

Canola bill goes to governor

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SALEM -- A bill to place a five-year ban on all but a smattering of canola production in the Willamette Valley has passed the Oregon Senate and is headed to the desk of Gov. John Kitzhaber.

Despite significant opposition testimony, the Senate approved House Bill 2427 by a vote of 18-12.

"It is a dangerous precedent" when the Legislature starts determining what crops farmers can and can't grow, Sen. Betsy Close, R-Albany, said. Close and other senators said those decisions should be left up to the experts at the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Sen. Chis Edwards, D-Eugene, countered, saying the prohibition on canola production is needed to protect Oregon's high value, preeminent specialty seed industry.

HB2427 allows minimal canola production on the far outskirts of the valley, but limits its production in the heart of the valley to 500 acres per year, and only for research purposes, until 2018. The bill overrides action taken earlier this year by the Oregon Department of Agriculture that lifted a ban on Willamette Valley canola production that had been in place since 2009.

The ODA's February ruling allowed growers to produce up to 2,500 acres of the crop in the valley. The February ruling kept in place prohibitions on its production in the heart of the valley, where most specialty seed crops are produced. The ODA has restricted canola production in the Willamette Valley since 2005 to protect Oregon's \$30 million specialty seed industry from an increase in pest pressure.

The specialty seed industry this session brought in seed buyers from Japan, who said they would discontinue purchasing seed from the valley if widespread canola production takes hold here.

HB2427 also stipulates the state will back research efforts in the valley to study canola's impact on the specialty seed industry. Oregon State University researchers have asked for \$679,000 to conduct the research. The bill previously passed the House by a vote of 37-22.