**Comments for Finance Subcommittee on agriculture, Development and Natural Resources for March 22, 2017**

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Minority Member Kelly, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee for Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources, my name is Leah Miller and I represent the Small Farm Institute. Thank you for hearing my testimony in support of increased funding for OARDC and OSU Cooperative Extension.

Ohio’s agriculture and natural resources are economic engines of prosperity. They provide the livelihoods for people as well as providing the essential tools of soil and water. Investing in leading edge research and technical support managing these valuable resources now and into the future is critical to the people of Ohio

whether they are in rural, suburban or urban communities. Plus it will ensure the vitality of our existing industries and draw new industries to our state.

Ohio State University’s Ohio Agriculture Research & Development Center (OARDC) and OSU Extension outreach, which you fund, provide new research findings, recommendations and technical support that enable agriculture to build an economic future of our residents as well as improving their lives. Agriculture is one place that we can point to as strong economic generator and mainstay for Ohio. We benefit from the fact that Agriculture is “place based” industry. Our location has given us natural assets like productive soils, abundant water, close to population centers and many markets, transportation systems, processors of our ag products, and good climate for growing diverse crops. We need to support those endeavors.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I am Leah Miller from Holmes County, Ohio. I direct Small Farm Institute and Leadership Holmes County. SFI works with smaller scale agriculture. Many of the participants are of the Amish community in Ohio and surrounding states. With Leadership Holmes County, I work through the Holmes County Chamber of Commerce to connect our local institutions, businesses and community members to leadership principles as well as help them to make and develop networks and connections through our rural community. Leadership HC was a partner with Holmes County Extension and HC Chamber of Commerce as it was formed. We have taken those leadership experiences and applied them to empowering the smaller scale farmers and rural communities in Ohio.

I was trying to figure out a visual image to help you grasp the breadth and depth of work that OARDC and OSU Extension do. s My word cloud is an attempt to show the complexity and diversity of OARDC and OSU University Extension relationship as they have developed community together throughout the state of Ohio. Much of my work has been traditionally with small dairy farmers that are grass based (the group is about 500 plus families and not all Amish) and many have become organic dairy producers. For example, Organic Valley Cooperative out of Wisconsin alone, has over 200 dairy producers in the state of Ohio in their milk pool. OSU Extension and OARDC have been key players as these farmers look for knowledge about growing better forages, how to maximize the soils and plants on their farms, water quality and water sources, fencing options and cow lanes; how do they reduce the Somatic Cell Count of their milk so they can get a premium, what are safe and economically practices; bedding and comfort for cows and the list goes on because the questions and solutions and knowledge help the dairy farmer with their bottom line cost and generating additional income by changing a practice or adopting a different way of doing something. Dairy is just one example.

The word cloud shows you that OARDC and OSU Extension are like a ball of many pieces of yarn. You unwind the yellow one and it is short because a phone call or email answers the question. The red one might be very long because it is a question that has many parts and many players in finding a solution or pulling together a collaboration of scientists from other universities or industry players to help our residents in Ohio. Sometimes, the funding means having a match from Ohio’s budget to a grant that OARDC got from USDA or private sources. The green piece could be pulling together a team around the questions from OARDC faculty and OSU Extension faculty and figuring how to tackle the problem together. The blue yard might be local residents in specific community looking to do local wage study for their businesses; while an orange piece might be working to help residents being “bugged” by mosquitoes or fruit growers facing crop losses from spotted winged drosophila. The science and research of OARDC and the outreach programming of OSU Extension are sources of information that supports the health, livelihoods and build wealth for Ohioans. They are partners in generating economy, social and environmentally sustainability for Ohio. OARDC’s in house “Seed” grant program showcased how they encourage faculty to partner with industry folks or suggest an innovation or explore an idea that might have economic and community benefits. Their ball of yarn takes them many directions and has been knitting together the different pieces of yard for Ohioan citizens whether they are young or old, poor or rich, conventional or organic, traditional or cutting edge, building off old research or starting new research fields. workshops or courses or fields days .It is people reaching out to people.

The current farmers, the next generation of farmers (and there is a next generation of farmers in our state) and the consumers that I work with are seeking high quality food, knowledge about their soils and their water and many other topics. They depend on having OARDC and OSU Extension as part of their community, too. They have questions for the educators and researchers but the educators and researchers have questions for them to help evaluate and test what they are exploring. Neither group can work in a vacuum. My farmers are always investing in their farms and the future for their families. I ask you to continue to invest and support OARDC and OSU Extension so they build Ohio’s future in its economy, its people and their well-being.

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