



*Working together for Ohio farmers to advance
agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**Proponent Testimony –HB 378
House Finance Committee, February 27, 2018
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, on behalf of Ohio Farm Bureau, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 378.

As you know, Farm Bureau is truly a grassroots organization. Our policies come from our members through our policy development process, a yearly occurrence that culminates with our annual meeting in December in which approximately 350 of our delegates gather, debate and vote on the policies that lead Farm Bureau. Broadband expansion is one of these policies that is important to our members. I have included that policy at the end of my testimony.

High speed internet access is key for economic development and sustainability. Today's precision agriculture technology enables farmers to collect increasing amounts of data, which allows them to make better management decisions. From information on crop yields, application rates, soil moisture levels, plant and animal health, crop maturity, weather conditions, insect damage and weed control, this wealth of data is collected in real time and transmitted via broadband networks to the cloud and then onto to desktop computers or hand-held mobile devices being used in the field.

Conservation practices also rely on broadband. Farmers can access web based programs that are essential conservation tools. One such program is the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service's web soil survey. This program is an important conservation tool for farmers to understand the soil types and characteristics for their farms. It cannot, however, be utilized with a dial up connection, necessitating the need for a high speed internet connection.

For livestock farmers, high speed internet is equally important for other reasons. For instance, one of our members has a high tech robotic milking system. This system allows for the dairy farmer to remotely view the milking process, track the cows and be informed when there is a problem. Dairy farming is tough work, but this system allows the farmers the ability to milk while doing other things, like spending some valuable time with family. This would not be possible without access to broadband.

Broadband is necessary not just for a better run farm, but for improving our rural communities and continuing the farm for years in the future. Retiring farmers want to leave their legacy and land to the next generation. For many, it can be difficult to interest the next generation to return to the farm and continue on the family tradition. A quality school system will be a major determining factor for where the family puts down roots. Children in rural areas that do not have



Working together for Ohio farmers to advance agriculture and strengthen our communities.

access to high speed internet will face a disadvantage to their contemporaries. The lack of broadband may mean that farmer's next generation will decide not to return to the farm but to find a community with more accommodations that will give their children the tools necessary to compete.

It is for these reasons and more that broadband access is vital for our rural communities. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 378. I will be more than happy to answer any questions.

Ohio Farm Bureau Policy:

Rural Broadband 285

We support

1. Increased access to high-speed Internet connections in rural areas, including wireless, that is reliable and price competitive.
2. Rural broadband initiatives, including federal funds or grants, in Ohio and recognize the increased economic development opportunities that come to rural areas with increased access.
3. Local government, education and business aggregation to increase demand for rural areas.
4. The formation of co-operatives to provide internet access.