

**Kansas Organic Producers Testimony on HB 2479
to the Senate Natural Resources Committee
March 9, 2016**

My name is Ed Reznicek. I am a certified organic farmer in Nemaha County, Kansas, raising corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and an assortment of small grains and legumes. I am also the General Manager for the Kansas Organic Producers Marketing Cooperative (KOP).

KOP is a marketing cooperative negotiating contracts and sales for certified organic grain growers in primarily Kansas, but also a few in Nebraska, Missouri, and Colorado. The co-op manages grain sales around \$8 million annually for about 70 small to fairly large certified organic farms. We have been in operation since 1992. Our members represent a portion of the 100-200 organic growers in Kansas. I receive at least 4 to 5 calls per month from farmers interested in transitioning to organic.

KOP members have two primary concerns with HB 2479.

- 1) Potential for an increase in the amount of herbicide spraying and lack of clear no-spray zone language, which is critical to protection of our organic certification; and
- 2) the lack of language addressing any exemptions or exceptions to chemical use for control of noxious weeds.

Certified organic growers receive premium prices on grain crops based on strict adherence to USDA rules and regulations for organic certification. We do not use synthetic fertilizers or chemical herbicides. To be certified organic, there must be a three-year period of proven non-use of prohibited substances. We use biological, mechanical, and cultural controls for weeds, based on practices that build and maintain soil health as the foundation of a healthy organic system. We apply for certification annually and receive a detailed annual inspection of not only the record keeping, but receive field visits that are designed to monitor the organic system and provide transparency to the certifying entity.

If we suffer non-target application or drift from outside our farm, we will suffer reductions in yield and possibly the entire crop on the affected acres. We also lose our certification for three years. We lose the premium price on that crop. If you lose certification on a modest 5 acres of certified organic soybeans that would have averaged 40 bushels to the acre (not an uncommon average yield), at current \$20 to \$25/bushel/acre prices, that is a \$4,000 to \$5,000 loss per year for three years or \$12,000 to \$15,000.

Similar damage to a certified organic corn crop at 125 bushels/acre dryland corn at current \$9/bushel, the loss would be a \$5625/year loss or over \$16,000 for 3 years.

Organic farmers would like clear language for no spray zones and/or a registry for no spray zones to protect our economic interests. Currently it is not clear that if the county spraying for noxious weeds damages a non-target crop, that the farmer has legal recourse to collect damages from the county.

The second concern is that the bill needs to recognize a need for exemptions or exceptions to chemical controls. Organic farmers are as concerned as any farmer about noxious weeds on their farms. We work to control these with biological or cultural practices such as mowing, grazing, or intensive cover cropping. To require only chemical controls is unfair and may only add to the dilemma of resistant weed strains.

A final concern is that there is no representation of non-chemical control interests on the proposed advisory committee, while there are at least three entities, who sell herbicides listed.

Thank you for your time. We hope the Legislature will consider the interests of all of its farmers and ranchers, including organic farmers.

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Note:

Current net farm prices for organic grains are listed below. These are prices based on actual current sales for KOP members. These prices reflect a drop of about 15% from organic grain prices a year ago.

Soybeans Feed grade \$20/bushel; food grade \$25/bushel
Corn \$9/bushel
Wheat \$12 to \$18/bushel (depending on quality)