

Poorly written GM ban in Oregon opens door to lawsuits against non-GMO farmers

An ordinance that prohibits biotech crops in Oregon's Jackson County is vague enough to encompass some conventionally bred crops, according to ban opponents. The recently-passed ballot initiative contains a broad definition of genetic engineering that could make conventional growers an easy target for lawsuits, they say.

While ban proponents claim that genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, were narrowly defined, they won't necessarily be enforcing the ordinance, said Ian Tolleson, governmental affairs associate with Oregon Farm Bureau. "It could be interpreted a different way," Tolleson said. A plaintiff with an expansive interpretation of the "genetically engineered" definition could sue over crops that were never regulated by USDA, he said.

"A lot of conventional crops are bred using pretty radical techniques," said Steve Strauss, an Oregon State University forestry professor who specializes in biotechnology.

The ballot initiative defined genetic engineering to include gene deletion, gene doubling and changing gene positions, among other techniques. Shifts in gene sequences can be achieved through conventional breeding, said Scott Dahlman, executive director of Oregonians for Food and Shelter, which supports biotechnology. The concern is that it will be up to plaintiffs to determine which method of altering gene sequences is acceptable and which isn't, he said. For example, modern breeders use chemical "disruptors" to force chromosome doubling in crops, said Strauss.

The ordinance's language is in line with the internationally recognized definition of genetic engineering, said George Kimbrell, attorney with the Center for Food Safety, which supports the ban. "Any arguments that it is over-inclusive or improper have no basis," Kimbrell said.

Read the full, original article: [GMO ban could snare conventionally bred crops](#)