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Testimony on HB 2595
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development
By Chad Bontrager, Deputy Secretary
Kansas Department of Agriculture
February 17, 2016

Chairman Hutton and members of the Committee, I am Chad Bontrager, Deputy Secretary at the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA). I am here today to express the department's support for House Bill 2595 (HB 2595) regarding labeling of food by political subdivisions.

Agriculture is the largest industry, employer and economic driver in Kansas, contributing nearly \$63 billion, or 43 percent, of the state's Gross Region Product (GRP) and employing 12 percent of the state's workforce. When food retail establishments and restaurants are factored in, agriculture accounts for nearly \$73 billion, or 50 percent, of GRP and represents 20 percent of the workforce. KDA takes very seriously our responsibility to promote and encourage growth in agriculture while also doing all we can to ensure a safe food supply and promote public health.

In accordance with the Kansas Food Code, food establishments, as defined in the Kansas Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act, are required to label allergen information and ingredients on foods packaged in the food establishment for food safety and consumer protection purposes. HB 2595 should not affect the department's ability to continue this consumer protection and public health service. In fact, it supports our position that the requirements for food labeling should be uniform across the country. This is a debate currently ongoing at the national level as well. We would like to see some clarification in the bill addressing the agency's role in providing statewide requirements for allergen and ingredient labeling. This will ensure the continuation of the Kansas implementation of nationwide FDA standards.

HB 2595 would prevent the State of Kansas and other subdivisions of government from requiring additional labeling requirements for food nutrition information. Such additional labeling requirements would create significant regulatory and financial burdens on food establishments across Kansas, could be used to prevent or restrict the sale or distribution of certain food products, and could actually result in confusion among the very consumers we aim to serve. The current uses of terms like "all natural," "no antibiotics," "Grass-fed," "non-GMO," and more are confusing and can be used to mislead consumers regarding perceived, not science-based, food-health disparities.

In addition, HB 2595 would prevent the State of Kansas and other subdivisions of government from restricting the growing or raising of livestock or grain, vegetables, fruits or other crops grown or raised for food and approved for sale by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or other federal or state government agencies. This is a provision the Kansas Department of Agriculture strongly supports. Our staff works each day to help Kansas farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses grow and expand. We strongly oppose any effort that would restrict the ability of farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses to do their jobs, growing and raising food products to feed the global population.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.