

Can GMO, other crops coexist without conflict?

Aides to Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber say he will propose legislation later this month to facilitate the coexistence of conventional, organic and genetically modified crops within the state.

It's a promising announcement, although short on details.

The GMO issue has proven divisive for Oregon consumers – consider the razor-thin defeat of the labeling measure in November.

It's no less thought-provoking for Oregon's agricultural industry. Producers of high-value specialty seed crops and organic producers have legitimate concerns about the potential for cross-pollination with GMO crops.

Farmers who grow, or who may in the future want to grow, GMO crops must be allowed to produce crops approved by the federal government.

These are not mutually exclusive objectives.

During a special session late in 2013, the Oregon Legislature pre-empted most local governments from restricting genetically modified crops at Kitzhaber's urging. The bill was part of a legislative package that also included corporate tax increases and was known as the "grand bargain," which the House and Senate leaderships worked out in advance with Kitzhaber.

The idea was to avoid a patchwork of county regulation, and to give the Oregon Department of Agriculture time to work out a reasonable scheme that addresses legitimate concerns of organic and conventional growers of high-value crops who fear contamination from genetically engineered pollen.

The governor then appointed a task force

to frame the controversy over genetically modified organisms and inform lawmakers' decisions on possible statewide legislation later.

The task force consisted of stakeholders representing all camps, who predictably found it difficult to agree on much except there needs to be more clarity in the role of the state in regulating production of genetically modified crops.

Clarity is in the eye of the beholder.

The state loses any power to restrict where genetically modified crops can be grown once they are deregulated by USDA.

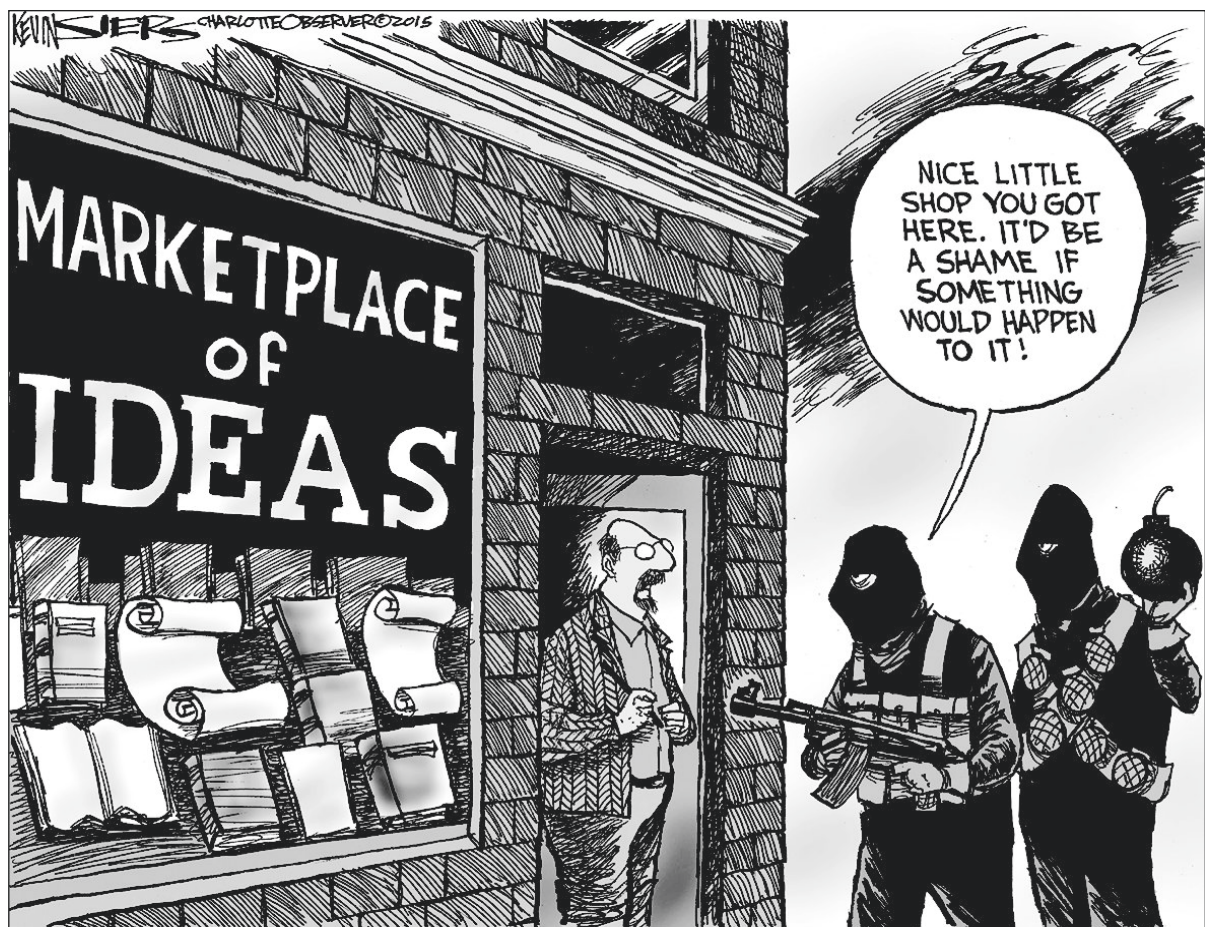
Proponents of stronger regulation say the state could pass legislation giving the ODA the authority to establish restrictions on where and how GMO crops could be grown. They point to a mapping system used by seed growers in the Willamette Valley.

They would also like a mechanism for compensating farmers if their crops are cross-pollinated.

Supporters of GMO crops favor a more voluntary approach. They say neighbors should be able to work out the particulars among themselves with minimal regulation.

We prefer as soft a touch as possible. But once the Legislature is involved, we're past the point where neighbors can reach accommodations. The issue has become too polarizing, and both the industry and the public need to be able to trust any framework that is put in place.

We still have hope that common sense can prevail so that farmers who grow conventional or organic crops can be protected without denying others the choice of growing already approved genetically modified crops or capitalizing on new opportunities that arise.



COMMENTARY

Down history lane with the PC Fire Dept.

By Jim Sullens
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Jim Sullens

I joined the Prairie City Fire Department in 1964, officially in December, as that was the time of my 16th birthday. I was just in time to help with evacuations during the 1964 floods.

The fire chief was Vernon Reynolds, a father figure to many of us. Some of the other firefighters then were Floyd Rynearson, Virgil Chapman, Larry Stark, Otis Howard, Cecil Bradford, Larry Bradford, Ernie Blair, Rich Looney, Jerry Maley and many more. At the time, most of the local ministers, merchants, mill workers and Forest Service employees were members, as well as several high school kids who were treated the same as adult firefighters.

We had lots more calls in those days.

This was before we had 911 and "dispatch" services or emergency medical responders. Our mortician in Prairie City had an old ambulance he used to transport people to the hospital.

We had what was called a "fire phone" system where a phone number for the fire department was published and when that number was dialed, it rang 10 different places in town. Everybody who had a fire phone had a button which set off the fire alarm. The fire department responded to just about any kind of emergency other than police calls.

We had lots of training in those days, and we did everything from

rescuing folks from wrecks to giving CPR. We even had our own mechanical resuscitator/aspirator.

We were among the best-trained firefighters in the state; Stan Phillips, iconic Deputy State Fire Marshal from John Day, assisted with nearly all of the training, from classroom to live fire training – and we had lots of the latter. We would burn old houses to clear property; we burned the old Anchor Club – where the Grant County Health Department now stands – and we burned the structures where Chester's Thriftway and the other stores stand now.

In 1964, we had a 1949 FWD-500 gallon fire engine and a 1955 Ford pickup that had a built-on pump, as well as our 1928 Ford Model A hose truck, which we still have.

When I first started, our turnout gear amounted to surplus military rain coats, rubber gloves, fire hats, and surplus military gas masks. It wasn't long before we began getting and using Scott Air Packs and real fire protective suits (turnouts), including boots.

There were some historic fire years, but the one that stands out for the older folks is 1972. We had seven major fires in our response area in just a few weeks, including the historic barn at the Camp Logan site that was struck by lightning – held together with pegs, it just exploded

with a direct hit – as well as the Prairie City Movie Theater and the Jackson Apartments.

Over the years, we have had several tragic fires and accidents with loss of life. I will always have nightmares about those.

After serving 29 years, Chief Reynolds retired. Next to step up was Hank Goslin, a hard-working truck driver and business man. He served as chief for about 10 years. During that time, he began to spend winters in Arizona and, as his assistant chief, I did a lot of filling in for him. Hank retired in 1992, and I was voted in as chief.

Also during that time, Tom Sutton, John Day fire chief, and I were able to build the first radio system for the fire departments. John Day had used a low band system that worked fairly well, and Prairie City had only CB radios prior to this. At this time, we also began to plan and implement the 911 dispatch system.

Dean Hicks now has the reins as chief of the department at this time, and is doing an excellent job. Since its formal inception as a fire department that covered the City of Prairie City and the Prairie City Rural Fire District in about 1949, there have only been five fire chiefs. None have been paid. Continuity and stability are very important when working with volunteers.

Lifelong Bates and Prairie City resident Jim Sullens recently received an award for 50 years of service with the Prairie City Fire Department.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Question of loyalty

To the Editor:

Speaking of loyalties – If you think your livelihood depended on the Forest Service, give some thought that Forest Service's existence in Grant County depended upon you. The Forest Service did not have the army of fallers and buckers, log trucks and drivers, mills to handle the forest bounty, trained construction workers to build stable roads, or welders needed to keep the Forest Service functional. Now jobs are dwindling and so is the "we are the biggest employers in Grant County" facade fading into obscurity.

When the Malheur National Forest headquarters moved into Jack Young's new big blue building on Patterson Bridge Road in the early 1990s, Forest Service personnel

filled it from top to bottom. With the passing of timber sales and road construction, the Forest Service barely fills the equivalent of one floor.

All those who are buzzing around its hallowed halls may not realize that after the Forest Service managers to close off our forest access the need for them (just like the fallers, buckers, mills, et al) will fade and downsizing is in their future. Where do they go from here? Maybe to join the misfits in Washington, D.C. who are attempting to control our land in its entirety. The only Forest Service people left would be those wading in creeks, chasing weeds, counting the beavers that their actions caused to become extinct in Grant County waterways, or attempting to control a fire that has had all access blocked.

Did someone say that the Forest Service is the biggest employer in

Grant County? Try on "was."

On the subject of misfits, I am reminded of the Malheur Forest landscape engineer who wouldn't allow a cutting unit be laid out near the bottom of Vinegar Creek because it detracted from the landscape seen from Tipton Summit on Highway 7. The Long Creek Ranger District interdisciplinary team planning the project let that pass without telling the damned fool that it was a bit difficult to see through two ridges between Highway 7 and the Vinegar Creek drainage at any point. How radically blind was that? But, that is okay ... the local Forest Service, in all wisdom, promoted him and sent him to Washington, DC. He now represents the Forest Service from a more elevated position.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

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