



KANSAS FARM BUREAU
The Voice of Agriculture

TO: Chairwoman Schwartz
Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

FROM: Richard Felts
Kansas Farm Bureau Board Member

DATE: March 20, 2013

RE: Written Testimony
HB 2404; Kansas Agricultural Growth and Rural Investment Initiative

Chairwoman Schwartz and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to join you today. I am Richard Felts, Vice President of the Kansas Farm Bureau. KFB, as you know is a grassroots organization with over 40,000 farmer and rancher members; families like mine, who earn their living every day producing the food, fiber and fuel that keeps our nation secure and provides affordable choices for consumers seeking to maximize their food dollar.

Our organization prides itself in having a presence in each of the state's 105 counties and on our ability to rally behind issues and impact the legislative, regulatory, and legal challenges facing our members. We have strong policy which supports the ability of agricultural entrepreneurs across the state to organize and operate in any structure which best suits their business model. We also have strong policy supporting options for young people seeking careers in agriculture who want to return to a rural community or pursue profit-making ventures anywhere in this great state. We strongly support the passage of HB 2404.

My wife and I live just outside Liberty, Kansas. We farm there on a 3rd generation family farm which produces corn and soybeans. We also house and grow pork through a production contract. We're fortunate to have family, including two of our three children, living in the area and involved in ours or their own farming operations. It seems many families today either don't have kids who are interested in returning to the farm or can't afford to offer the next generation a place in their operation.

For our family and for Kansas Farm Bureau this bill represents a new approach to a system that, in many ways hasn't worked all that well for us. Current law has restricted our ability to attract and capitalize on the protein potential inside of Kansas, and in doing that to capture the opportunity to keep families on the farm and keep rural communities alive and well. For the past many years we've simply watched as farm consolidation occurred and rural communities ceased to exist.

While no piece of legislation is likely to address all of the issues of out-migration or de-population, removing the real or perceived hurdles to bringing a new business venture online can encourage growth in the industry and in turn attract jobs and residents to rural communities, providing diversification to economies, better markets to producers, and a brighter future for families who know and understand and want to continue to live and thrive in rural Kansas.

For the Felts Farm, and for others across the state, this bill represents a unique opportunity to access new markets, to diversify operations, and to attempt a new strategy to invigorate rural communities and offer young people a rural alternative.

In addition to support for the concepts behind this bill, our member adopted policy also supports existing requirements for environmental controls to ensure that we leave this land just a little better than we found it. Those same provisions also offer a mechanism for input from the neighbors and community surrounding any proposed development which satisfies a strong desire for local input into the decision making process to permit CAFOs and other large-scale projects.

For the reasons above and many others, our board of directors recently unanimously voted to support repeal. We ask for your partnership in that effort today and stand ready to assist as you move this bill forward.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.