



Since 1894

To: Senate Committee on Federal & State Affairs  
Senator Pete Brungardt, Chair

From: Kelli Maydew, Kansas Livestock Association

Re: **Testimony in support of SB 399**

Date: February 15, 2012

*The Kansas Livestock Association (KLA), formed in 1894, is a trade association representing over 5,300 members on legislative and regulatory issues. KLA members are involved in many aspects of the livestock industry, including seed stock, cow-calf and stocker production, cattle feeding, dairy production, grazing land management and diversified farming operations.*

The Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) believes that SB 399 is a sensible way to assist industries who are in need of labor. It represents a pro-business, pro-economic growth way to manage the issue of undocumented workers in our state.

Western Kansas is in need of labor. Statistics from the Kansas Department of Labor show that 53 Kansas counties have less than 4.5% unemployment, with the majority of these counties being in the Western part of the state. This is compared to the state average of 5.9%. The level of unemployment that exists in Western Kansas is considered by most economists to be full employment.

There is often a misconception that the agricultural industry overworks and underpays its workers. Our industry relies on a reliable, stable workforce and many of our members consider their workers "family."

Based on a 2009 salary survey, the starting wage range for entry level positions on dairies in Western Kansas is \$25,000 - \$30,000 per year plus benefits - most common benefit packages include health insurance, worker's compensation, paid vacation after the first year, life insurance, and a retirement savings plan. This survey also showed that the average salary of dairy employees is \$33,800 per year.

Our members have tried to recruit from areas of higher unemployment, but without success. In August of 2011, KLA dairies placed ads in mainstream newspapers, targeting areas in Eastern Kansas with high unemployment. Sixteen total respondents were interviewed by telephone, all of which indicated they were unemployed at the time of the call. Three finalists were invited to visit dairies in Western Kansas for interviews. The persons interviewing were given a travel allowance for the interview. Only two individuals elected to make the trip. The two individuals were interviewed by three dairy operations, and were not found to be employable.

Several cattle producers have placed jobs on the Kansas Works website, with very limited interest from applicants. Several respondents have been interviewed but not hired.

Other states have realized the devastating impacts of recent immigration legislation. In June of 2011, the Georgia Agribusiness Council conducted a labor survey after passage of Georgia House Bill 87, which tightened restrictions on immigrant workers. The survey found that fifty percent of Georgia's produce never made it to market after the passage of the bill. This resulted in more than \$400 million in losses. The Georgia Agribusiness Council also reported that their agriculture industry is more than 5,000 workers short due to immigrants fleeing the state after this legislation passed.

Kansas cannot afford to follow this same failed path.

KLA supports the passage of SB 399 and encourages the committee to recommend the bill favorably for passage.