

OPINIONS

River Right: Signs and labels

BY TOM CARSTENS

The Metolius River is one of the most beautiful in Oregon. It is also one of the strangest. It begins somewhere beneath all that frothy lava west of Sisters and emerges fully formed from the base of Black Butte. Along its journey to the Deschutes Valley, it grows to 40 times its original volume, with no seasonal variation in flow. That's good for kayakers, but it's a cold ride: 48 degrees year-round! It's also a river with two distinct personalities: from the headwaters down to Canyon Creek the ride is fairly gentle; at that point there's a little sign: "Warning—Dangerous Rapids!" Now that's where I choose to haul out the kayak. I've hiked at least four miles beyond that sign and those dangerous rapids just keep keeping on! Signs mean a lot.

Our grocery products come with a lot of signage. Calories, fats, ingredients, chemicals, warnings...you name it. Many of these foods also contain something called genetically modified organisms or GMOs. These are genes from a bunch of different organisms that are spliced together to form vegetable seeds that have so-called "desirable" characteristics. Some are resistant to pests or to herbicides like Roundup. Some have better crop yields. Some require less watering. And so on. This has been ongoing since the mid 90s and affects almost all corn and soy products. So, if you buy sodas, salad dressing, boxed cereal, corn snacks, or meat (think animal feed), you've been eating GMO foods.

So far, no state, national, or international scientific regulatory agency has found any safety or nutritional problem with these foods. But some folks have a problem with this business of mixing genes from completely different species—say, salmon and tomatoes (for thicker skins). Sounds yucky, doesn't it. To alert consumers, more than 60 countries now require labeling in grocery stores. But because of lower farm costs and higher yields, many believe that GMO foods could be the salvation for the world's poor. No US state requires labeling of these products.

November Ballot: Label GMOs?

Oregon could be the first. Come November, Oregonians are going to get a chance to vote whether or not to require labeling of these foods. This ballot initiative is sponsored primarily by growers and consumers of organic produce. Since genetic engineering is not permitted in products labeled "organic," they believe that GMO-labeling will empower consumers with greater knowledge and healthier choices. The thing is, organic products are

already labeled. Proudly. And those of us who want them can find them easily. So why require GMO labeling, especially if there's no science-based health or safety concerns? Maybe we'd be better off if we saved the warning labels for the dangerous stuff—just like we do on the rivers. Oregon voters rejected GMO-labeling once before in 2002. So did California in 2012 and Washington last year.

May Ballot: Ban GMOs?

Which brings us to another GMO ballot initiative, this one coming up for a vote in May. Organic food promoters are asking Jackson County residents to ban the growing of any genetically modified crops within county borders. The idea is that GMO crops like sugar beets could cross-pollinate and contaminate similar small farm organic crops, like organic Swiss chard. The county farm bureau opposes a ban because it would unnecessarily restrict the rest of the county growers. Think of it as a food fight between farmers. The Oregon legislature has already prohibited similar initiatives in other counties, preferring a uniform statewide policy. The governor says he'll appoint a task force to figure out a way to avoid cross-pollination and seed mingling. The farmers in the Willamette Valley have formed an association to work out buffer zones and field separation distances. It's a compromise that seems to be working.

GMO crops already go through a 13-year testing process before being approved by the Federal Drug Administration or Department of Agriculture. Why should lil ol' Jackson County ban them? How can a county that can't keep its own libraries open possibly afford to monitor and enforce a sweeping prohibition like this? (More taxes, anyone?) And what happens to the farm families who already grow GMO crops? (Lawsuits, anyone?) Both sides in this dispute have huge business and marketing interests. Why not take a look at other agricultural regions and see how they're working it out? Like scouting river rapids, we should be able to figure out the actual dangers and routes to avoid them—before making an expensive commitment with unintended consequences.

For a science-based look at this issue, check out the April 2010 National Academy of Sciences report, *The Impact of Genetically Engineered Crops on Farm Sustainability in the United States*. (Google "National Academy of Sciences GMO Crops.")

See you on the river.

Tom Carstens • 541-846-1025

Good neighbor?

BY SUSAN BRATT

What does it take to be a good neighbor? It's not just our interaction with each other, but with the earth and all her dependents. The health of animals, insects, plants and trees depends on our actions. If we waste the land, water and air, what is left for our children and their children?

Recently the Applegate Valley has seen what commercial agribusiness can do with large parcels of Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) farmland on North Applegate Road. The miles of fences leave few, if any, access for wildlife to get to the river. Applications of herbicides, fungicides and pesticides are another problem. Just take the example of Monsanto's Roundup. Its primary active ingredient is glyphosate, but one of its inert ingredients, polyethoxylated tallowamine (POEA), is far more dangerous. There are over 4,000 inert ingredients that have been approved by the EPA, yet extensive studies have shown many of them to be *not* inert at all. In a June 23, 2009, *Scientific American* article, "Weed-Whacking Herbicide Proves Deadly to Human Cells," it calls glyphosate's inert partner POEA "more deadly to human embryonic, placental and umbilical cord cells than the herbicide itself—a finding the researchers call 'astonishing.'"

In the late 70s the Bureau of Land Management wanted to spray herbicides on the Humbug Creek Road watershed using helicopters. The Applegate community came together in force to protest. We won, thus protecting not only the school's well,

but also the neighbor's wells uphill. We won that time because we cared.

Research has proven that these sprays travel easily through air and earth to water sources. If these toxic sprays are so safe, would you spray your vegetable garden with them and then eat the produce? Why, in the year 2014, do we still allow these products to even be sold?

So what we need to do is not waste any more time, but take personal action. Know that toxic spray trespass (drift) is *not* allowed and that there are regulating laws to protect you, your family and your land. Vote for laws to protect us! We need to speak out, discuss our concerns with neighbors, eat only organic and non-GMO foods, stop using any toxic products and find alternative organic sprays and farming practices to use.

Here are some websites to check out: Beyond Pesticides—www.beyondpesticides.org; Pesticides Action Network/Advancing Alternatives to Pesticides—www.panna.org; "Roundup & Glyphosate Toxicity Have Been Grossly Underestimated" and "Monsanto's Roundup Herbicide May Be Most Important Factor In Development of Autism & Other Diseases"—www.articles.mercola.com.

Special thanks to all good our neighbors who farm and garden considering the health and well-being of our beautiful Applegate Valley and all who live here. Let's take less and leave more.

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