



Date: January 6, 2025
To: Chairman Ken Rahjes, House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
From: Shahira Stafford, Kansas Cooperative Council
RE: Proponent Written Testimony on HB 2063

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Formed in 1944, the Kansas Cooperative Council (Co-op Council) represents cooperative businesses across multiple sectors throughout Kansas, including agricultural cooperatives that serve thousands of Kansas farmers. Our purpose is to further the understanding of cooperative principals, methods of doing business, and the impact co-ops have on our state's rural economy. Kansas co-ops have over 575 locations, employ over 5,000 people, and represent over 116,000 members.

The Co-op Council strongly supports House Bill 2063, particularly its provisions for the Working Lands Conservation Fund, which embody our association's fundamental belief that conservation is most effective when it works alongside agricultural production, not in opposition to it.

Key strengths of the bill that merit our support include:

- **Emphasis on Productive Conservation:** The fund's focus on irrigation efficiency, soil health, grazing management, and ecological restoration demonstrates a nuanced understanding of conservation. By supporting projects that maintain agricultural productivity while improving environmental sustainability, the bill offers a balanced approach that protects both our agricultural heritage and natural resources.
- **Economic Impact Considerations:** We appreciate the bill's implicit recognition of the economic dimensions of conservation. The requirement for grant recipients to be public entities or nonprofits, with preference for projects with matching funds, ensures fiscal responsibility and community engagement.
- **Transition Support for Agricultural Producers:** The Working Lands Conservation Fund's provisions are especially critical for supporting producers transitioning between irrigation strategies. The focus on transitional strategies – such as moving from irrigated to dryland production – directly addresses one of our key policy priorities.

We recommend the committee support House Bill 2063, with special attention to maintaining the Working Lands Conservation Fund's current framework. The fund's structure provides a promising pathway for collaborative conservation efforts that support both agricultural producers and environmental stewardship.