



**To: The House Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
June 4, 2019
Honorable Kyle Koehler, Chairman**

**From: The Ohio Farmers Union (OFU)
Joe Logan, President**

Regarding : Sub SB 57, Decriminalization of Industrial Hemp

Chairman Koehler, Ranking Member Brent and committee members.

We appreciate the opportunity to present our “Interested Party” testimony regarding Ohio’s efforts to decriminalize the production, processing and marketing of industrial hemp. We strongly support the decriminalization of hemp production and processing and look forward to working with you and the Ohio Department of Agriculture to see this process to completion.

Despite our robust support for the basis of this bill, we have expressed our concerns about inclusion of a marketing program (Sect 924.212) in Ohio Statute.

As we noted in earlier testimony, marketing programs can be useful under circumstances where production is excessive and research is lacking. Neither of these criteria apply for hemp.

We also oppose the structure of the hemp marketing board’s operating committee as proposed in Section 924.212. As proposed, the operating committee would be the least



democratic of any of the agricultural commodity operating committees, as all decisions would be made by only four members of the committee, none of whom would be elected by farmers.

As cited in earlier testimony, our experience with commodity marketing programs is that farmers pay the tab, while processing corporations reap the benefits. It would appear that this sub bill is structured to do the same.

As some of you may know, the Ohio Farmers Union has advocated for decriminalization of hemp for several decades, based on our long-standing belief that the plant and derived products are benign and have a wide variety of useful applications.

We strongly believe that Ohio farmers can benefit from the opportunity to diversify into new crops, such as hemp. We also believe that entrepreneurs can benefit from a rapidly-growing market demand for many hemp-derived compounds.

We also have concerns about new amendment language that would impose financial requirements, equipment requirements, even land and facility requirements on prospective growers in Ohio. As you know, there are no such requirements for other crops grown in Ohio. This will set a very bad precedent about excessive government intrusion in agriculture production.

We believe that Substitute SB57 can effectively accomplish the decriminalization of hemp, as permitted by the Farm Bill, and can open the door for Ohioans to participate in a growing market for hemp-derived products.



However, we also believe that the bill would better serve Ohio's farmers and entrepreneurs if it excluded the radically undemocratic marketing program included in section 924.212. We also believe that a statutory mandate for the Department of Agriculture to proscribe requirements for production are a gross overstep.

Farmers have a wealth of experience with crop production and with commodity marketing programs. They should be allowed to make decisions about hemp production without being saddled with a poorly structured marketing programs or specific production requirements.

In short, the Ohio Farmers Union strongly supports the decriminalization of hemp and look forward to working with the legislature and state agencies to accomplish this goal. However, we do not believe it is useful for the Ohio House to create an unnecessary bureaucratic body in a hemp marketing program .

Should this body see fit to delete section 924.212 and the production requirements in section 928.02 (D) from the sub bill, we could become enthusiastic proponents.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have.

