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To: Representative Ken Rahjes
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee

My name is Riley Akin and I am a Member Service Representative for the National Cotton Council. I am here today at the request of one of our associate organizations, the Kansas Cotton Association. Among other things, the National Cotton Council works to secure federal funding for boll weevil eradication and oversees the Boll Weevil Plant Protection Fund. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments today on a matter of significant concern to the U.S. cotton industry, the post eradication operations protecting the industry's boll weevil eradication accomplishment.

The history of the cotton boll weevil documents unprecedented annual crop destruction. As this exotic pest entered the U.S. in 1892, it spread across the cotton belt over the course of 30 years leaving a path of destruction as it spread. Today, after more than 42 years of an active boll weevil eradication program, the boll weevil is confined to a small region of Texas along the Tamaulipas, Mexico border. Boll Weevil Quarantines prohibit cotton equipment movement from this active eradication area until equipment has been thoroughly inspected and cleaned. From the quarantine line through the U.S. Cotton Belt, every cotton producing state continues to monitor for potential reinfestation and maintains state authorization to support monitoring activities. Every State complies with a set of "Minimum Standards" to ensure areas remain free of the boll weevil. Every state stands prepared to respond as necessary should boll weevils appear. Every state except Kansas. The adoption of House Bill 2559 will address this issue.

It is worth noting that Kansas did not have cotton production during the years leading to boll weevil eradication. Kansas had no cotton, and therefore had no boll weevil. However, today, Kansas has a growing cotton industry, which includes the infrastructure of four modernized ginning facilities with high through put potential and two warehouses. For Southern Kansas, cotton has become a viable crop that requires far less water than many other row crops.

It is also worth noting that Virginia and North Carolina, once crippled by the presence of the boll weevil, have been free of boll weevil longer than Kansas has been in cotton production. Yet, all states maintain a minimum standard monitoring system, authority to access and treat any infested field, and a response plan in case a boll weevil is detected. All these post eradication activities are state responsibilities.

As cotton acreage expands in Kansas, it is critical that your state take measures similar to all other cotton producing states; that is ensuring the boll weevil eradication investment of federal, state, and producer fund is not in jeopardy. Although one could argue the risk of a boll weevil hitchhiking on transportation or equipment all the way to Kansas is low, it exists. Forty-two years of active boll weevil eradication, 70% of which producers funded, could be lost if a boll weevil infested cotton acres in Kansas. The boll weevil eradication program to date is a historical accomplishment and partnership between producers and federal and state governments. The U.S. cotton industry urges support of this bill and welcomes Kansas as an ally in maintaining profitable cotton production free of the boll weevil.

I hope you will all support the passage of House Bill 2559. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

Riley H. Akin