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**Testimony of Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach**

**Written-Only Proponent HB 2290**

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Chair Tarwater and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the threats Kansans and all Americans face when foreign adversaries purchase land within our borders. The increasing acquisition of agricultural land by foreign nationals and by corporations based in foreign countries must be addressed, because it poses a growing threat to national security, to our food supply, and to our state's economic future.

Foreign land ownership has doubled over the 10-year period from 2009 to 2019. According to USDA records, which have been criticized for *understating* foreign land ownership, foreign nationals own 35.2 million acres. That's about the size of the state of

Iowa. Percentage-wise, that is 2.7% of agricultural land. And the number is growing. Remember also that actual numbers are likely much higher due to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's inability to effectively track all land purchases.

Canada owns the largest share of foreign owned land in the country, but China's share is significant and growing. According to the USDA, Chinese landowners control approximately 383,000 acres of U.S. farmland. From 2010 to 2021, Chinese farmland increased from \$81 million to \$1.9 billion. Part of the dramatic increase in China's land ownership is due to Shuanghui International Holdings Limited's purchase of Smithfield Foods in 2013.

Three of our neighboring states—Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri have restrictions on foreign land purchases, leaving Kansas particularly vulnerable. We are the only state in America's breadbasket where there are no restrictions.

## **24 States Have Some Prohibition Against Foreign Nationals Purchasing Land**

Currently, 24 states have some prohibition on nonresident aliens, foreign businesses and corporations, and foreign governments from acquiring or owning an interest in agricultural land within their state. During the 2023 legislative session, the following states enacted new laws addressing foreign ownership of land: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign Ownership of Agricultural Land: FAQs & Resource Library, NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LAW CENTER, <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/foreign-investments-in-ag/> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

The scope and breadth of these new laws varied from state to state. In Idaho, the new statute would prohibit a foreign government or a foreign state-controlled enterprise from purchasing, acquiring, or holding any controlling interest in agricultural land, water rights, mining claims, or mineral rights in the state. The law in Idaho is more comprehensive compared to the weaker version adopted in Tennessee. In Tennessee, a nonresident alien, foreign business, or foreign government, or their agent is prohibited from purchasing real property in the state if the country where the person or organization resides or is located is on the U.S. Department of the Treasury's sanctions programs and country information list.

The law adopted in Florida is currently being litigation in federal court in *Shen v. Simpson*, No. 4:23-cv-208 (N.D. Fla. 2023).

## **National Security Threat**

It's no secret that China uses nontraditional means to gather intelligence within the boundaries of the United States. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice calls Chinese espionage the FBI's greatest counterintelligence priority.<sup>2</sup>

The nation was shocked when a Chinese spy balloon brazenly crossed over the United States in last year.<sup>3</sup> The United States Department of Defense later confirmed the balloon was capable of capturing images and collecting signals from United States

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<sup>2</sup> The China Threat, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/the-china-threat#:~:text=The%20counterintelligence%20and%20economic%20espionage,the%20FBI's%20top%20counterintelligence%20priority>. (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Natasha Bertrand, Chinese spy balloon was able to transmit information back to Beijing | CNN politics CNN (2023), <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/03/politics/chinese-spy-balloon/index.html> (last visited Sep 20, 2023).

military sites.<sup>4</sup> This incident helped to trigger a larger national debate on foreign adversaries spying on the American homeland.

Since March of 2021, the United States Department of Defense has received 366 reports of unidentified aerial phenomena.<sup>5</sup> An initial assessment found that in 26 cases the phenomena were unmanned aircraft or similar to drones, and another 163 were balloons or balloon-like entities.<sup>6</sup> This is concerning for the State of Kansas due to the fact that there are three major military installations located in the State (McConnell Air Force Base and the U.S. Army bases located at Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley), in addition to a significant Air National Guard presence at Forbes Field.

There are also several institutions within Kansas that handle and research sensitive technologies and dangerous pathogens that could be vulnerable to spying by foreign adversaries. One of these institutions is the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). The NBAF is a 574,000 square-foot facility located on a secure federally-owned site in Manhattan, Kansas.<sup>7</sup> It is a state-of-the-art facility that was built by the United States Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate to fulfill the research mission of the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> 2022 Annual Report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena, Director of National Intelligence, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Unclassified-2022-Annual-Report-UAP.pdf> (last visited Sep 21, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, USDA, <https://www.usda.gov/nbaf> (last visited Sep 19, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

The NBAF is the first facility in the United States with biosafety level-4 containment that is also capable of housing large livestock.<sup>9</sup> Biosafety levels range from level-1 to level-4. Biosafety level-4 is the highest level of biological safety. The microbes in a biosafety level-4 laboratory are dangerous and pose a high risk of aerosol-transmitted infections. Without treatment, infections caused by these microbes are fatal. In biosafety level-4 laboratories, staff must change clothing before entering and shower upon exiting. All work with these microbes must be performed while the microbe is completely sealed and with the staff likely wearing a full-body, air-supplied suit.<sup>10</sup>

Another institution of note that could be a target of spying by foreign adversaries is the Aircraft Structural Test and Evaluation Center (ASTEC). The ASTEC is a component of the National Institute for Aviation Research located at Wichita State University and encompasses 250,000 square feet of space. The ASTEC is a secure site designed to accommodate proprietary defense and industry research and certification testing. The lab has performed research and structural testing on aircraft such as the Learjet 85, MQ-9 Reaper, B-52, KC-135, F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, B1-B Lancer, and UH-60 Black Hawk.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, Chinese nationals have succeeded in gaining access to military bases and other sensitive sites in the United States as many as 100 times, according to

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<sup>9</sup> CDC LC Quick Learn: Recognize the four Biosafety Levels, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/training/quicklearns/biosafety/> (last visited Sep 19, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> CDC LC Quick Learn: Recognize the four Biosafety Levels, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/training/quicklearns/biosafety/> (last visited Sep 19, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Aircraft Structural Test and Evaluation Center (ASTEC), Wichita State University, [https://www.wichita.edu/industry\\_and\\_defense/NIAR/Laboratories/astec/astec.php](https://www.wichita.edu/industry_and_defense/NIAR/Laboratories/astec/astec.php) (last visited Sep 20, 2023).

federal officials. These incidents appear to be part of an organized effort by the Chinese government to test U.S. security practices. Examples of these unorthodox breaches include instances of Chinese nationals in scuba gear swimming near a U.S. government rocket-launch site in Florida and a group of Chinese nationals taking photos at a U.S. Army range.<sup>12</sup>

Federal officials have been particularly concerned about recent attempts by Chinese-owned companies to acquire land near sensitive United States military sites. In 2020, questions were raised when a Chinese-owned company moved forward with plans to build wind turbines near the Laughlin Air Force Base in Texas. This project prompted concerns that the wind turbines could interfere with low-level flight training routes and be used to spy on American troops.<sup>13</sup>

In another instance, plans were ultimately scrapped for a Chinese owned food manufacturer to acquire more than 300 acres of farmland after the company attempted to make the purchase in North Dakota in 2022. The land in question was just twenty minutes away from Grand Forks Air Force Base, which is described as “the backbone of all U.S. military communications across the globe.” Experts believed that the U.S. Air Force would have had little ability to detect surveillance being conducted by the Chinese

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<sup>12</sup> Gordon Lubold, Warren P. Strobel & Aruna Viswanatha, WSJ News Exclusive | Chinese gate-crashers at U.S. Bases Spark espionage concerns The Wall Street Journal (2023), <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/chinese-gate-crashers-at-u-s-bases-spark-espionage-concerns-cdef8187> (last visited Sep 20, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Robbie Gramer, Deep in the Heart of Texas, a Chinese Wind Farm Raises Eyebrows Foreign Policy (2020), [https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/25/texas-chinese-wind-farm-national-security-espionage-electrical-grid/#cookie\\_message\\_anchor](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/25/texas-chinese-wind-farm-national-security-espionage-electrical-grid/#cookie_message_anchor) (last visited Sep 21, 2023).

government from the property due to the simplicity of the antennas that the Chinese could use to collect the information.<sup>14</sup>

Because Kansas is home to several military installations and research institutions that contain sensitive information, preventing aliens and foreign corporations from purchasing land is essential to reducing the risk that these facilities face from unauthorized intrusions and spying by foreign nationals and governments.

### **Threat to Food Supply**

Not all land purchased by foreign nationals and foreign businesses is used for agricultural purposes. As of 2019, 49% of foreign-owned land was forest land, 25% was crop land, and 24% was for pasture and other agricultural uses. Thus, approximately half of foreign owned land is agricultural in nature. Currently, the United States produces adequate food to feed U.S. citizens, even after adjusting for food waste. Still, large scale ownership of U.S. land by foreign nationals poses security risks to the food supply chain.<sup>15</sup>

In 2013, Shuanghui International Holdings Limited, a subsidiary of the Chinese WH Group, purchased Smithfield Foods. It marked the largest Chinese purchase of a U.S. asset in history. Though the WH Group is privately owned, the state-owned Bank of

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<sup>14</sup> Eamon Javers, Chinese Company's Purchase of North Dakota Farmland Raises National Security Concerns in Washington CNBC (2022), <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/01/chinese-purchase-of-north-dakota-farmland-raises-national-security-concerns-in-washington.html> (last visited Sep 21, 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Jamie Lutz & Caitlin Welsh, FOREIGN PURCHASES OF U.S. AGRICULTURAL LAND: FACTS, FIGURES, AND AN ASSESSMENT OF REAL THREATS CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/foreign-purchases-us-agricultural-land-facts-figures-and-assessment-real-threats> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

China provided approximately half of the financing for the \$7.1 billion purchase. The purchase included more than 146,000 acres, mostly in Missouri, Colorado, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Utah, and Virginia. It accounts for 25% of the U.S. pork industry and gives the foreign-owned company significant control over the entire U.S. pork supply chain. It's control the CCP exercised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite U.S. meat shortages at the time, Chinese-owned Smithfield increased its pork exports and closed U.S. plants during the pandemic.<sup>16</sup>

China's ability to utilize global supply chains as leverage to advance its political and military is a concern, according to the "Annual Threat Assessment" issued by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence. Specifically, Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence, told the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence earlier this year that China intends "to increase global supply chain dependencies...with the aim of using such technologies and dependencies, rather, to threaten and cut-off foreign countries during crisis."<sup>17</sup>

The solution to this threat is an obvious one. U.S. citizens and companies must control our own land. It is a hedge against the threat China and other foreign bad actors pose to our supply chain and our food security. It also provides leverage to the United

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<sup>16</sup> Jamie Lutz & Caitlin Welsh, FOREIGN PURCHASES OF U.S. AGRICULTURAL LAND: FACTS, FIGURES, AND AN ASSESSMENT OF REAL THREATS CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/foreign-purchases-us-agricultural-land-facts-figures-and-assessment-real-threats> (last visited Sep 25, 2023). 15 C.F.R. 7.4

<sup>17</sup> ODNI Office of Strategic Communications, ODNI HOME HOME (2023), <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/congressional-testimonies/congressional-testimonies-2023/3685-dni-haines-opening-statement-on-the-2023-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).



States in future crises. As long as China remains dependent on other nations to feed its population, the ability of the Chinese government to extract concessions from the United States is at least somewhat limited.

### **Land Acquisitions by Mexican Drug Cartels**

The list of foreign adversaries, as determined by United States Department of Commerce, includes the following countries: (1) The People's Republic of China (China); (2) Republic of Cuba; (3) Islamic Republic of Iran; (4) Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea); (5) Russian Federation; and (6) the Regime of Venezuelan politician Nicolás Maduro.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, that list can be changed by the unilateral action of the Secretary of State. So there is no guarantee that any country will remain on the list, particularly if that country is a major trading partner of the United States and owns the majority of the U.S. debt.

Another limitation of the foreign adversaries list is that it is only limited to nation states. The adverse acquisition of U.S. agricultural land is not limited to the countries and nationals on the official foreign adversaries list. The list does not address foreign nationals utilizing U.S. agricultural land as fronts for illegal enterprises that can jeopardize public safety.

In Riverside, California, Mexican drug cartels have been paying cash for land and setting up illegal marijuana farms. Other such land acquisitions have been identified

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<sup>18</sup> 15 C.F.R. 7.4

around other cities in California including Anza, Twentynine Palms, East Lancaster, Lake Hughes, Neenach, Action, and Pinon Hills. Chad Bianco, the Sheriff of Riverdale, confirmed that these illegal farms are relying on human trafficking victims to support the farming operations of these illegal foreign owned enterprises.<sup>19</sup>

In 2012, federal agents raided a horse ranch in south Oklahoma. The ranch was being utilized as a front for the Los Zetas Drug Cartel to launder U.S. dollars obtained through illegal drug transactions into the United States under the guise of horse breeding and racing.<sup>20</sup>

As of July 2023, there are 14 Kansas counties that have been identified as high intensity drug trafficking areas by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).<sup>21</sup> Rural police departments in Kansas often lack the manpower or resources to combat these sophisticated drug trafficking operations.<sup>22</sup> With the accelerating availability of illegal drugs laced with fentanyl, the crisis is becoming all the more dangerous.

Limited oversight of foreign land purchases in Kansas leaves our state vulnerable to these illegal enterprises being set up by the drug cartels on land purchased by Mexican

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<sup>19</sup> Jorge Ventura, “no-go” zones: Cartel-run illegal marijuana operations on US soil, NewsNation (2023), <https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/immigration/border-coverage/cartels/no-go-zones-cartels-setting-up-marijuana-farms-in-us/> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Nolan Clay, Oklahoma Horse Ranch called a Front for Mexican drug cartel The Oklahoman (2012), <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/columns/2012/06/12/oklahoma-horse-ranch-called-a-front-for-mexican-drug-cartel/61066031007/> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> High Intensity Drug trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Programs Counties July 2023, HIDTA Program, <https://www.hidtaprogram.org/> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> DEA and Kansas Law Enforcement Partners join together to find drug traffickers behind overdoses, United States Drug Enforcement Administration (2022), <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2022/04/07/dea-and-kansas-law-enforcement-partners-join-together-find-drug> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

nationals or other foreign entities. These unlawful enterprises incentivize human trafficking and support the proliferation of illegal drugs within the boundaries of Kansas.

### **Land Acquisition Opportunities for Young Kansans**

According to a survey conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition and analyzed by the University of Wisconsin, 59% of young farmers identified finding affordable land to buy as very or extremely challenging.<sup>23</sup> It is the number one barrier to young farmers continuing in the footsteps of their parents. Allowing foreign nationals and foreign corporations to bid for and purchase this land only makes the problem worse. Prices rise above the reach of young Americans trying to start a career in agriculture.

U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, a farmer from Iowa, observed in an interview that “[t]here’s an entire generation of ownership waiting in the wings. If deep-pocketed investors come in, foreign or not, it drives up prices and makes it harder for new and beginning farmers to get started.”<sup>24</sup> It is expected that over 40% of America’s agricultural land will change ownership in the next 20 years.<sup>25</sup> It will be up to us to decide whether it goes to young farmers and ranchers, or to foreign interests that do not share the same interest in the preservation of American national and food security.

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<sup>23</sup> Ximena Bustillo, THERE AREN’T ENOUGH YOUNG FARMERS. CONGRESS IS LOOKING TO CHANGE THAT NPR (2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/01/1120100449/farm-bill-not-enough-young-farmers-congress#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20survey%2C%2059,%25%20%E2%80%94%20among%20farmers%20of%20color>. (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Q&A: Foreign Ownership of U.S. Farmland, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley (2022), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/qanda-foreign-ownership-of-us-farmland> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Rose White, Young Michigan Growers Want to farm – but they can’t afford land mlive (2023), <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2023/04/why-young-michigan-farmers-are-fighting-for-land.html> (last visited Sep 25, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

Legislation is necessary to protect Kansas' sensitive infrastructures from intrusion by America's foreign adversaries, to protect our state's food security, disrupt the establishment of any unlawful foreign enterprises in our state, and provide opportunities for young Kansans to compete for acquisition of agricultural land. By limiting land ownership by aliens and foreign-owned corporations, our state will be taking the necessary steps to ensure Kansans are more safe and secure at home.