

February 13, 2018
Testimony in Support of HB 2726
Committee on Water and Environment

Chairman Sloan and committee members:

Thank you for your dedication and service to the state of Kansas. I ask that you strongly consider passing House Bill 2726 out of committee as this program has great potential to boost multiple efforts throughout the state. As a public health and environmental advocate who has attended multiple water events and the Governor's Water Conference among others in years past, I can confidently say this legislation will accomplish numerous goals regarding water conservation. Through the different grant program levels, not only will farmers be able to begin to diversify commodities and expand efforts where they were unable before, but it will give us the collective opportunity to continue the vision of being conscious stewards of our most precious resources by incentivizing agricultural best practices.

As a state that with the nation's third highest number of acres dedicated to agriculture, it stands to reason that 86% of Kansas' water usage goes to irrigation and ag-related purposes. While many efforts are working diligently to change the culture of how communities think about water all the way from water technologies like drip irrigation to cross-county LEMAs (Local Enhanced Management Areas), water reuse, aquifer recharges and streambank stabilization projects; all of these initiatives can be largely helped by specialty and drought-resistant crops. The Governor's Water Vision includes a multi-faceted approach. Farmers can also have the same intent when they change the crops they grow to more sustainable options. By doing this they are simultaneously requiring fewer inputs (which is desperately needed), and accomplishing secondary goals such as soil erosion control and prevention.

Good soil health requires a robust biodiversity, which is dependent on many of the microbes and ecosystems that have become heavily damaged from decades of conventional farming. Never-till and no-till practices are achieving what they can for those who can commit to it. However, markets for certain high-water crops like corn, soybeans and wheat are transitioning to other areas. We need to reposition ourselves to both protect those who provide commodities of their choice to whomever possible *and* those who wish to expand into new industries. Crops like industrial hemp were included in the Kansas Ag Growth Summit report and have also been acknowledged by the Kansas Department of Agriculture and Kansas Farm Bureau as important to research for Kansas farmers. While accepting industrial hemp has an interesting past, we must also come to terms with the reality that it has an astronomical future in Kansas because it can now be utilized by at least 10 different industries. And yet, Kansas lawmakers have left the state out of moving forward with the 34 who have reintroduced it. Hemp requires on average 3-4 times less water than other crops like corn, soybeans and cotton. In fact, the overall input requirements are significantly lower, so when fewer chemicals go on crops the risk also decreases of nutrient runoff, water contamination and algal blooms. History has proven that

when farmers are given the proper financial foundations to shift to different crops as a natural reflection of markets, that assistance yields benefits for everyone. This proposed grant program can help make it happen.

Please vote to enact HB 2726 under the administration of the Kansas water office. This will be a big step in continuing the legacy of ensuring the sustainability of our water resources, while also taking care of our farming communities.

Sincerely,

Kelly Rippel

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