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agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**Ohio Farm Bureau Senate Bill 1 Review Testimony
Before the Joint House and Senate Agriculture Committee
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy
June 5, 2018**

Chairman Hill and Chairman Hackett, members of the joint committee, on behalf of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and its members, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today reviewing Senate Bill 1.

As you know, Farm Bureau supported SB 1 and we actively educated our members in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) about the law's restrictions on nutrient application after the bill was signed. Our members have responded and have been adjusting their practices. We have now experienced two winters since SB 1 became effective, and while it may sound cliché, it is important to remember that the problems in the WLEB did not take place nor will they be solved overnight. In fact, researchers with the Carnegie Institution for Science recently have generated new estimates of historical algal blooms in Lake Erie, more than doubling the number of years previously available for scientists to study. Based on their data, the researchers have suggested it may take up to a decade to see a difference from proposed nutrient loading reductions as "phosphorus trapped in lake sediments continues to be re-released into the lake for several years, feeding blooms year after year."

Besides SB 1, it is also significant to discuss the other actions that the agricultural community has taken to improve water quality. Before the Toledo water crisis, Farm Bureau organized Healthy Water Ohio, a coalition of agriculture, conservation and environmental groups, business and industry, universities, and water suppliers to develop a comprehensive water resource plan and policy for the state.

Farm Bureau and Ohio's commodity groups have also been at the forefront of needed research to determine what are effective practices for reducing nutrients. We have funded edge of field research, an update to the p-risk index, and manure application research. Ohio Farm Bureau alone has invested \$2.5 million of member funds to date in steps to improve water quality. That does not include the millions of additional dollars that our colleagues in the agricultural community have spent, nor have we discussed the countless other projects ongoing such as our Blanchard River Demonstration Farm project.

There is also the Ohio Agribusiness Association's 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program. This program encourages agricultural retailers, service providers and other certified professionals to adopt proven best practices through the 4Rs (Right fertilizer source at the Right rate, at the Right time and in the Right place). This is a very successful program and one that is a model for other states. To date, 47 total ag retailer branches representing 6,000 clients covering 2.89 million acres have been certified via the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program. Of



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this, 37 ag retailer branches covering 1.9 million acres have been certified in the WLEB via the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program.

Over the past six years, Ohio ag retailers in the Western Lake Erie Basin have substantially increased sales of products and services that keep soil and nutrients on farm fields. Based on published studies, the Partnership for Ag Resource Management (PARM) estimates Ohio ag retailers participating with PARM retained more than 1.5 million lbs. of total phosphorus on farm fields in 2017 and out of Ohio waterways. Sales of variable rate technology (VRT) alone reduced phosphorus losses by more than 600,000 lbs.

A USDA 2016 report on the effectiveness of voluntary conservation measures shows that in the Western Lake Erie Basin average annual phosphorus application rates decreased from 21.5 pounds per acre in 2003-06 to 18.7 pounds in 2012; that is a 13% decrease. Additionally, agricultural soil phosphorus levels held steady or trended downward in at least 80 percent of Ohio counties from 1993 through 2015, according to recent findings from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University.

These dramatic decreases in phosphorous usage might lead one to question why Lake Erie continues to have algae bloom issues. The numbers clearly show farmers have significantly reduced their applications, but what do we know about what is still being applied? Cited in the 2013 Ohio Lake Erie P Task Force II report, the total projection for excess nutrient loading in the WLEB, which means what is coming off the land, is around only 1 pound of phosphorous per acre. That is roughly equivalent to a pint-sized mason jar of fertilizer spread across an entire football field. If we already have millions fewer of those “mason jars” in the system within the WLEB, why are we not seeing more of a response?

Clearly, there is not a quick, obvious, nor easy fix and will require a sustained commitment and patience. The WLEB has unique characteristics and challenges compared to other parts of our state. SB 1 has only been in place for a little over two years. It is a great tool among the numerous tools in the toolbox outlined in this testimony. We should continue to give it the time to work.

Thank you for your time, and I will be happy to answer any questions.