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HB 695 makes an appropriation to once again fund the Rural Industrial Park Program, a popular and successful tool for rural counties to develop and market industrial parks and buildings designed to retain and attract growing businesses, and in turn jobs, in our rural counties that may not have seen the job growth and prosperity that many parts of our great state have enjoyed. The program was not funded as a part of budget tightening measures in 2001. While we are conscious of budget responsibility, this is a program that is worthy of funding, provides a valuable investment mechanism, and ultimately provides new jobs and investment in rural communities that would be unable to do this without the participation of our state of Ohio partners.

The vast majority of marketable sites in Appalachian Ohio over the past 15 years were developed because of the Rural Industrial Park program. Most of these are now the home of new businesses and new jobs. In Meigs County alone the program helped us to develop an industrial park and two speculative buildings, all of which are occupied and producing employment opportunities and tax base.

However, our small counties are stretched to the fiscal limit in developing new parks and buildings. This program, which provides up to 5 years of payment relief while marketing the development, makes the risk reasonable in areas like ours where the demand is not as strong, as say central Ohio, and the private sector profit motive is not as pronounced. Yet, our citizens and families want jobs just as desperately as anyone. This program, and HB 695 which capitalizes the program once again, is a wise investment in our rural future and will produce measurable job growth results.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.