



Date: February 15th, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Senator Dan Kerschen, Chair

From: Justin Cobb, Government Relations Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Kansas

RE: Oral Neutral Testimony – SB71

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 71. The Nature Conservancy is a nonpartisan, conservation nonprofit that has worked for over 30 years in Kansas to fulfill our mission of preserving the lands and water on which all life depends. We have permanently conserved over 150,000 acres in Kansas including five preserves that are open to the public. We are dedicated to protecting the natural heritage of the state by pursuing science-based initiatives, including sustainable agriculture and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

SB 71 identifies a critical need for Kansas in allowing the Department of Agriculture to pursue federal moneys provided for sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture provides benefits to the producer, the consumer, and our natural resources. However, the recommendations in SB 71 need significant alteration for it to be feasible.

From an organizational standpoint, there already exists a Division of Conservation within the Department of Agriculture. Due to its limited funding, this division mostly focuses on water programs and administering conservation districts. Conservation and sustainable agriculture are the same by most definitions, and it would be far more prudent to expand the existing division than to add an entirely new one.

Programmatically, SB 71 is limited to specifically targeting the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund established by the Inflation Reduction Act. This funding is competitive, only allocated through 2024, and includes environmental justice factors not included in SB 71. It is very likely that if this bill passed, the state would spend the \$173,000 and not receive anything in return.

Our recommendations are to enhance the purview of the existing Division of Conservation to include sustainable agriculture and pursuit of federal funds. This would reduce the growth of new government divisions, lower overhead costs, and increase the likelihood of the state to receive returns on its investment. Sustainable agriculture initiatives often include incentive programs for beneficial practices (cover crops, no-till) as well as the programs discussed in SB 71.

We are encouraged by the sentiment behind SB 71 and ask that the committee continue to pursue efforts that assist sustainable agriculture in Kansas.