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January 28, 2020

Family Farmers Speak Out Against Family Separation Bill

By Ben Abell & Bree Pearsall, Farmers in Oldham County and Longtime CFA Members

We are Ben Abell and Bree Pearsall, a husband and wife team running a mid-sized diversified farm in Oldham County, Kentucky. As small business owners, farmers, and employers we are deeply concerned about the impact that Senate Bill 1 could have on the immigrant employees who make our business a success. As many Kentucky farmers know, immigrants not only provide a reliable, efficient, and knowledgeable workforce for our farms, they are in fact the only practical workforce available. The passage of Senate Bill 1(SB 1) will damage our ability to recruit and maintain these vital members of our community and economy by creating a climate of fear and persecution among Kentucky's immigrants.

Our farm, Rootbound Farm, employs 10 seasonal farmworkers through the H2A guest worker visa program. We also employ 3 full-time year-round local employees. Our employees, both the immigrants and locals, come to us from all walks of life. Most of them have families and young children close in age to our own. We know that farm work is hard work, and our dedicated staff who show up every day to do the work we love - managing livestock, growing healthy food, and tending the land. When we are up before dawn preparing for the harvest, it is our immigrant staff who are alongside us. When we are working late into the night seeding crops ahead of a rain our staff are working as well. In farm communities, we know the central role that immigrants play in our agriculture economy, from the crop fields to the milking parlors to the horse stalls. **Kentucky farmers know that the future of a thriving farm economy is tied to a stable and safe community that welcomes our immigrant neighbors.** SB 1 is a far-reaching bill that encourages vast numbers of our civil staff from hospitals, to court personnel, to social workers, to interrogate folks about immigration status and then to aid in efforts to enforce immigration law. In short, this is a racial profiling bill asking people who are invested in helping their communities to become undercover immigration agents policing their communities.

Even national farm groups such as the Farm Bureau are elevating the importance of legislative solutions to stabilize our immigrant agricultural workforce. **SB1 is not a solution that will work for farm businesses, it is a step backward that will**



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result in a disruption to the essential business operations for agriculture businesses of all sizes across the state. Furthermore and most importantly, it is a human rights issue and contrary to the values we uphold in our local communities. We are better than this. We cannot let fear and mistrust cause us to demonize each other, especially our vulnerable immigrant neighbors who have come here for a better life and are playing essential roles in our economy.

Supporters of this bill might try to say that so-called “good” immigrants like the hard-working folks at our farm will not be affected by this bill. But we know that under this bill racial profiling, harassment, and interrogations about status will rise for people who “look suspicious” and do not benefit from white privilege. This will ultimately lead to a less welcoming atmosphere that affects immigrants’ ability to integrate and thrive in our community. On the most transactional level, this will ultimately lead to making Kentucky a less attractive place to work and live and more difficult for Kentucky farmers to have happy, and successful workers. But this bill will have a much deeper and longer-lasting impact on our state’s culture, communities, and economy than can be quantified by worker productivity and business profitability. **The bottom line on this bill is that it will codify into law the devaluing of human life, the disregard of empathy for hard-working families, and the entrenching of a loss of dignity for all of Kentucky’s workers.**

On the Kentucky state seal, we see a drawing of an immigrant shaking the hand of a native-born Kentuckian with the powerful message, “United We Stand, Divided We Fall”. It depicts a time when people traveled to this state to seek a better life for themselves and their families. Over two hundred years ago, that immigrant was us, the white people now leading the charge to build a state that stands in contradiction to our founding ethos. We urge the members of the Kentucky legislature to vote against this bill and to focus on building a thriving Commonwealth for all Kentuckians.

Join us in taking action to protect our immigrant neighbors and agricultural communities. Call 1-800-372-7181 and ask your Senator to vote NO on SB 1.