

Office of the President

July 27, 2020

Karen A. Woodrich
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service
760 South Broadway Blvd.
Salina, Kansas 67401

Dear Ms. Woodrich:

As President of the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) and on behalf of the state's largest general farm organization representing more than 30,000 farm and ranch families through our 105 county Farm Bureau associations, I am writing to request your support and expeditious processing of the pending request for USDA PL-566 Watershed Act assistance to prepare a watershed plan for the streamflow augmentation proposal prepared by Big Bend Groundwater Management District.

Agriculture is the prime economic driver in the project area, which is comprised of 4,587 farms producing \$1.89 billion in sales annually. The District's proposed project is the product of arduous stakeholder efforts to address U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) water resource demands for the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) without harming the farmers and ranchers who are the economic engine of the region. The District's project will address FWS concerns by constructing a 50-unit wellfield to provide groundwater to augment the Rattlesnake Creek streamflow into the Refuge, as specifically authorized by Kansas law. K.S.A. 82a-706b(a)(2).

The main alternative considered to address FWS concerns would involve the mandatory curtailment of agricultural water rights. Such draconian groundwater cuts in an area blessed with abundant supply, though heavily developed usage, would reduce agricultural productivity in the area by roughly \$95 million *annually*. The Kansas Farm Bureau believes streamflow augmentation is a much more amenable solution. The District's augmentation proposal to resolve FWS concerns carries an estimated total project construction cost of \$12 million, making it the clear cost-effective solution.

USDA conservation programs like PL-566 are specifically designed to help farmers, ranchers, and rural communities address conservation concerns through voluntary, infrastructure investment. In this case, advancing the District's project through this PL-566 augmentation project will avoid a harmful regulatory approach that would significantly undermine the key economic driver in the region — farmers and ranchers — and the rural communities that depend upon a robust agricultural sector.

Very truly yours,



Richard Felts
President