



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

**Ohio Farm Bureau Federation  
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 7  
Before the House Finance Committee  
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy  
May 23, 2019**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and its members, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on HB 7.

First, I'd like to share with you what Farm Bureau and the agricultural community have been doing on water quality. Farm Bureau and Ohio's commodity groups have been at the forefront of needed research to determine what are effective practices for reducing nutrients. 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.

We've 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.

One of the biggest ventures has been Farm Bureau's partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service on a five year, \$1 million demonstration farm project. We have established three demonstration farms in the Blanchard River area conducting on the ground research and practices. We are continually learning more about what keeps nutrients from leaving farm fields and readily sharing that information.

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. This is a very successful program, one that is becoming 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 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.



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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 (13%). 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.

We supported SB 1, which restricts nutrient application in the Western Lake Erie Basin on frozen, snow-covered, saturated ground and under certain weather conditions. In addition, 18,600 Ohioans have received their Fertilizer Applicator Certification training on the 4Rs of nutrient application (which refers to using the Right Source of Nutrients at the Right Rate and Right Time in the Right Place) per the requirements of Senate Bill 150, a bill Farm Bureau supported. To this date, we are not aware of any other state in the country that has a similar requirement for farmers to be certified to be able to apply fertilizer.

Last but not least, I am excited to tell you about the *Agriculture Conservation Working Group*. Consisting of a unique alliance of groups representing agriculture, conservation, environmental, academia involved in water quality research, and water quality technicians, the *Agriculture Conservation Working Group* has been meeting to develop and launch a statewide water quality initiative. The *Agriculture Conservation Working Group* brings together a wealth of knowledge and experience. One of its goals is the creation of a baseline of on-farm conservation and nutrient management actions. An equally important goal will be building participation by farmers in a new certification program that will help Ohio farms support healthy waterways in Ohio.

Ohio Farm Bureau is very supportive of the governor's H2Ohio proposal. We believe this is a much needed program that will help on the ground actions to reduce nutrient loading. It is refreshing that Governor DeWine wants to work with the agricultural community to address water quality issues, not just in the Western Lake Erie Basin, but across the entire state. However, H2Ohio isn't just about funding, it is about partnering with people engaged in agriculture, conservation and the environment, as well as researchers at our universities. Be it best management practices based on sound science, help with equipment cost sharing, continued research, addressing failing septic systems, or restoring wetlands, H2Ohio is important because it can be used to address issues across the entire state. Working together on the multitude of sources impacting water quality will improve water quality.

Addressing the challenges in the Western Lake Erie Basin will take time and continuity for the H2Ohio fund and its goal is vital. To that end, we appreciate Representatives Ghanbari and Patterson's work on HB 7. Farm Bureau supports the bill's long term approach for funding H2Ohio. We are also supportive of other possible mechanisms that will sustain H2Ohio for years to come.



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As HB 7 proceeds through the legislative process, Farm Bureau does have some items in the bill that we believe should receive some a further consideration and clarification. This is not an exhaustive list but some examples we believe are important to address.

- How will the amount of funding be divided among ODA, OEPA, and ODNR?
- There should be representation from universities or researchers with technical and or a science background in water quality on the H2Ohio Advisory Board. The H2Ohio Advisory Board's decisions should be based on sound science.
- Can the H2Ohio Advisory Board approve part of an agency's annual plan or does the entire plan have to be approved or disapproved?
- Are H2Ohio funds available from the H2Ohio Advisory Board to the public?

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify today in support of HB 7. I will be happy to answer any questions.