

Oregon legislature divided on GMO “contamination” bills

Backers of two bills that would allow the state to regulate where genetically modified crops could be grown in Oregon got a chilly response from a House committee.

House Bills 2674 and 2675 came out of a task force that spent six months and more than \$100,000 studying the issues, Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Eugene, a sponsor of the legislation, told the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

The bills aim to resolve the growing conflict between the state’s GMO and non-GMO farmers, who fear contamination from cross-pollination or rogue plants.

Already, international markets have rejected Oregon wheat because of possible GMO contamination.

But committee Chairman Brian Clem, D-Salem, said he thinks the real problem is with “the illogic of Europe.”

Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, said neighboring farmers should be able to work out conflicts among themselves.

“As a general overall policy, I am extremely concerned when we start down the pathway to what crops does the state of Oregon determine are OK for farmers to grow,” Witt said.

Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, said he is confused by cross-contamination fears.

“If (cross-contamination) occurred prior to genetically engineered plants, then how did the state survive 156 years of being one of the best agricultural states in the country?” he asked. “What’s broke that needs fixing?”

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