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Testimony on HB 2404 to House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources March 20 2013

Chairwoman Schwartz and members of the committee, I am Michael Springer and I am writing to express my support for HB 2404. I am a third generation crop and pig farmer from southeast Kansas. I also am currently serving as chairman of the Kansas Pork Association and I am a member of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture.

My wife, Christy, and I are partners in my family's farm that raises wheat, corn and soybeans. It is my hope that our two sons, Mason and Cooper, will be the fourth generation of the Springer family on this farm. I am also managing partner for my family's farrow-to-finish pig farm. We employ 27 full-time employees and market 80,000 hogs annually.

Kansas is an agricultural state. That's a widely known, widely accepted fact. When driving anywhere in Kansas, I expect to see corn fields, soybeans, wheat, sorghum, green pastures and some sunflowers. I see cattle herds grazing in my part of Kansas and see vast cattle feeding operations in Western Kansas. I see dairies, both large and small. Unfortunately, I do not see many pig farms.

My family has worked hard to build our farm and we have found some success raising pigs in Kansas. Based on our family's history and from what I know about raising pigs, the reason there are not more pig farms in our state has nothing to do with the climate. It is definitely not because Kansans do not enjoy pork. I believe our state's restrictive corporate farming laws have discouraged raising pork in Kansas.

Some may ask if the only way to increase pig production in Kansas is through the corporate model. Of course not, but it does provide another tool for groups to pool resources. In pig farming today, the type of facilities needed and the technical expertise needed require that farmers generally form a partnership of some kind with others that can contribute capital and expertise that would otherwise be unavailable to the farmer.

The law, as it stands right now, was amended in 1994 to allow corporate ownership of swine production facilities or dairy production facilities under specific actions by voters and boards of county commissioners. So, it's true. The ability for there to be corporate pig farms in Kansas exists. However, the unnecessary and outdated restrictions in the law are not sending the right message to potential pig farmers. Instead of discouraging them to come to Kansas by forcing them to jump through multiple hoops and cross various hurdles, we should swing the doors wide open and welcome them to our state.

Demand exists for more pork consumption in Kansas, in the United States and around the globe. Pig farmers work meticulously to care for their animals but also work tirelessly to care for and manage the land and its resources. We follow stringent nutrient management plans and work to mitigate odor coming from our farm. At Springer Family Foods, LLC, we are committed to being good stewards of the land and also being good neighbors.

Passing HB 2404 will take an important step forward to encourage pig farmers to pick Kansas. It has strong potential to create good jobs and generate growth in our rural communities. I thank the committee for considering this important piece of legislation and urge you to support passage of HB 2404.