**Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources**

**H.B. 49 Interested Party Testimony**

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Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding H.B. 49, the Governor’s budget proposal. We would like to highlight our support for funding in the budget for some areas that provide important services and support for agriculture.

The Ohio State University provides an array of agricultural leadership and educational programming that is paramount for agriculture. Extension services provide youth all across the State of Ohio with the leadership development skills they need through the 4-H program, educate people about nutrition and healthy food choices, and help farmers meet certification requirements. Another invaluable service Extension provides is taking agriculture to the urban centers and cities leading to more locally grown, fresh food where there is less availability. For these services to continue flourishing, adequate funding is needed to ensure program cuts do not occur.

The Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) is also a crucial component of our thriving agriculture industry. They provide farmers with researched best management practices so that they can operate their farms with greater efficiency and precision along with conservation practices. Water quality is one of OFBF’s priority issues and OARDC provides us with a lot of the information and data needed to respond to the algae issue in Lake Erie and runoff in Ohio’s other waterways. Greater funding for both of these line items will ensure our state has the science-based research and development programs necessary to educate the population on agriculture and safe food practices.

Two other programs we believe are vital to our state are the Sea Grants Program and Ohio State’s Agriculture Technical Institute (ATI). The Sea Grants Program conducts numerous applied research projects on Lake Erie each year and serves as an important partner in improving water quality. ATI provides valuable technical training for students and opportunities for the next generation to get involved in agriculture. ATI is a shining example of success in higher education, ranking first nationwide among two-year institutions awarding two-year degrees in agriculture and related sciences.

Ohio Farm Bureau also urges support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). For over 75 years, SWCD have been an indispensable partner of Ohio farmers. They work hand in hand with agriculture, helping farmers with technical assistance, which in turn helps conservation and water quality efforts. With the transfer of the division of soil and water from ODNR to ODA, SWCDs play a vital role in monitoring and implementation of our state’s agricultural pollution abatement laws. While they are an important partner with agriculture, SWCDs also execute important duties in urban and suburban areas as well. It is for these reasons that Farm Bureau strenuously supports increasing funding for SWCD at or near their request.

In addition to Soil and Water funding, it is important for ODA’s general funding to reflect the myriad of duties they are required to perform. With fertilizer certifications, meat inspections, food safety, livestock permitting, and many other responsibilities, it is imperative for the department to have the resources they need to perform these tasks to the degree of quality we have come to expect.

ODA’s meat inspection program in not just important for keeping our food supply safe, but it is also an economic driver in our state. Livestock can only be processed with an inspector present and so if Ohio does not have adequate funding for inspection our livestock producers will have difficulty reaching the market. Therefore, we respectfully request ODA’s meat inspection program be increased by $150,000. This will enable ODA to complete a federal match in funding.

Ohio Farm Bureau also requests ODA’s animal health program funding be increased by $200,000. This will enable ODA to continue carry out its important mission of protecting Ohio’s livestock and poultry health.

Lastly, we respectfully support an increase in the funding of the Ohio Proud program at ODA of $50,000.  From fresh meats, fruits and vegetables, to dairy products and snack foods, Ohio Proud promotes Ohio made and grown products. This funding increase will allow ODA to no longer rely on rotary funding for Ohio Proud.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the perspective of Ohio Farm Bureau members.  I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.