

Representatives Ingels, Ehlert, and Sleck,

Thank you for serving on the House subcommittee reviewing House File 389 to establish a grant program for costs of school agricultural education teachers. I encourage the committee to support HF 389 and move it forward for consideration as an active piece of legislation.

I am Eric Smith of Independence, Iowa. I was a member of the local school board when agricultural education returned to the high school in Fall 2013. Part of that decision was determining if additional instruction outside of the teacher's 180-day contract would be included in the agricultural education program.

The agricultural industry is an Iowa strength. Many local school districts have added agricultural education programs to respond to the need for more workers. I applaud that you are considering ways to support those schools.

This grant program will help schools add agricultural education to their Career and Technology Education programs while employing an instructor with an extended-days contract.

When my school district added the agricultural education program, the teacher contract for more than 180 days was criticized by the existing staff. To address the concern, the teacher's salary, inclusive of nearly sixty days of additional instruction, was offset by contributions from the school district's foundation for several years. Local supporters of the new program would seek donations throughout the year to ensure that the instructor's contract would remain with those additional days of instruction the following year. Today, the full salary is covered by the general education funds of the school district. The supporters are able to donate to specific program needs, such as new greenhouse equipment. If this grant program was in place in 2013, the school would demonstrated that the additional instruction costs would not be coming from the general education fund, but from completely independent funds.

I ask that you support HF 389 to move forward as an active piece of legislation. This grant will help school districts avoid some of the stress encountered by my school when we brought in the agricultural education program.

Eric B. Smith