

KANSAS HOUSE AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
March 20, 2013
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2404
PAUL JOHNSON – KANSAS RURAL CENTER

Kansas deserves a very deliberative debate on changing corporate farming laws that have been in place for decades. Kansans deserve better than a rushed, end of the session discussion that is happening today. There are so many unanswered questions on repealing the corporate restrictions and the impact of redefining corporations on so many laws in Kansas. Where is the substantive debate on potential 'unintended consequences' from this fundamental change of agricultural policy.

The Governor got it right in forming a 'drought task force' and holding meetings across Kansas to solicit input. Why can't the Kansas Legislature use a similar model to take this debate on repealing corporate restrictions to the Kansas' public with a series of forums this summer and fall? If this is such settled, agreed upon public policy, why hasn't the normal legislative process worked with **Senate Bill 191** - with the Senate working its will and the House holding proper hearings and debate? Is **House Bill 2404** the bill that will be slipped into a last minute agricultural 'Christmas tree' conference committee bill written far from public view?

What opportunities will beginning farmers – without inherited wealth – have in competing with Wall Street investors/speculators? What will be the long term impact on our environment with these short term speculators? Does the Kansas public care if Chinese sovereign wealth investors can buy large holdings of our best farm land? What are the ramifications of moving to an 'investor-owned' land base from our present 'farmer-owned' land base? Debt held by the nation's farmers has risen nearly 30% since 2007, to an expected \$277.4 billion this year. Data from the Kansas Farm Management Association on 1,300 farms showed the amount of debt compared to the value of underlying assets had climbed to 25.5% at the end of 2011, slightly above where it stood in 1979 before the farm crisis of the 80's. (New York Times March 18, 2013) Let corn fall to \$4.50 a bushel or wheat to \$3 a bushel and with this bill - let the fire sale begin with desperate farmers!

Now that the Kansas' 'right to farm' law will be on steroids giving farmers a preferential right - over the 'property rights' of neighbors and rural communities - to reasonably expand acreage, animal units or change agricultural activity (going from cropping to CAFO's) and this entitled right can be sold, the "FOR SALE" signs will start flashing around the world to come buy their piece of the 'Land of OZ'. Don't worry about environmental regulations as continuing budget cuts will neuter proper monitoring. This may well be the most important vote you cast in your political career. Hopefully - your conscience is clear that this fundamental change was fully debated.

The Kansas Rural Center continues to support the appointment of a select interim committee to fully research the potential impact of expanded 'right to farm' law and the repeal of corporate farming restrictions on the entire state.

House Agriculture & Natural
Resources Committee

Date 3-21-2013

Attachment # 14