



KANSAS RURAL CENTER

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

KANSAS RURAL CENTER

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Opponent Written Testimony on SB 71

Dear Chairman Kerschen and Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB 71. I'm the Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center, which has been working to build an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just farming and food system for Kansans for over 40 years. As one of the leading voices for sustainable agriculture in Kansas we were excited to see a bill on the agenda that would establish a division on sustainable agriculture at the Kansas Department of Agriculture. Sustainability is often thought of as a three-legged stool, that rests on developing a more just and resilient society, supporting healthy ecological systems and economic viability. Such a division could help improve soil and water quality across the state and positively impact food access, rural communities, and farm viability.

Upon reading the bill we were surprised that almost every aspect of sustainable agriculture is left out of the purview of the proposed division. Per the language of the bill the division of sustainable agriculture would have the "express purpose of dispersing grants, loans, bond guarantees and other financial and technical assistance to sustainable agriculture districts using funds obtained by grants from the federal greenhouse gas reduction fund established by 42 U.S.C. § 7434 for the construction and commissioning of renewable natural gas plants or sustainable ammonia or urea plants, or a combination of both." The Kansas Rural Center opposes this strict limitation on the division of sustainable agriculture.

This restrictive vision for the division of sustainable agriculture has two major problems. First, renewable natural gas plants or sustainable ammonia or urea plants are far from key pieces of any program to develop truly sustainable agriculture. I think there is some debate about whether these types of plants are part of a sustainable agriculture agenda, but even if we consider them tools to support sustainable agriculture, they are a small piece of a broad set of practices to build agricultural sustainability. There are many common ideas and practices that are central to sustainable agriculture include conservation tillage and no till systems, soil health building practices like cover cropping, diversified cropping systems, perennial crops, managed intensive grazing, ecological pest management, water conservation, direct marketing options and local and regional food systems (see <https://www.sare.org/resources/what-is-sustainable-agriculture/> for more information). A division of sustainable agriculture should focus on helping Kansas farms adopt a wide variety of practices that

can help them improve their farm profitability, while strengthening their community and conserving environmental resources. The current bill does not support that inclusive vision of sustainable agriculture.

Additionally, the limitation of the proposed division of sustainable agriculture to a narrow vision of natural gas and ammonia or urea plants funded by the Federal greenhouse gas reduction fund limits the potential for the state of Kansas to bring in additional dollars both from federal funds and private sources that could fund efforts that could support sustainable agriculture across the state. The USDA has been developing many new programs for climate smart agriculture, soil health and other priority areas that have funds that the state of Kansas could potentially leverage to build a more sustainable agricultural system. Private foundations and other funders are also interested in supporting projects around sustainable agriculture. The narrow scope of the proposed bill would limit the ability of Kansas to utilize all the resources available.

In short, the Kansas Rural Center applauds the idea of a division of sustainable agriculture at the Kansas Department of Agriculture, but that division should be able to focus on the broad concept and funding opportunities to support sustainable agriculture, rather than the very narrow focus as it is described in the SB 71. We oppose this bill as it is written but support the idea of an inclusive division of sustainable agriculture at the Kansas Department of Agriculture that could leverage a variety of federal funds to encourage a broad array of sustainable agricultural practices in Kansas.

Thank you to members of the committee for your consideration.

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