

Kansas Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Ed Reznicek, General Manager
Central Plains Organic Farmers Association
(formerly Kansas Organic Producers)

Opposition Testimony to HB 2583

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 2583. My name is Ed Reznicek and I represent the Central Plains Organic Farmers Association, which just changed its name from Kansas Organic Producers beginning in 2018.

KOP or Central Plains Organic Farmers Association is a marketing / bargaining cooperative selling certified organic grains for about 70 farmer members mostly in Kansas but also in neighboring states. Our organization began in 1975 and converted to a cooperative in 1992. Since then our initial annual sales of around \$40,000 have grown to sales in the range of \$7 to \$9 million annually. Our members range in size from just over a hundred acres to several thousand acres. We raise and sell wheat, corn, soybeans, oats, millet, hay, milo, and other grains. We help our members source seed, and we offer educational workshops on weed control, cover crops, soil health and fertility, and organic transition. Production and demand for organic grains are increasing. Prices are good. We receive increasing numbers of inquiries from conventional farmers on transitioning to organic and we try to help them as best we can. There are increasing amounts of organic grains coming down the organic transitional pipeline.

USDA Census numbers for 2016 show 86 organic farmers in Kansas covering just over 54,000 acres. We think this is low. There are many organic farmers in Kansas who are not members of our organization, and there are farmers who do not respond to the USDA Census. Also, farmers newly certified in 2017 along with those at some stage of the three year transition to organic are not counted.

Loss of organic certification and crop production to spray drift can be very expensive for organic grain farmers. A spray drift contaminated 50 acre field of organic soybeans with a yield of 45 bu. per acre at a \$10 per bushel price premium (the price above the conventional price) would result in a loss of over \$20,000 in price premium alone. There could also be significant yield reductions, along with loss of certification on succeeding crops for two additional years. Financial losses over three years on one field could readily exceed \$60,000.

We are here to testify against HB 2583, and to explain the challenges we face from pesticide drift and what it means for us economically. Certified organic farmers adhere to strict production standards established by the National Organic Standards Board and overseen by USDA. We use no pesticides. We use crop rotation, diversification, cover crops, mechanical and biological controls for weeds and pests. Standards require us to post "No spray " signs on our property boundaries. We leave buffer strips between our fields and our conventional neighbors. We do what we

can on our farms to limit the risk of spray drift and contamination of the organic crops we grow.

Supporters of this bill with its changes that give the KDA secretary and staff and county weed departments greater authority to enter property and spray noxious weeds – even after proper notification—claim there will be no increase in pesticide spraying. We question that assumption. If the purpose of this bill is to go after those who are not now addressing noxious weeds on their property then it logically follows that there will be more spraying if the counties have the authority. We are concerned that this increase will increase our vulnerability to drift, which is not addressed in this bill or current noxious weed law or in the Kansas pesticide use statutes.

Organic grain farmers, just like sensitive crop growers (like fruits and vegetables), are worried about the increasing use of stronger herbicides and pesticides by our neighbors. Will the definition of a noxious weed change under this bill to include some of the herbicide resistant weeds now creating big problems for conventional farmers? And will this mean the counties will begin tackling those problems?

Dicamba drift last summer created huge problems for many soybean growers across the Midwest and the south. Many farmers - conventional, transitioning and organic – are expressing deep concern that the problem may get even worse this year.

We do not support the shift of authority from the Legislature to KDA and county weed departments without clear evidence that KDA will adopt a more comprehensive and ecological approach toward pest control and management.

We support a clear process for defining a noxious weed and a clear administrative hearing process at KDA to expedite investigations of drift complaints and settlements. We support the inclusion of greater focus on non-chemical controls and integrated pest management approaches, but these need to be real and not just on paper.

And finally, we ask that a certified organic farmer position be included on the advisory committee. As written the committee can include a representative growing “non-traditional crops” meaning specialty crops of fruits and vegetables. Traditional crops are wheat, corn, soybeans, milo, hay, oats, peanuts and cotton. USDA does not include organic crops as specialty crops. Organic grain farmers are primarily raising traditional crops. So you have excluded certified organic grain and forage producers from the committee. Inclusion of an organic producer on the advisory council would enhance the committee and KDA’s understanding of non-chemical controls and challenges.

We also urge you to ask KDA for a report on pesticide drift complaints and include recommendations to the Kansas Legislature. Thank you.