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Senate Ag Committee hearing on HB 2502

By Donn Teske

Kansas Farmers Union wishes to testify today in opposition to HB 2502.

The bill, 2502, we are hearing, as amended by the House Ag Committee is much, much better than what they started with, (and I want to thank the House Ag Committee for these improvements), however Kansas Farmers Union is still opposed to this bill.

2502 as amended still removes from the current law a provision that requires a vote by the electors of a county to approve construction of corporate hog facilities in that county, thus making it easier for corporate operations to be built in Kansas.

Kansas Farmers Union has long fought against corporate agriculture, and will oppose anything that makes their advancement in Kansas less impeded.

Our preamble states; "We believe that family ownership of farm land is the basis for the worlds' most viable system of food and fiber production and that maintaining this family farm system will preserve our country's natural and human resources." Our policy states; "We support legislation which would prohibit direct investment by corporations or private corporation size entities and their stockholders in the business of farming."

In a wonderful dream future when Kansas is feeding the world with unlimited demands maybe something like this would make some sense, the reality of recent history proves otherwise. Kansas had over 14,000 hog operations in the mid- 1970's with about 1.8 million hogs, today there is 1,500 hog operations producing about 3.1 million hogs. In the mid- 1970's Kansas had 1,828 dairy farms with 147,000 cows, today there are 410 dairy farms with 112,000 cows. What's missing from this data? Farmers, not cows, not hogs, farmers! What is being promoted as economic development is in reality economic opportunity transfer from the hands of many to the hands of few.

Last week I was deep down on the high plains of Texas, I've had many opportunities to travel that area of our great country. I look at that area as being about 20 years ahead of where western Kansas is now in regards to transition to corporate agriculture. There is huge modern agriculture in abundance, yet the county seats main streets are boarded up, the county hospitals are closing, the population base is now 75% minorities with normally a lower social status and income level trying to fund their school systems. There is federally subsidized public housing for immigrant workers.

Is this really our vision for rural Kansas?

If you on the Senate Ag committee vote for this bill do it knowing that what you are doing is benefiting a few at the cost of many. Is this responsible representation of your constituents?