



**To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chair**

**From: Jennifer Simmelink, Coordinator, Kansas Soil Health Alliance**

**Date: January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**

**RE: HB 2541 – Establishing a state conservation fund**

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Conservation is the proper management of our natural resources and there are few investments more critical to the quality of life in Kansas. Our economic success, public health, and future generations are dependent upon us maintaining and improving these resources. Currently, the state does not provide the proper funding for this work and is subsequently losing out on federal or private matching dollars to the 35 states that have already established dedicated conservation funding, including all four of our neighbors.

The Kansas Soil Health Alliance is a farmer and rancher led 501c3 organization that was created by Kansas growers to help assist other growers improve and rejuvenate our state's largest asset, the soil. As an exclusively farmer and rancher led, focused, and driven organization the Kansas Soil Health Alliance has the unique perspective of seeing conservation and soil health from the farmer's perspective – the need to achieve profitability in an ecologically sound manner in order to restore soil productivity for future generations. Established in 2021, the Kansas Soil Health Alliance is primarily funded through grants and matching funds from private companies. In order to continue living out our mission, we are constantly seeking new funding sources.

Soil erosion is costing growers across the United State over \$100 million annually (Journal of Environmental Economics 2007) in lost income due to lower yields and loss of nutrients and soil fertility. Like all facets of modern agriculture, soil conservation methods are constantly evolving. With the increased awareness soil health farming systems can add to carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emission reductions, decreased irrigation water usage, decreased soil erosion, and lessened water contamination, cost share funding to incorporate soil health practices has been coming from new sources as compared to the traditional sources of NRCS programs. During the years of transitioning from a conventional farming system to a soil health farming system, these cost share dollars help lower the risk to growers who incorporate new practices. Oftentimes, though, those risks are not reduced by a significant amount, especially during times of drought and price inflation. The potential for conservation fund dollars to further bolster these cost share dollars would be impactful in further lessening the financial risk to growers. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, cost share dollars coming directly from a state conservation fund will show the hardworking men and women who steward our valuable soil and water resources that their boldness to change is valued by all across the state.

Cost share dollars are just one example of how the conservation funds could be utilized. Locating markets that pay a premium for commodities grown in soil and water conservation farming systems would further improve farmers' profitability and reinforce industry, consumer, and the state's support for conservation focused growers. While cost share funds help during the 3-5 year transition period, to ensure and promote lasting change, guidance and mentoring from



innovative growers is necessary. Funds to enhance and support budding peer-to-peer farming networks and mentoring would set the stage for long-term and lasting change throughout our state.

Kansas has been referred to as the breadbasket of the world. Unfortunately, the resources needed to maintain that recognition – soil, water, and the men and women who manage those resources – are all at risk of being depleted and exhausted. Establishing a state conservation fund will ensure productivity and future profitability of Kansas farms and ranches for generations to come. The time to invest in our soil is now.

As outlined above and by our fellow coalition members, the establishment of state conservation funding benefits all Kansans, allows for the proper stewardship of the resources bestowed upon us, and enables the state to be competitive for match opportunities. Therefore, we ask you to support HB 2541.