

**Testimony to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources
Committee**

Keith Badger, Osage County Farmer

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Keith Badger, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2063. I farm corn, soybeans, and wheat in Osage county. I also serve on the Osage County Conservation District board and have served on boards whose goals are to protect reservoirs within our state.

Protection of our working lands in Kansas is essential to sustain and improve our natural resources. Water quantity and quality, improved soil health, drought resilience, productive rangelands and diverse wildlife habitats are critical to sustaining our family farms and ranches environmentally and economically as well as improving quality of life.

Conservation districts have been in Kansas for over eighty years and were formed in response to the dust bowl. Board members are publicly elected. As a conservation district board member, we meet monthly to handle district business and address the conservation needs of our farmers and ranchers, reviewing cost share applications and approving contracts for funding. The one constant that we always see is that there is never enough funding to address the resource concerns in our county. It is always difficult to budget for applications that are critical and leave many unfunded that are deserving.

In my years of board service, I have learned that conservation districts are the leadership of resource conservation. Landowners often bring their resource concerns to the district offices first. The managers are local residents providing guidance to technical expertise, partner

agencies of interest, and funding to assist the implementation of projects. The State Division of Conservation is responsive to districts requests for guidance and assistance. I have experienced other avenues for funding and expertise, but proudly, the state conservation district system is the best.

Our conservation district works closely with many of our partners to reach our elementary and high school students in Osage county each year, educating our future generations on the importance of sustaining and protecting our natural resources. We encourage active participation in poster, limerick, and speech contests and recognize them at our county annual meeting, which is well attended by our state legislators, and we appreciate that very much.

Adult education is also critical as new research and technologies become available. This is not only necessary for our active producers, but also for the increasing number of absentee landowners that may not be connected to the land and need to be educated on the importance of addressing natural resource concerns on their land. We have hosted meetings on soil health, rangeland improvement, and a women managing the farm seminar.

Additional funding is needed to sustain and increase our education efforts at the local level and promote responsible stewardship.

Conservation funding to promote long term sustainability and resilience of our working lands is not an expense, it is an investment. Economic security for our state, a stable healthy food supply, clean water to our urban and rural water districts, and the preservation of our reservoirs are the reward. As I have experienced, conservation today lasts for generations.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon and look forward to working with you to fund conservation in Kansas. I am happy to address any questions you may have.