

March 8, 2018

Piccalilli Farm
Nathaniel Bjerke-Harvey
Farm owner/manager
Proponent
HB 2668

Chairman Johnson and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2668.

My wife and I own a small-diversified farm outside of Manhattan. We intensively cultivate an acre of vegetables organically as well as focusing on pasture raised poultry, pork and goat. Half of our farm's income is generated through farmers market sales, the other half through direct wholesale to restaurants. Our model of agriculture is very different than typical farming operations found in Kansas, but it is a viable way to make a living and a growing demographic of agriculture around the country. We are also the rare first generation farmer, we did not inherit land or equipment, and as small new business owners, every bit of money we can save is valuable. We strive to build a food community through the farmers market, an environment where people can get fresh, healthy food in season that not only keeps money in the local economy but also builds relationships between rural/urban environments in valuable ways.

Incentives to join the farmers market community here in Kansas are few, the formidable barrier of sales tax impedes many small growers from entering the farmers market scene. Compounded by high city taxes in Riley county/city of Manhattan, we are taxing our sales at nearly 9% at the market. This makes our rate of sales tax comparable to some of the largest urban/affluent areas around the country. Based on income demographics across this state that makes no sense. Our customer base is not wealthy and if we are to make our small production vegetables affordable to the widest demographic possible, any leverage we could have in pricing would be a boon.

I probably don't need to mention the poor state of public health in Kansas. In state obesity is rampant, per capita density of fast food is one of the highest in the nation. Farmers markets represent an opportunity to make delicious, healthy food readily available to the public. And, by reducing/eliminating sales tax for those vendors, the benefits would be passed directly to the consumer. As a legislator, this bill represents a great opportunity to help Kansans cook seasonally at home, eat more healthful foods, and spend more money in the local economy. I hope you can see to move this bill forward for the better of small farmers and the community of eaters they support.

Lowering the sales tax on food would benefit the Kansas economy while putting dollars back into the pockets of Kansas families who need it most. For these reasons, we ask the committee to support HB 2668.

Thanks for your consideration.

Nathaniel Bjerke-Harvey