

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 2564
to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
by Kelsey Olson, Deputy Secretary
Kansas Department of Agriculture
February 6, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Rahjes and members of the committee. My name is Kelsey Olson and I serve as the Deputy Secretary for the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA).

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2564. This bill establishes a state-run farm-to-food bank program which KDA would administer to expand the availability of Kansas agricultural food products for the state of Kansas' emergency food system while at the same time providing additional opportunities for producers to sell their product for the benefit of their neighbors and Kansans across the state. The bill language is modeled after a federal grant program which the agency is currently administering, the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program.

In 2022, KDA applied for and was awarded a \$2.5 million cooperative agreement under the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service's Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Program with a goal to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. KDA developed a program in which these funds would be used to purchase and distribute Kansas grown and processed foods to underserved communities and families across Kansas through the state's existing distribution network of food banks by partnering with Harvesters, the Kansas Food Bank, and Second Harvest Community Food Bank. Purchases of food began in the spring of 2023 and the food banks have been able to purchase locally grown and processed foods including pork, beef, fruit, vegetables, cheese, and honey from 22 Kansas producers. The food has been distributed to Kansans in urban and rural communities facing food insecurity. Food banks and the Kansans they serve have appreciated having access to local vegetables, fruit, and other foods that aren't always accessible for this population.

In the first year for the program, the three food banks have distributed \$2.388 million worth of local food to 375 local pantries and mobile sites serving 187 cities across 98 counties.

In the fall of 2023, KDA was awarded an additional \$2.5 million, which will allow KDA to continue to fund the purchase and distribution of local food through the LFPA Program through the end of this calendar year (2024) or until the funds run out, whichever comes first. Through this program, Kansas-grown food is reaching communities across the state, benefiting not only

families experiencing food insecurity but also the farmers, ranchers, and food processors who are working directly with the food banks to supply this food.

HB 2564 will establish the program statutorily at the state level to extend it beyond the duration of the federal grant program. The farm-to-food bank program not only provides local food products to Kansas families who need it most, it connects local producers with a unique market outlet that fosters positive working relationships with the Kansas food banks. Through this program, farmers have the opportunity to sell their products to the food banks, allowing them to sustain capacity especially at times of year when they may have excess product or fewer marketing opportunities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2564. I'm happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.