

**To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Senator Kerschen, Chairman**

**From: Kent Askren, Public Policy Director for Kansas Farm Bureau**

**Date: March 14 and 15, 2023**

**Re: Testimony in support for HB 2279**

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Chairman Kerschen and members of the Committee, on behalf of Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony giving support for HB 2279. KFB is the state's largest general farm organization representing more than 30,000 farm and ranch families through our 105 county Farm Bureau associations.

Our member developed policy supports both the Kansas Water Appropriation Act (KWAA) and the Groundwater Management Act (GMDA). They were designed to work **together** to accomplish the legislative directive found in the GMDA while preserving the basic water use doctrine found in the KWAA. It is logical that all parties who implement these bodies of law should stand before this committee yearly.

HB 2279 would provide each Groundwater Management District (GMD) the opportunity to showcase their accomplishments and challenges before this body each year. This activity should enhance the opportunity for stakeholder engagement and a needed public conversation about water in Kansas. When water shortages occur, our policy supports stakeholder driven management plans consistent with state water law that doesn't disadvantage senior water right holders.

GMDs that overlie the Ogallala aquifer face the daunting task of creating management programs for a heavily developed resource that has far less recharge than usage. This development has resulted in generating an enormous agricultural economy that profits Kansas, the nation and the world. But, at what cost? Will we be able to adjust to the use of less water which will either occur from well-conceived plans created in conformity with Kansas water law, or because of the demise of the Ogallala?

The answer all starts with "the goal" of either having an indefinite supply of water capable of sustaining life (especially domestic use) and the most robust economy we can produce with less water or continuing to pump the aquifer slowly but surely to a level that may not be capable of maintaining the population or production to sustain livelihood.

HB 2279 will promote the review and if necessary, revision of GMD management programs. Due to the aquifer being mosaic and heterogeneous in nature, accomplishing the locally developed goals should not and will not be universal across the aquifer but the common trait of each goal should be maintaining an indefinite supply of water.

In many cases, voluntary, incentive-based resource management will assist in stabilizing the aquifer to meet local and state goals which could be fundamentally improved by passage of HB 2303 which this committee will soon hear. In circumstances where this voluntary approach isn't enough, the KWAA must be the backstop to accomplishing the goal. Whenever we weaken the basic principles of the KWAA we jeopardize our ability to achieve an indefinite water supply and unfortunately, we are implementing a few tools in a way that ignore the most basic tenants of the KWAA.

A few years back, KFB hosted a meeting of all the GMDs and the Secretary of Agriculture to have a conversation about the challenges they face not only collectively but individually and uniquely in the seamless implementation of both the KWAA and GMDA. These two acts should be working hand in glove and we have concern they are not. HB 2279 would facilitate a conversation with the legislature so that collectively we can move forward in a positive approach to addressing the immensely serious and challenging consequences of the Ogallala decline.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify and give our support for HB 2279 and would be happy to address any questions at the appropriate time.