



UNITED TO GROW
FAMILY AGRICULTURE

House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources

Re: HB2404 AN ACT concerning agricultural corporations

March 20, 2013

Submitted by:

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Chairwoman Schwartz and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 2404.

Kansas Farmers Union is one of the state's oldest active general farm organizations, representing farmers and ranchers from across the state since 1907. Our primary goal is to sustain, strengthen, protect, and enhance the economic interests and quality of life for family farmers and ranchers and their rural communities.

House Bill 2404 is the Kansas Department of Agriculture's push to repeal corporate farming laws in Kansas, laws which have worked well for Kansas farmers and ranchers for 80 years. The primary goals of these laws is to protect family farms and ranches from the threats of unfair competition by corporate interests, and all-out repeal threatens the future of family agriculture across the state.

Kansas Farmers Union's 2013 policy clearly states:

"We support legislation which would prohibit direct investment by corporations or private corporation-size entities and their stockholders in the business of farming,"

&

"We urge passage by the Kansas State Legislature of a law to prohibit entry into the business of farming and ranching or the ownership of agricultural land by alien investors, except those resident farm families or individuals seeking United States citizenship."

& finally,

"We urge passage of legislation strengthening the reporting of Kansas agricultural land owned by aliens, corporations, and limited partnerships."

Kansas family farming operations, are important to the state for the jobs and products they produce. They literally feed Kansans and figuratively "feed" Kansas communities, schools, churches, numerous businesses and their workers. To quote KFU President Donn Teske, "Every time a 2,000-cow

(corporate) dairy goes in; it takes 20 dairy farmers out of a community. That is not economic development; that is rural depopulation.”

Bans on corporate farming are beneficial to the people of rural America. Research done in 2002 found that states with anti-corporate farming legislation have less poverty, higher employment, and a higher percentage of farms reporting cash gains in agriculturally-dependent counties.

Citizens of the entire U.S. are better off when those who work the nation’s farms and ranches are individuals and families who have the opportunity to control their own land and labor, and have a desire to create a future for family farming and ranching and for all of rural America that is socially just, economically equitable, and environmentally sound.

Governor Brownback has noted that successfully recruited corporations have only mentioned the current corporate agriculture law. He did not say it prevented the businesses from relocating to Kansas, it was only mentioned. There is no evidence to support the governor’s assertions, or KDA’s, for that matter.

One key provision to HB2404 is that it will take away the county option, meaning no county in Kansas will be able to opt out of consideration by any corporation looking to relocate to Kansas. In the past, the county was able to vote on any decision relating to corporate agriculture, but that changed last year when the Kansas Legislature voted to give county commissioners the power to decide whether to allow corporate expansion. The only way such a decision could come to a vote now is if enough people gathered signatures on a petition of 5% of the county’s registered voters. HB2404 now takes that power from the commissioners and the people, and places it in the hands of the state of Kansas.

Everyone knows you will go ahead and eliminate any resistance to corporate agriculture flowing into Kansas. Secretary Rodmans has already stated, “Kansas’ door is open to corporate agriculture, and welcomes it with open arms.” Personally, I find it both interesting and disconcerting that a group of people who were elected touting the virtues of local political control and smaller government, now feel the need to take away this last protection of Kansas citizens. I just hope you all know in your hearts, when you cast a supporting vote, you are doing it for the benefit of a few, and at a cost to the average citizen of Kansas.

Kansas’ family farmers and ranchers should expect every protection the state can provide. For 80 years, Kansas has done just that - protected family farmers and ranchers. Family farms and ranches are the foundation that built the state of Kansas, and they continue to drive and lead its economy. Last year, Kansas farm production totals were over \$14.4 billion. Why is this hugely successful model of entrepreneurship being abandoned now? There is no legitimate reason to change the game plan. As the old saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today, and will be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.

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