



Ohio House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee

HB 183 Proponent Testimony, April 30, 2019

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Chairman Koehler, Vice Chair Smith and Ranking member Brent thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 183, what we are calling the Family Farm ReGeneration Act.

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association or OEFFA, has more than 4,000 members, of which, more than half are farmers. We have been working to connect farmers looking to ease out of agriculture with next generation farmers for many years, and in a different role many years ago I began a Farm Link program in Northern Ohio. OEFFA also received a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Grant approximately three years ago and have been providing in-depth education and assistance to both early career and aspiring farmers during that time.

I say all this to illustrate that OEFFA is very aware of the need for and challenges of bringing farmers together to transfer land, as well as the urgent need for those services. As I am sure this committee is aware, 100 million acres are set to change hands in the next several years. The most recent USDA Agricultural Census results illustrate the continued rise in the average age of farmers: nationally, it's age 56 and in Ohio, the average age is close to 55. Those who own farmland are under increased pressure to sell to development, larger farmers or investment companies for a variety of reasons. According to American Farmland Trust, Ohio continues to lose 3 farmland acres a minute, as the price frequently exceeds what can be earned by farming. Further illustrating this dire situation is a recent national survey of beginning farmers, who reported access to land as their number 1 challenge.

And yet, there is much good news for Ohio to continue as an agricultural leader into the future.

After decades of farm loss, the number of farms in on the rise in Ohio and our state is in the top 10 (#6) in the number of beginning farmers. We have a real opportunity to ensure that the social, economic and food security benefits from a strong agricultural sector continue.

House Bill 183—introduced by Representatives Susan Manchester and John Patterson and patterned after a similar law in Minnesota—holds great promise for success in connecting these two sides of the farming coin, aging and beginning farmers both of which tend want to see land continued to be farmed into the future. After little more than a year in operation in Minnesota, this program has taken in more than 400 landowner and 400 land seeker applications. Connections are being made that will contribute to the success of next generation farmers and this important sector. This effort will not just benefit our economy, but our society. Thank you for your support of HB 183 and I look forward to any question you have.