

## Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

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#### **BARRY BUSHUE**

Josephine County voters will cast ballots in May on an agricultural issue with costly implications for farmers, local taxpayers and everyone who relies on county services.

Measure 17-58 proposes to ban genetically modified crops. In reality, it is an unfunded mandate that diverts scarce county funding for public safety and human services to enforce an unnecessary ban on one method of farming.

The Oregon Farm Bureau is opposed to Measure 17-58 because of this guiding principle: No one should tell a farmer what to grow or how to grow it.

To be clear, if this measure banned organic farming, we would work just as hard to defeat it. To have a thriving agriculture sector and safe and healthy food supply, we must embrace all forms of agriculture and promote a spirit of cooperation and communication among farmers.

We come to these conclusions based on consensus from a full range of voices. The Farm Bureau is a nonprofit organization that works to improve public policy for farm and ranch families. You have to be a farmer or rancher to participate in our policy-making discussions. There are no seats at the table for government officials or other special interest groups or corporations. No organization embodies more breadth of geography, crops produced, or variety of production methods — from biodynamic and organic to the most cutting-edge technology — than the Farm Bureau.

We are the voice of agriculture. The Oregon Farm Bureau, your Josephine County Farm Bureau and other local farm bureaus across the state stand united and against Measure 17-58.

We believe no one is better equipped to decide which method to use on each farm or ranch than the family who does the farming and ranching. But Measure 17-58 takes farm regulation to scary new heights.

It empowers government inspectors to access private property when they suspect non-compliant farm practices. Further, it allows them to remove and destroy crops and impose expensive abatement that could wipe out entire farms.

In neighboring Jackson County where a similar measure is on the ballot, a detailed analysis by the county administrator revealed enforcement of the ordinance would drain \$250,000 from the county's budget in the first year. In Josephine County, budget constraints are so tight that the county doesn't have money for a thorough fiscal impact analysis.

What we do know is that Josephine County can't afford a single cent to be diverted from law enforcement to establish an unnecessary new government function. A recent article in the Oregonian newspaper noted three violent deaths that have gone unsolved in the county because of lack of criminal investigation resources, and quoted Sheriff Gil Gilbertson: "We're in crisis mode ... Our county has become a magnet for criminal activity." When public safety is already underfunded, Measure 17-58 is the wrong use of dangerously scarce county resources.

The budget implications could be even more severe because the proposed ordinance violates two state laws that protect farmers from government over-reach. Measure 17-58 is in violation of the state's long-respected Right to Farm and Forest law that's been honored since 1993, and it contradicts Senate Bill 863, which was passed by the Legislature last year to protect communities from unfunded mandates just like this one. If Measure 17-58 passes, it would become wrapped up in costly court battles that Josephine County cannot afford.

The budget implications and unintended consequences are practical matters that affect the entire community. But on matters of agriculture, the Farm Bureau is especially concerned. Small and large, organic and conventional, north, west, south, and east, we all believe this measure makes awful public policy. And we urge Josephine County to vote No on Measure 17-58.

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Barry Bushue is president of the Oregon Farm Bureau and runs a family nursery stock and berry operation near Boring, Ore.