27	r
Medford	60	50	c	58	41	r
Newport	53	47	r	49	36	r
North Bend	59	50	r	51	37	r
Ontario	67	46	pc	64	39	c
Pasco	49	42	r	60	33	r
Pendleton	51	45	r	59	32	r
Portland	51	46	r	52	36	r
Redmond	61	48	r	57	26	r
Salem	55	50	r	52	33	r
Spokane	48	43	r	52	29	r
Ukiah	57	47	r	56	25	r
Vancouver	50	46	r	52	37	r
Walla Walla	50	46	r	64	36	r
Yakima	52	39	c	58	28	r

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	64	36	pc	69	36	s
Hong Kong	73	67	c	73	69	sh
Jerusalem	59	50	c	64	46	c
London	53	48	sh	59	52	c
Mexico City	73	46	pc	73	47	pc
Moscow	45	32	c	45	34	c
Paris	56	43	pc	56	48	c
Rome	65	48	s	63	48	pc
Seoul	58	32	s	58	32	pc
Sydney	74	70	c	76	71	sh
Tokyo	53	43	pc	55	45	s

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Today	WSW	Sat	Sat
Boardman	NNE	4-8	WSW	10-20	
Pendleton	NNW	4-8	WSW	10-20	

UV INDEX TODAY

0 2 3 2 1 0
8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.
0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme
The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2017

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

National Summary: A storm will spread snow and a wintry mix over the Upper Midwest with rain showers and thunderstorms farther south today. Rain will return to coastal areas from Northern California to Washington.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 95° in Imperial, Calif. Low -5° in Embarrass, Minn.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.				Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W		Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	77	48	s	79	50	s	Louisville	54	44	sh	54	33	s
Atlanta	67	52	pc	67	43	sh	Memphis	70	56	c	71	46	sh
Atlanta City	44	35	s	47	36	r	Miami	72	61	pc	77	59	pc
Baltimore	46	36	s	51	34	c	Millwaukee	42	34	sn	44	27	pc
Billings	52	38	pc	73	43	c	Minneapolis	46	28	c	43	30	s
Birmingham	67	56	pc	70	41	c	Nashville	59	49	sh	65	35	pc
Boston	71	53	pc	65	42	r	New Orleans	74	57	s	77	60	pc
Charlotte, SC	35	21	s	36	29	sn	New York City	40	30	s	38	30	sn
Charleston, WV	63	47	s	72	45	pc	Oklahoma City	76	53	c	76	59	s
Chicago	47	35	sh	46	28	pc	Omaha	64	29	pc	58	42	s
Cleveland	38	36	sn	45	33	sn	Philadelphia	42	32	s	45	33	sn
Dallas	83	64	c	82	62	c	Phoenix	93	66	s	95	65	s
Denver	69	43	pc	80	49	s	Portland, ME	34	12	s	33	20	pc
Detroit	38	34	sn	45	30	sf	Providence	38	19	s	39	29	sn
El Paso	86	54	s	88	60	s	Raleigh	57	44	s	66	39	sh
Fairbanks	7	-12	s	11	-14	s	Rapid City	56	27	pc	73	44	s
Fargo	39	19	c	42	32	pc	Reno	75	48	pc	66	41	sh
Honolulu	83	69	pc	82	69	s	Sacramento	75	52	pc	67	50	sh
Houston	80	61	pc	82	59	pc	St. Louis	68	41	c	60	36	s
Indianapolis	47	36	sh	46	30	pc	Salt Lake City	75	54	pc	80	51	pc
Jacksonville	66	42	s	76	48	s	San Diego	71	57	pc	68	56	pc
Kansas City	69	34	pc	63	45	pc	San Francisco						