



# KANSAS RURAL CENTER

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## Senate Natural Resources Committee Hearing on SB 191

March 7, 2013

### Testimony of the Kansas Rural Center

The Kansas Rural Center is testifying against SB 191, which would repeal certain sections of the Kansas corporate farm law. The Kansas Rural Center supports, as it has historically, a decentralized, diversified agricultural system that works for the farmer, the environment, rural communities and consumers. We oppose the proposed changes in the corporate farm law because we see those provisions as the remaining protections for local independent farmers and quality of life in rural communities.

The argument from the Kansas Department of Agriculture, the administration and others is that we need to repeal the corporate farm law in order to grow the state's agricultural economy. The question we ask is for whom? At what cost? And who really benefits?

There is little left in the current corporate farm law to stop corporate or non-farm investment or ownership in Kansas agriculture. What is left is the county option provision on swine and dairy, which allows local county citizens to vote yes or no to allowing such facilities with their potential for water and air pollution into their counties as neighbors.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Administration have stated they especially want to grow large confined animal agriculture, and a number of bills, in addition to the corporate farm bill, have been introduced to make it easier to expand existing facilities or to bring in new ones. On Tuesday the Governor announced his plan for tax breaks offering incentives to investors and companies in agriculture.

KRC has three areas of concern:

1) Concentration and competitiveness.

While proponents of the change argue that opening the doors in Kansas will provide jobs and opportunities, we have been moving this direction (toward mega-swine and dairy operations) for several decades and we have only seen fewer numbers of farmers, declining rural communities and shrinking opportunities for independent businesses and farmers.

A few companies or enterprises may profit; the state may see an increase in overall numbers of hogs, poultry or dairy herds, and an increase in gross regional product, but the number of farmers drops and rural communities continue to shrink. Opportunities are for

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the few who would work for the companies, or for those farmers who would contract production. Agricultural contract production does not have a very attractive record. Half of all contract poultry growers earn below poverty-level wages. In Missouri a \$5 million investment in contract swine production generates about 40 to 50 jobs, and displaces nearly 3 times that number of independent hog producers. Thus, opportunities for independent businesses or farmers do not follow this model.

2) Environmental degradation. At the same time we are repealing this law and opening the doors to more animal agriculture, we are reducing funding to the state agency that oversees the permits and monitoring that protect our water and air quality. If we are opening the state up for increased animal agriculture, should we not ensure that it is done responsibly to protect our water and air, and thus our quality of life? What about property rights of others (farmers and non-farmers) in those neighborhoods or communities?

3) Loss of local control. Today county residents at least have an option to accept or reject corporate swine or dairy developments. The repeal would take that away. Corporations exist to maximize profits to investors. Capital investors do not live in the communities affected. Transferring external costs such as air quality and water pollution to the public is part of how these companies do business. Most politicians today tout the virtues of local political control and yet you are poised to remove this last protection of Kansas citizens.

We urge you to vote against SB 191.

Thank you.

Submitted by  
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Policy and Programs Director  
Kansas Rural Center

*The Kansas Rural Center, is a private non-profit research, education and advocacy organization, that provides vision and a voice for our food and farm future. We promote the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy that advances economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just food and farming systems.*