

Testimony of Leon Dunn on HB 2059
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
January 29, 2015

Chairperson Swartz and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Leon Dunn. I am a farmer, irrigator, and livestock producer from St. John. My wife and I are owners of Dunn family farm, along with our son and his family and our daughter and son-in-law. We have a diversified crop operation, which is largely designed to support our operations in cattle and swine. Both our registered cattle herd and swine multiplication facility have obtained a premium market niche because of the advanced genetics and management systems that we have adopted. The greater investment and management that these livestock operations require means we have to hire more employees to get the mission accomplished. Our family's farm supports a total of nine families, making us one of the top private employers in Stafford County. Part of our business approach is to add value to the crops we grow, with the foundation being the five irrigated circles which produce the feed for our livestock enterprises.

These circles are vital to our operation, especially in dry years. The water right impairment that Quivira NWR has filed threatens to shut down four of these five irrigated circles.

The reason I am here today is that I believe that HB 2059, which would allow the Chief Engineer authority to pump water into the Rattlesnake Creek, is reasonable and should be adopted. This in turn would supply Quivira NWR with water when needed, instead of limiting irrigation for a long period of time within the two mile corridor of the Creek.

In the event an impairment is found, this would allow the Chief Engineer an alternative which would be less devastating to individual farms and their employees. Certainly local tax bases, school enrollment, and the local economy have to be considered. Furthermore, it is definitely a more efficient use of our precious water resource.

The 2007 the Greensburg tornado followed the Rattlesnake corridor severely damaging farmsteads and irrigation systems. My swine facility was heavily damaged along with two pivots destroyed. We rebuilt, as did many others. In 2012, another series of tornados followed the Rattlesnake corridor for several miles severely damaging farmsteads and irrigation systems. Once again, there was rebuilding. In 2014, the PED swine virus killed several thousand baby pigs in our facility. At age 72 we could have said that retirement is an option. However, we want to maintain our farm to be relevant into the next generation. We were thankful that our employees stayed with us during this demoralizing time and we have returned to full production.

After the chain of devastating events, I, as well as others, rebuilt on the faith that our business plans would continue to be a community contribution. We re-invested, trusting that the legal environment we operate within would be stable, and that our business could continue to contribute to economic

growth. Our water rights need to be available in the future to provide stability in meeting the financial obligations of building our businesses.

The authority this bill provides to allow augmentation may not be the best approach in all parts of the state, but in the Rattlesnake Creek Basin, It would be a win for Quivira Wildlife Refuge and a win for the irrigators. I strongly urge you to adopt this bill.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the significance of this legislation to me and my community. At the appropriate time I will be glad to answer any questions you have.