

Kansas Farm Bureau
POLICY STATEMENT

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Re:HB 2517 an act concerning water

February 1, 2012

Submitted by:

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Director of Natural Resources

Chairman Powell and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 2517. I am Steve Swaffar, Natural Resources Director for the Kansas Farm Bureau.

HB 2517 makes the pilot Water Transition Assistance Program (WTAP) a permanent program in the State. In 2006 KFB testified in support HB 2710, the bill that authorized the WTAP program, today is no different. For the exact same reasons we supported the program in 2006, we believe the program should be made permanent. Targeted water rights purchases in the highest priority areas where aquifer declines are most severe or interstate water compact compliance is critical; sustaining crop production by transitioning to dryland farming; and minimizing impacts to local economies.

In 2006 KFB testified that the pilot concept of WTAP would allow the Legislature and State agencies the time to evaluate and improve on the program with reevaluation in five years. We have seen improvements come through streamlining the sign-up process, enhancing payments, and by expanding the target areas. These improvements have increased eligibility and desirability.

Another improvement to the program is proposed in HB 2517, partial retirement of water rights. Partial retirements of water rights may provide a boost to enrollment this program needs to make a big

difference in measurable, positive impacts. Producers may use a partial retirement as to find greater efficiencies in water use and be the true transition to dryland farming, thus extending the useable life of the available water. Additionally, USDA's Risk Management Agency is currently looking at the insurability of crops under limited irrigation. Once these products and coverage are developed and quantified, producers will have greater flexibility in water use and crop choices.

We encourage the Committee to pass out HB 2517 favorably. Thank you and I would be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.