



Kansas Corn Growers Association

To: House Committee on Agriculture
Representative Ken Rahjes, Chair

From: Kansas Corn Growers Association

Re: **Support for HB 2800 – Increasing the cap and matching basis for division of conservation moneys disbursed to conservation districts based on amounts allocated by the board of county commissioners to such conservation districts.**

Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Rahjes and members of the committee for the opportunity to address the above organization's views on HB 2800. The Kansas Corn Growers Association (KCGA) represents more than 1,100 members on state and national legislative and regulatory issues and actively works with other organizations to maximize the voice of Kansas corn producers. KCGA is a proponent of HB 2800 and encourages the Committee to move forward and pass this bill.

Conservation Districts play a vital role in farmers implementing conservation practices that are good for the environment, the community, and the farmer. Conservation District managers are often the first point of contact when it comes to natural resource issues, or questions about implementing practices. When a farmer needs to combat issues like wind or rain erosion, nitrogen leeching, or just wants to try out cover crops, Conservation Districts are a useful resource. District Managers can explain the various programs that are available and directs farmers to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Conservation District technical staff to listen to their concerns and provide alternatives to address their concerns.

Conservation Districts are also the primary point of delivery for state conservation programs provided by Kansas Department of Agriculture's (KDA) Division of Conservation (DOC). They are where farmers go to apply, get approval, and get technical assistance, when utilizing the numerous DOC programs. They will also play a significant role with implementation of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program project, bringing \$25,000,000 federal dollars to Kansas to improve irrigation technology and reduce water use in the High Plains aquifer. Further, Conservation Districts provide additional technical support for NRCS programs.

Conservation Districts are funded primarily from county commissions. Current law allows for a match of county funding up to \$25,000. This cap has been in place for 17 years and during that span the cost of employment and operations has risen significantly. Forty-two of the districts receive \$25,000 or less and six of those districts receive \$20,000 or less. The \$30,000 - \$50,000 budgets that these districts receive from combined county and state funding is simply not enough to fairly compensate staff and cover office

operating expenses. These limitations lead to Conservation District staff being underpaid for the work they are doing, causing hiring challenges that create problems for farmers receiving the assistance they need.

HB 2800 would enhance the state match of county funding up to two to one, with a state cap of \$50,000. This increase would allow Conservation Districts to provide more competitive pay to employees as well as increase work benefits. Keeping good staff employed at Conservation Districts is of utmost importance to Kansas farmers that need to implement conservation practices.

To this end, KCGA supports HB 2800 and looks forward to its successful passage.

Submitted by Taylor Williamson on behalf of the Kansas Corn Growers Association.