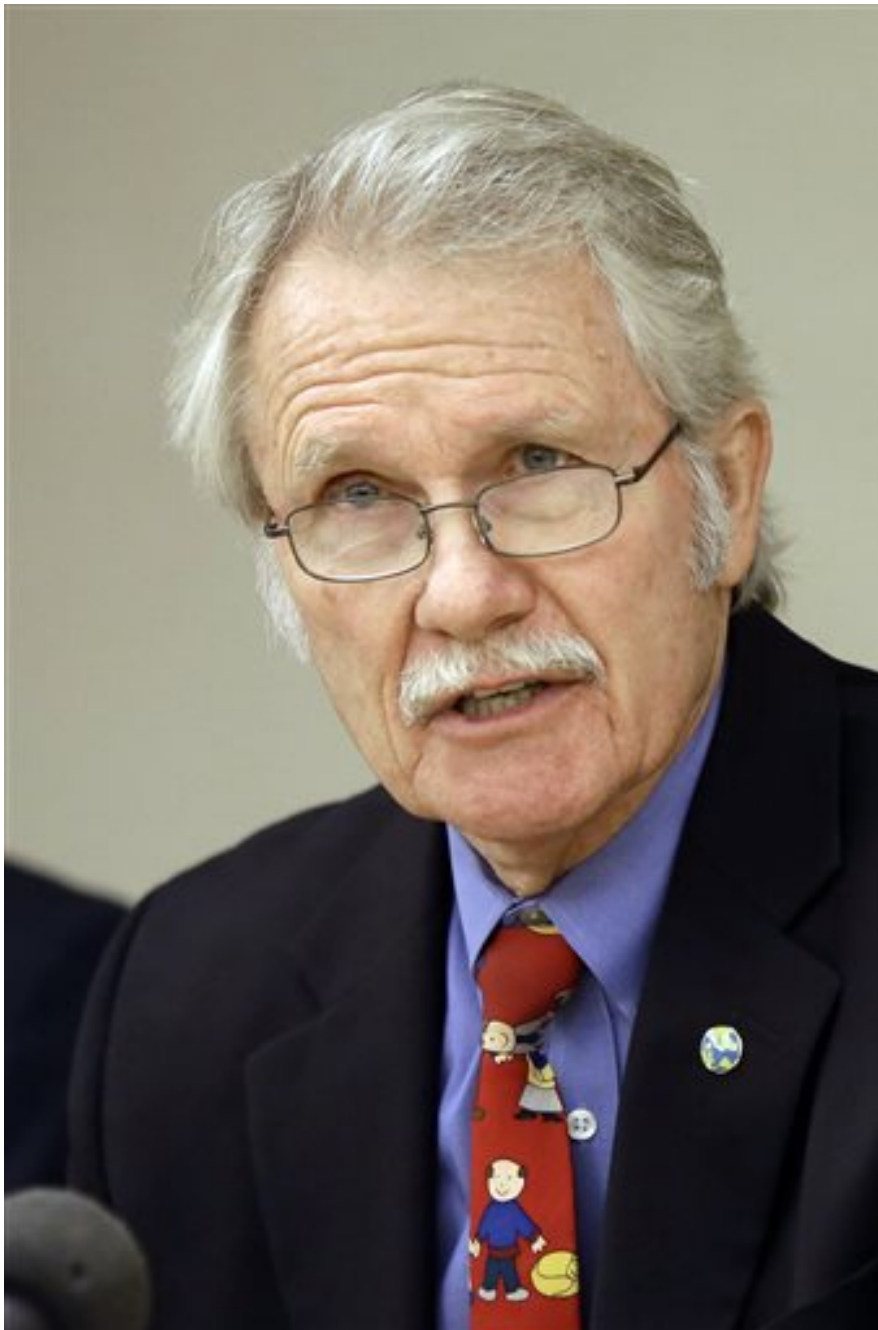


Oregon Gov. Hopes to Frame GMO Laws with Panel

STEVEN DUBOIS, Associated Press



Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber speaks during the first meeting of a new task force he created to look into the possibility of legislation on genetically modified foods in Portland, Ore., Thursday, April 10, 2014. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Gov. John Kitzhaber told members of his newly created task force on genetically engineered agriculture that he does not expect them to reach a consensus or produce any specific proposals for next year's legislative session.

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Rather, the governor wants the 13-member group that represents all sides of the hot-button topic to frame the issue for legislators, and articulate areas of agreement and disagreement.

"You bring to this very, very diverse attitudes, viewpoints, perspectives," Kitzhaber told the task force Thursday at its first meeting. "And I'm hoping that we can use that to get a better understanding of GE products in Oregon and the contours of the controversy."

Kitzhaber promised to form the task force last year after signing a bill that prohibits local governments from regulating genetically engineered crops. An exception was made for Jackson County in southwestern Oregon because it has a measure to prohibit such crops on the May ballot.

The governor directed the Oregon Department of Agriculture to map where genetically engineered and non-genetically engineered crops are grown. He also asked the department to submit a state action plan for dealing with genetically engineered crops.

The task force will examine conflicts between growers of genetically engineered products and other producers, including organic growers. It will also look into the issue of labeling such foods.

The governor has said he plans to introduce legislation next year to address the issues. Those proposals, however, won't come from task force members, who represent both conventional and organic farmers, among others.

"We recognized early on the strength of feelings on all sides of this issue and did not want to set expectations that were unrealistic for this effort," said Richard Whitman, natural resources adviser to the governor. "The hard choices on these issues will have to be made by the Legislature and the governor."

The task force held an organizational meeting Thursday and will tackle more substantive issues in meetings that will continue through fall and end with a report.

Task force member Sam Tannahill of Newberg-based A to Z Wineworks said he was honored to be included on the panel and will bring a balanced viewpoint.

"We're really studying it right now and trying to figure out which way we want to go," he said. "On the one hand, it could be a great cure for a lot of the diseases and sensitivities that we face growing grapes, which are very fragile, especially in this northern climate.

"On the other hand, we don't want to release something that we don't know what the ultimate effects are. Vineyards are very long-term propositions."

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