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*Forging a partnership between farmers and consumers.  
•Working together for Ohio's farmers•*

**House Bill 64 Interested Party Testimony  
Senate Finance Corrections Subcommittee  
Brandon Kern, Director of State Policy  
May 21, 2015**

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Brown and members of the Senate Corrections Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Farm Bureau's interested party testimony on HB64.

Ohio Farm Bureau Federation is the largest voluntary non-profit agricultural organization in the State of Ohio, representing many farmers and landowners across the state. Those involved in agriculture have a diverse set of interests in the state budget. We have already testified on many of our budget priorities in the Senate's General Government Subcommittee, however several issues important to Farm Bureau members are being considered under the jurisdiction of this subcommittee.

**Water Quality Research and Programming**

I must start by talking about issues related to our organization's highest priority, which is working to improve Ohio's water resources. Farm Bureau recognizes that agriculture must do its part in reducing nutrient run-off, and to that end, we continue to execute our comprehensive water quality action plan. We believe a central component of any solution is legislative support for proven programs that are already providing needed research and improving water quality. By ensuring these programs have the resources they need, you are continuing a partnership with the agricultural community to find solutions to Ohio's water quality challenges.

**Healthy Lake Erie**

Through the Healthy Lake Erie Initiative, farmers can secure funding from the Healthy Lake Erie Fund to initiate nutrient stewardship on their land. Since the fund's creation in 2012, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has committed over \$2.5 million to put agricultural nutrient management practices on more than 35,000 acres of farmland in the Lake Erie watershed. However there is much more to be done and more resources need to be allocated to this program.

Healthy Lake Erie Fund dollars can be used to support research and to implement practices that will make a difference in water quality. The use of the fund to support installation of drainage tile control structures as well as edge of field monitoring stations in the Western Lake Erie Basin are two great examples.

The Ohio Lake Erie Phosphorus Task Force II Final Report in November of 2013 recommended nearly 11,000 drainage tile control structures be installed in the WLEB. That equates to an overall capital investment cost of \$22 million alone. In addition, the Healthy Lake Erie program is already providing support for maintenance of existing, as well as the installation of new, water quality monitoring stations. As an example, edge of field monitoring stations can cost between

\$25,000 and \$30,000 for equipment and set up. An estimated \$7,500 per year for maintenance, data collection, and analysis is needed per site for these stations. As you can see, there is significant need to enhance this fund further to meet the need for implementing both best practices to improve water quality and research methods to more fully understand the problem.

### **Heidelberg Water Quality Lab**

The National Center of Water Quality Research (NCWQR) at Heidelberg University is another key program. Here research is being conducted that will help us fully understand the nutrient management challenge. The water quality lab at Heidelberg is a leader in surface and ground water research and monitoring in the Great Lakes region and beyond. The data they are collecting is critical to moving forward to a solution.

### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

For more than 70 years, Soil and Water Conservation Districts have been involved in work to preserve vital natural resources. Farm Bureau is committed to ensuring districts operate with the greatest efficiencies possible, develop strategies to connect farmers with the expertise SWCDs have to offer, and help districts develop capacity for providing assistance that gets results.

Recently, SWCDs have been asked to work directly with farmers even more to help Ohio tackle water quality issues. For example, under Senate Bill 150, SWCDs take on new responsibilities of assisting farmers in the development and approval of nutrient management plans. Senate Bill 1 also calls for increased roles in helping farmers develop plans to meet new compliance standards that now govern the application of nutrients in the Western Lake Erie Basin. In addition to these increasing responsibilities, SWCDs continue to take on greater responsibilities in providing the expertise and guidance to farmers that are undertaking voluntary conservation practices.

Through our conversations with SWCDs we know these growing responsibilities will require hiring and training new staff. There is a need to hire and train as many as 25 additional staff along with expanded training of existing staff. That effort would cost SWCDs upwards of \$5 million dollars. A portion will be one-time costs, but it's clear additional resources are needed to ensure new laws and regulations get results in improving water quality. To help with these efforts, the House added more funding support for SWCDs in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) specifically in their efforts to help farmers comply with SB 1. We support this additional allocation.

In addition to supporting funding for SWCDs in the WLEB, we also believe statewide funding support should be enhanced. Farm Bureau would support restoring the historic partnership between state and local government for funding a 1:1 match of SWCDs. An additional \$2.5 million per year would meet this goal.

### **Non-Resident Deer Hunting Permits**

The budget bill also includes a provision to increase nonresident deer hunting licenses and permits. Director Zehringer has testified that, in part, the Department of Natural Resources would use additional revenue to acquire additional lands for creating more state hunting areas.

While Farm Bureau policy could support increasing nonresident hunting fees, we are opposed to using the revenue for the purpose of land acquisition.

Farm Bureau believes ODNR should be required to get legislative approval to purchase any additional lands. We also feel strongly that adequate maintenance funds for state-owned lands should be set aside from existing revenue sources. Programs to indemnify adjoining landowners for damage caused by the failure of ODNR to maintain state-owned land should also be implemented before the department is authorized to purchase more land. Farm Bureau also believes ODNR needs to create better land management plans. These plans should include, for example, identification of funds for development or maintenance of the land; a wildlife management plan; and identification of noxious weed and mosquito controls.

Our members from across the state have expressed concern that needed steps to protect landowners surrounding state-owned land have not been adequately taken on portions of the more than 714,000 acres ODNR already controls. More needs to be done before the department should be authorized to proceed with additional land purchases to create hunting grounds.

#### **Dog and Kennel Fund Registration- Livestock kill/injury**

The House passed version of the budget removes the county commissioners' responsibility to reimburse farmers from the dog and kennel fund for livestock that are killed or injured by stray dogs. Historically, the county commissioners have been required to reimburse farmers for this purpose and have been doing so since the General Code was in effect. This fund receives its money from dog and kennel registration fees and it is also used to pay the county dog wardens.

Ohio Farm Bureau policy supports keeping this fund and the ability for farmers to be reimbursed for the damage done to livestock from stray dogs. Contrary to popular belief, not every animal on a farm is insured. Most of the time only prized livestock are insured. Therefore, keeping this fund in one form or another is important to our members.

In closing, Farm Bureau members appreciate the hard work that goes into passing a state operating budget. It's critical to enhance resources allocated for water quality research and outreach in this bill. Thank you Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer the committee's questions.