

Harney County Farm Bureau
SB 432
Senate Rules Committee

June 26, 2017

Chair Burdick and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rusty Inglis and I am the president of Harney County Farm Bureau. Our farm bureau writes today to oppose HB 432 and the -13 amendments. We are one of the counties that would be allowed to take the exception under the bill for any business or housing reason.

Agriculture is the life-blood of Harney County. With nearly \$90 million in economic value as of 2012, agriculture is the primary economic driver of the County and critical to our county's future. Our farms and ranches support local businesses and provide jobs to the community. While we want to see more economic activity brought into our county, SB 432 is not the right solution for Harney County.

One of the biggest drivers of increased cost of agricultural lands in our county is people who want to buy small parcels of land out in the country and put homes on them. Historically, these people have brought in mobile homes or other trailer type homes and often leave after one rough winter, abandoning the home. The abandoned trailers have become a burden for our county, and costs our ratepayer base because the power provider will pay to run electricity to the home only to have it abandoned a short time later. I have personally seen perfectly good agriculture land approved for non-farm dwellings, then abandoned. Hardly a day goes by that I don't talk to a young rancher/farmer that wants to either get into the business or expand their operation only to be unable to find land because the realtors and absentee owners of adjacent lands that are zoned agriculture are holding out for outrageous prices based on their hope that the county will allow home sites to be placed on land zoned agriculture. Well Harney County has allowed that in the past, and where has it got us, NO WHERE in terms of economic development. SB 432 would exacerbate this problem.

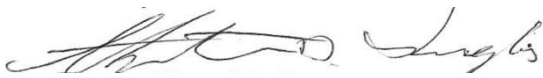
We have a lot of buildable and developable land in Harney County that is ready for businesses to move in to increase economic activity. However, businesses are not moving in because we are located in such a remote area and lack the infrastructure they need to be successful. We have long accepted that we are an agricultural community, and are doing our part to manage our water and land resources to ensure that we will be able to be an agricultural community for decades to come. SB 432 would only serve to drive up land prices on speculation and put property out of reach of farmers and ranchers, particularly young farmers and ranchers, looking to grow and become part of our agricultural community. Allowing the county to change the zoning on property without any regard for impacts to neighbors also increases the potential for conflicts which make farming and ranching more difficult.

While the bill does contain a carve out for "high value farmland," I can't think of a single farm or ranch in Harney County that would be protected by this definition – it does not recognize cattle or hay, our two most valuable and productive products here in Harney County.

In closing I want to say the following. This may sound personal, because it is. I may be at the end of my ranching career, but I have a passion for ensuring that young people are still able to make a living in agriculture. The best suited and most economic use of the land in our county is agriculture. If you want to help rural communities, then pass bills that support the most economical industry in their counties, and that would be agriculture in the case of Harney County.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on SB 432. I ask you to vote 'no' on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thurston Inglis".

Thurston "Rusty" Inglis
President, Harney County Farm Bureau