Kentucky Horticulture Council
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July 9, 2026

Dr. Kirk W. Pomper
Kentucky State University
Atwood Research Facility
Frankfort, KY 40601

Re: Support for Designating the Pawpaw as the Official State Native Fruit of Kentucky

Dear Dr. Pomper -

On behalf of the Kentucky Horticulture Council (KHC), I am pleased to offer our strong support for the effort to designate the pawpaw (Asimina triloba) as the official State Native Fruit of Kentucky. As the statewide organization representing Kentucky's horticulture industry, KHC works with growers and green-industry businesses across all 120 counties in fruit, vegetable, nursery, greenhouse, and specialty crop production. From that vantage point, we see the pawpaw for what it is becoming - one of the most promising emerging specialty crops in the Commonwealth, and a fruit whose story is inseparable from Kentucky itself.

The pawpaw is the largest edible fruit native to North America and Kentucky's only native tropical fruit. For most of its history it lived at the edges of the woods and the edges of the market, known to those who grew up finding it along creek banks in late summer but rarely seen on a store shelf. That is changing. Nurseries are propagating named varieties, growers are putting in orchards, and chefs and consumers are discovering a fruit that cannot be shipped like a commodity and therefore belongs to the places that grow it. For Kentucky producers looking for high-value crops that fit small acreage, the pawpaw is a genuine opportunity.

What makes this designation fitting is that Kentucky is, without exaggeration, the center of the pawpaw world. Kentucky State University operates the only full-time pawpaw research program in the world and serves as the USDA National Clonal Germplasm Repository for the species, conserving genetic material drawn from across the fruit's native range. Under Dr. Kirk Pomper's leadership, that program has released named cultivars such as KSU-Atwood, trained the nursery propagators now supplying the trade, and hosted the International Pawpaw Conference that draws researchers and growers from around the country to Frankfort. No other state can make that claim. The pawpaw is native to much of the eastern United States, but the work of understanding it, improving it, and building an industry around it lives here.

An official designation would raise consumer awareness of a fruit most Kentuckians have never tasted, lend legitimacy to the growers and nurseries investing in it, and mark the Commonwealth's leadership in a crop that is still early enough for Kentucky to lead rather than follow. It costs the state nothing and gives our specialty crop producers a recognizable banner to grow under.

The Kentucky Horticulture Council enthusiastically supports designating the pawpaw as the official State Native Fruit of Kentucky, and we are glad to add our voice to the effort you are leading. Please

share this letter with the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture as you see fit, and do not hesitate to contact me if KHC can be of any further help as this moves forward.

Sincerely -



Trevor J Terry
Executive Director
Kentucky Horticulture Council