



Kansas Grain & Feed Association
Kansas Cooperative Council
Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

March 10, 2016 – Topeka, KS

RE: Support for SB 330 – Statutorily Authorizing CREP Programs



Thank you, Chair Schwartz and members of the House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources, for the opportunity to appear today and comment on SB 330. As you know, the bill will provide statutory authorization for the Kansas Dept. of Agriculture (KDA) to enter into conservation agreements with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture under the a specialized section of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) known as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). I am Leslie Kaufman, President/CEO of the Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC). I am appearing today on behalf of the KCC, the Kansas Grain and Feed Association (KGFA) and the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association (KARA).

The Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC) is a 72 year-old, voluntary trade association representing all types of cooperatively structured (member-owned, member-controlled) businesses operating in Kansas. All Kansans have an interest in water issues and our agricultural, utility, financial and service cooperative members are among them. The Kansas Grain & Feed Association is a voluntary state association with a membership encompassing the entire spectrum of the grain receiving, storage, processing and shipping industry in the state of Kansas. KGFA's membership includes over 950 Kansas business locations and represents nearly 99% of the commercially licensed grain storage in the state. The Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association's membership includes over 700 agribusiness firms that are primarily retail facilities which supply fertilizers, crop protection chemicals, seed, petroleum products and agronomic expertise to Kansas farmers. KARA's membership base also includes ag chemical and equipment manufacturing firms, distribution firms and various other businesses associated with the retail crop production industry. As you can tell from these descriptions, our associations share many common agribusiness members.

Our associations have a strong history of supporting environmental stewardship programs and public-private partnerships based on working lands models (incorporating stewardship practices into land use practices that keep land in active agricultural production and not idling working land). Although CREP is not a working lands program, we are here today in support of SB 330, as amended by the Senate committee, to include important safeguards and conditions for CREP programs.

Many of you will remember our multi-year opposition to CREP and might be surprised that we are actually here in support of this measure. Although we have opposed CREP, largely for it's blanket requirement that enrolled land must be idled, the provisions in the amended version of SB 330 follow closely the parameters we have supported annually in budget provisos. Thus, we appear in full support of the measure today.

We firmly believe the conditions are reasonable and workable. The acreage limitation will still leave room to fully implement the already existing Upper Arkansas River (UAR) CREP, focused on irrigation reduction, and allow creation of a water quality CREP in more eastern areas of the state. Additionally, we think it is time to more the conditions to statute and end the year-after-year budget proviso discussion.

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The work product before you is a good bill. It is a compromise piece of legislation that many of our friends have contributed to, including the Kansas Dept. of Agriculture. We are grateful for their willingness to accept reasonable limitations and work with us, and the other stakeholders, to craft an amendment package that was ultimately adopted.

This bill went through extensive review and discussion in Senate subcommittee and committee. We understand that the second chamber often likes to leave their mark on legislation, but we respectfully request this committee honor the compromise language and pass the bill favorably without further amendment. It is critical that this measure pass this session and with the accelerated timelines, quick action is quite appropriate.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to share our comments on and support for SB 330. I am certainly willing to take any questions at the appropriate time.