

Testimony of Dakota Resource Council
Sam Wagner Lobbyist #1034

Chairman Luick and members of the committee,

My name is Sam Wagner and I am testifying today in favor of SB2342 on behalf of the Dakota Resource Council. DRC has more than 650 members statewide and was founded in the 1970s to promote sustainable use of North Dakota's natural resources and family-owned and operated agriculture.

What does SB2342 actually do? Simply put, this bill would like to accomplish the following:

- **Build on existing ND Soil Conservation infrastructure**
- **Modernize the Century Code**
- **Coordinate healthy soils principles statewide and properly fund them**
- **Establish a statewide network of champions to promote soil health stewardship**
- **Add healthy soil education to soil conservation districts**
- **Provide statewide healthy soil grants and financial incentive programs**
- **Provide Technical assistance to achieve Healthy Soil goals**

Topsoil Issues

North Dakota's agricultural industries have many difficult challenges looming on the horizon as we start this new decade but few are as urgent as soil health. North Dakota is losing on average 3-5 tons/acre per year on cultivated lands. Through new information gained over the last decade and better understanding through our research we have come to the conclusion that there is more to saving our topsoil than we previously believed. Due to these discoveries it is time that we modernize our century code to recognize the aspects of soil health to include soil restoration. North Dakota has some of the best and most fertile soil in the United States and possibly the world. If we can sustain and build this resource we can continue to lead the nation and the world in agricultural production.

The current soil conditions that we have are unsustainable for North Dakota's agricultural production in the long term and the short term. North Dakota's soils continue to lose high levels of carbon. Farmer's have lost hundreds of millions of dollars due to flooding and droughts in the past few years alone. North Dakota waters have suffered, 12 North Dakota lakes were under advisory 2020 due to blue green algae blooms, and 2 were under warnings. Blue Green Algae Blooms can be caused by excess nutrients from fertilizers and animal manure. By using healthy soil practices we can lower the amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizers and do better at preventing over

application saving money for both the farmer and the state. The farmer has less overhead costs in fertilizer and chemicals for weed management. The state would see better flood mitigation and less clean up from over application of fertilizer.

Modernize the North Dakota Century Code:

I'd like to read you a passage from the ND Soil Conservation Districts History.

“Since 1997, the North Dakota State University Extension Service has assisted the director with the administrative duties of the committee within the limits of legislative appropriation to deliver information and services to the districts (S. L. 1997, Ch. 50)”

Note the words “within the limits of the legislative appropriation to deliver information and services to the districts” With this bill we want to expand the limits and language to ensure that our extension office has the proper definitions needed to pursue modern healthy soils practices. This is not just the old way of thinking that ensured protection against erosion, topsoil loss, or leaching. In many cases we’re still using language from the 50s and 60 and even in some cases the Great Depression Era when we think about soil health. SB2342 would create a new subsection under North Dakota Century Code, 4.1-20 Soil Conservation. This bill adds the principle of soil restoration to the already written language for soil conservation. This is a very important addition because soil restoration works on building back our top soil. Simply conserving what we have will not be enough and restoration has the added effect of sequestering carbon. By forming new soil we can increase the amount of carbon that our soils absorb and lock it away in the ground naturally. Carbon sequestration by introducing plants and animals naturally to restore the soil is cheap, effective, and has the added benefit of making our land more productive for both farming and ranching.

Reorganizing our Existing Structures

SB2342 organizes statewide infrastructure to give access to knowledge and resources to connect soil experts, conservation groups, producer groups, and individuals championing the principles of soil health to create a statewide network that gives . By strengthening existing programs and giving future state and federal financial incentives that can be more readily accessed and promoted, this bill will assist North Dakota farmers, ranchers, gardeners, city planners and landowners, helping them improve the health of their soils, water, and local economy.

This bill will reorganize our existing facilities and this bill doesn’t mandate new taxes but can give the soil districts the authority to collect levies if they wish to seek more funding for their programs or start new projects in their jurisdiction. We also are not trying to

force anyone to buy into projects that they don't want to start. However what this bill does will also centralize our already existing research from universities and our extension offices the ability to create a statewide network to collaborate on soil health issues. This bill also appropriates money in the form of a healthy soil grant that would help North Dakota farmers, ranchers, and entrepreneurs find solutions and practices that would be promoted throughout the state.

In conclusion we'd like to thank you for taking the time to hear our testimony. I stand for Questions