

**Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas House of Representatives
The Honorable Larry Powell, Chairman
Testimony on HB 2587
March 14, 2012**

Chairman Powell and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing us to submit comments concerning HB 2587 and Kansas conservation easements programs.

It is our desire that our ranch NOT EVER be developed, but without the conservation easement program in perpetuity, we could not accomplish that goal.

USDA figures from 1992 to 1997 show that 1.2 Million acres of agricultural land are lost each year to industrial and residential development. More recent figures confirm an ever-increasing trend and point towards 1.4 Million acres of agricultural land lost each year to development. It is important to note that these figures account for only the PRODUCTION agricultural land, that is, land that was being used for ranching or crop production. The figures for total rural land being developed are much higher.

Of course, a growing economy and strong country need both industrial and residential development, but at some point, a balance must be struck because a reliable economy and strong country also need a reliable food source, which comes from its agricultural land base. We as a country and society also realize the importance of maintaining the integrity of unique and irreplaceable ecosystems. It is in maintaining this vital agricultural land base and maintaining unique ecosystems that the Conservation Easements are so important.

My husband and I operate a backgrounding and grazing operation in the Flint Hills of Kansas. We feel we have improved the land since we acquired it by properly managing both the prairie and tame grasses on the ranch, by preventing erosion problems, and by cleaning up the junk left by previous owners. It is our intention to leave the land better than we found it and hopefully to maintain the integrity of our land well into the future. The conservation easement programs, which provide for the protection and preservation of agricultural land, allow us to do that.

In our case we are working with the Kansas Land Trust (KLT) and using the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), to make certain that our ranch land will stay ranch land in the future. Our conservation easement allows us to remain the sole owners of the ranch and to direct the use of our land as a working ranch. It also allows us to sell it, lease it, or will it to heirs. The one thing it does not allow is development of the land, which is something we do not want to happen.

All around us we see land being developed either from various industrial enterprises, or into “ranchettes” for residential housing. There are weekly ads in our local paper, which specify tracts of 5 to 40 acres that are wanted for development.

The beauty of the conservation easement program is that it enables us to realize a portion of the value of our land now, which can help with cash flow, expansion, or debt relief. Then if we sell the land in the future, we can price it somewhat below the market price which should make it more affordable for another young couple to purchase and run it as a working ranch.

It is our hope that in this manner we can perpetuate in future generations of Kansans not only preservation of agricultural land, but also the ranching lifestyle and work ethic.

Other states are also realizing where the base of their economy lies and are setting up dedicated funding for conservation easements. A statement made by one of these folks who was with the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association, has stayed with me. His comment was, “We are placing easements on as much land as we can get funding for and are preserving land for future agricultural use. But we should have started thirty years ago.”

In closing, I believe we all recognize that agricultural land in Kansas is one of our most valuable assets and is the base of our economy. Your support of the current conservation easement program in perpetuity is vitally important. To limit the length of time that land can be protected from development would ultimately result in the industrial or residential development of much more of Kansas’ vitally important agricultural land base.

Thank you again for your time and consideration of our comments on this matter.

Sincerely,

Rose Bacon

Rose and Kent Bacon
RK Cattle Company
1181 Four Mile Road
Council Grove, KS 66846
Ph. 620-767-7048
Email: rkcattle@excite.com