Dear Kentucky General Assembly's Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture,

My name is Blake Cothron and I own and operate Peaceful Heritage Nursery LLC in Stanford, KY. I'd like to express my support towards Kentucky recognizing the native pawpaw fruit tree (*Asimina triloba*) as the Official State Native Fruit of Kentucky. Not only is the pawpaw a culturally impactful fruit here in Kentucky, but it's important to native wildlife including raccoon, oppossum, and the beautiful Zebra Swallowtail butterfly that is fully dependent on pawpaw. I've spoken to many elderly people over the years that sentimentally remember foraging for wild pawpaws in the woods and on the farm. No other wild fruit has as much cultural weight and likely wildlife impact as the pawpaw. However, even more weight is now on the pawpaw as an economically viable product for Kentuckians.

Our rural and small towns in Kentucky have been ravaged economically and socially over the last 30 years from everything from the opioid epidemic to outsourcing labor and farm goods. There has been a resurgence as of late in small town rehabilitation and revitalization. Pawpaws have been identified as an iconic, attractive, and lucrative Kentucky-grown product that can bring more wealth and farm stability back into the Commonwealth. Pawpaws currently are a hit at farmer's markets, gourmet restaurants, and even wineries and breweries now making pawpaw wine and beer. Fruit prices have doubled, tripled, even quadrupled due to intense customer demand, and often small supply. Now is the time to capitalize on pawpaws' growing popularity and make a move towards recognition as the State Native Fruit Tree. This would have the additional benefits of increasing awareness and helping small farmers and producers increase demand for this fruit. A fruit that, due to it's native genetics, can withstand harsh conditions, insects and diseases, and requires no pesticides to produce a crop. It's a burgeoning, realistic, and lucrative small crop for KY farmer's and growers, and this recognition would increase the awareness of it for both producer and the KY customer looking for healthy, KY-grown products. Thank you very much.

Blake Cothron
Peaceful Heritage Nursery LLC