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agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**Ohio Farm Bureau Federation  
Proponent Testimony on the H2Ohio Fund in HB 166  
Before the House Finance Agriculture, Development  
and Natural Resources Subcommittee  
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy  
April 11, 2019**

Chairman Hoops, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, members of the House Finance Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on provisions of the operating budget, HB 166, on behalf of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

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.

Farm Bureau and Ohio's commodity groups have also been at the forefront of needed research to determine what are effective practices for reducing nutrients. 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.

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.

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.



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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.

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.

It is clear that a tremendous amount of work is being done to find solutions in the agricultural space, both mandatory and voluntary. What is simple and easy about our water quality issues in Ohio is that we know there are many contributors to the bloom, including agriculture. What is much more difficult and complex has been translating research and data into identifiable practices that will be part of the solution. That is why a "one size fits all" approach is not effective and why the approach of the Governor's H2Ohio proposal is the right path.

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. We appreciate the governor's proposal to provide funding to ODA, ODNR, OEPA for targeted purposes. 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.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Farm Bureau. I will be happy to answer any questions.