



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

**Proponent Testimony Senate Bill 159
Senate Ways and Means Committee
Bennett and Liza Musselman
May 13, 2020**

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on Senate Bill 159, creating a tax credit program for new and beginning farmers in Ohio.

We are Bennett & Liza Musselman part owners/operators of Musselman Farms. Musselman Farms is a 4th generation grain crop operation in Orient, Ohio located in Pickaway County. Together we farm alongside Bennett's parents and our two boys. We are also both employed off the farm, Bennett is a Vice President Agribusiness Banker at Heartland Bank, while Liza is the Finance and Development Director at Pickaway County Community Foundation and owner of eMusselman Photography & Design. Bennett is Vice President of the Pickaway County Farm Bureau, sits on the Pickaway County Fair Sales Committee and a Pickaway County Farmers Club member. Liza sits on the Pickaway Competitive Network, Ag Committee and a member of Ohio Agri-Women.

We are the past co-chairs of OFBF's State Young Agricultural Professionals Committee. Young Ag Professionals are 18 to 35-year-old individuals who are interested in improving the business of agriculture, learning new ideas and developing leadership skills. The group includes full and part-time farmers, OSU Extension agents, teachers, consumer educators, former Ohio Farm Bureau Youth members, FFA and 4-H alumni, farm media communicators, livestock and equine enthusiasts, seed representatives, green industry employees, gardeners, foodies and more.

In our role as chair couple, we had the opportunity to regularly hear from new farmers all over Ohio and the challenges they face entering agriculture. There are many barriers to full-time farming beyond access to land and capital like the lack of employer-sponsored health insurance plans, lack of broadband access, high premiums for crop insurance, and minimal mentorship opportunities. However, the biggest challenge is limited capital, credit and land. This can be addressed through succession planning, but that is typically for interfamily transitions occurring at the time of death. SB 159 would incentivize transfers during the retiring farmer's lifetime and possibly provide a connection for mentorship.

Heartland Bank has deep roots in Ohio agriculture. Started in 1911 in the farming community Croton, Ohio, Heartland Bank continues to serve the agricultural industry. In 2015 Heartland Bank felt that young and beginning farmers were being underserved with access to sound, reliable credit. We saw a need to help the next generation of farmers and agriculturalist establish and build their operations. We set out to learn, understand, utilize, and administer the several



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programs available through the Farm Service Agency to provide opportunities for young and beginning farmers.

In 2016 Heartland Bank was honored to receive a Preferred Lender designation through the Farm Service Agency. The preferred lender designation is the top lender status that a lender can hold in the FSA programs. The Preferred Lender Program is a streamlined program that allows lenders to expedite the program offerings.

Although there is a streamlined process for this loan program, the time that it takes from application to loan closing is significantly longer than a traditional loan. Young farmers have an added obstacle of finding a seller that is willing to wait additional days for a sale to be completed. The passage of SB 159 will give a financial incentive for sellers to work with a young beginning farmer, and thus help level the playing field.