Testimony SB2353

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Testimony in Support for SB2353

To the Honorable Chairman and the members of the Committee, we submit these remarks on behalf of DRC.

Mr. Chairman,

DRC would like to support SB2353. Over the past year our group formed a soil committee, talked to soil districts, NDSU extension, attended the state soil convention, and talked to farmers and ranchers about what they can do to better their service to farmers and ranchers across North Dakota. Time and time again we've heard the same thing. The storage buildings are getting older. They have vehicles and tractors that are getting a bit outdated. They have Nurseries or tree coolers that need more capacity or are aging rapidly. After all of our meetings, it became clear that updated infrastructure was needed at our Soil Conservation Districts.

Conservation Districts have good funding but there is a blindspot for some of these infrastructure needs. They do not always qualify for federal or state grants in the traditional sense. County mills are not always there to fund these projects. In counties with high amounts of non taxable federal land it's not as simple as raising the levies to pay for these projects.

SB2353 is a simple solution to address this issue. It is a study to assess what infrastructure needs updating. This bill would give the Extension office the tools they need to analyze the situation and provide a report to the committee. We spoke to the NDSU extension office to ask what they needed and they had told us that 80 thousand would be needed if we wanted to contract a full study and have some extra to deal with travel and staff hours to present the data. After speaking with the soil districts it was brought to our attention that some districts do have 10 year plans in place for their infrastructure. We specifically worded the legislation to give the Extension office the power to use their discretion when spending money and we don't expect to use all this money. Extension will have the options to do a study, a simple data call to the districts, or something in between. If the money is not used it will simply go back into the general fund.

This is a cost effective way to determine exactly how much money we need to spend on our Soil Districts and if we follow through with providing them the infrastructure they need, they can increase their capacity to produce revenue and be less dependent on the state.

We urge a DO PASS on this Bill.