Kentuckians, keepers of Kentucky culture, and Members of the Kentucky General Assembly,

I am writing in rejoicing support of designating the Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) as the Official State Native Fruit of Kentucky. This recognition would honor one of our Commonwealth's most remarkable native species while encouraging continued conservation, research, education, and economic opportunity centered around a fruit that is deeply rooted in Kentucky's landscapes, history, and culture.

As the owner of Green Mammoth Nursery in Paris, Kentucky, and as someone who has spent years growing, studying, and promoting pawpaws, I have seen the enthusiasm this remarkable native fruit inspires. Whether among home gardeners, commercial growers, researchers, chefs, or visitors discovering the fruit for the first time, the pawpaw has become a source of pride that continues to unite people across our state.

Kentucky is the heart of pawpaw country.

The Commonwealth is home to the finest native pawpaw habitat in North America. Our rich river valleys and forested hillsides have provided ideal conditions for this species for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence suggests that Indigenous peoples valued the pawpaw and likely played an important role in selecting and dispersing desirable fruit through travel and trade. It is entirely possible that descendants of those ancient selections still exist within Kentucky's forests today, representing an irreplaceable reservoir of genetic diversity waiting to be discovered, protected, and appreciated.

The pawpaw is an essential part of Kentucky's native ecosystem. It is the exclusive larval host plant of the beautiful zebra swallowtail butterfly, one of our region’s most dazzling native butterflies. Protecting and celebrating the pawpaw therefore supports far more than a single fruit tree; it helps preserve the intricate relationships between Kentucky's native plants, wildlife, and forests that have evolved together over countless generations.

Together, we are building new opportunities for Kentucky agriculture. Nurseries throughout the state supply trees, seeds, and scion wood to customers across the country. Farmers continue establishing commercial orchards to meet increasing demand for fresh fruit, while entrepreneurs create value-added products such as pawpaw ice cream, beverages, and specialty foods. Festivals, educational events, and agritourism centered around the pawpaw introduce thousands of visitors each year to Kentucky's unique natural and agricultural heritage while supporting local communities and businesses.

No state is better positioned to lead the future of the pawpaw than Kentucky. Kentucky State University has earned international recognition for its leadership in pawpaw research, breeding, Cooperative Extension, and conservation. Through its stewardship of the USDA National Clonal Germplasm Repository for *Asimina triloba*, continued cultivar development, and outreach to growers, the university has established Kentucky as the global center for pawpaw science. Few

states can claim such a meaningful connection between one of their native species and a world renowned research program.

Beyond its scientific and economic importance, the pawpaw remains something even more meaningful; it is a living connection between Kentucky's forests, its earliest inhabitants, its farming traditions, and our future. It reminds us that some of Kentucky’s sweetest treasures have always been here, quietly growing and waiting to be enjoyed again.

The more we lift the pawpaw into public attention and care, the greater our opportunity to recover exceptional wild genetics, conserve native populations, inspire future generations of researchers and growers, and strengthen Kentucky's identity as the home of this extraordinary fruit.

Designating the pawpaw as Kentucky's Official State Native Fruit is a simple but meaningful act. It recognizes our Commonwealth's natural heritage while encouraging conservation, education, scientific discovery, agricultural innovation, and economic development. Most importantly, it affirms that Kentucky values the unique native resources that distinguish our state from every other place in the nation.

I respectfully encourage you to support this designation and help ensure that the pawpaw is remembered not as America's forgotten fruit, but as one of Kentucky's greatest natural legacies.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

James Briggs
Owner, Green Mammoth Nursery
Paris, Kentucky