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**Ohio Farm Bureau Federation
Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 299
Before the Senate Finance Committee
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy
May 15, 2018**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and its members, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on Senate Bill 299. Farm Bureau would also like to thank Senator Gardner for his hard work on bringing this bill to the Senate.

We believe the structure and focus of SB 299, and its companion bill in the House, recognizes that we are at a critical junction for improving water quality in Lake Erie. While the bill acknowledges there has been much research conducted that can help Ohio's farmers focus their efforts on effective solutions, there is much that still needs to be discovered. Farm Bureau has long been supportive of scientific research needed to understand both the causes of and the solutions to the Lake's water quality problems. This legislation positions resources toward actions that we know will work based on science while assisting those researchers continuing their investigations.

Let me explain further. 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.



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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.

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 is 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 this legislation is the right path.

The recently released *Western Lake Erie Tributary Water Monitoring Summary* notes the 5 year running average for total phosphorus shows a directionally correct downward trend over the past 5 to 6 years. Even with this positive trend, it has been noted that the data from the in stream water monitoring is not "moving the needle" enough. When comparing this all to the work that has been going on our farm fields, it is certainly perplexing, but leads to the strong conclusion that more research is necessary to find the most effective solutions.

As we gather more data and we give these practices the time they need to work, we continue to encourage multiple other practices that we believe can make a difference and we do more and



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more research on those as we go. Each field is different and different practices will yield varying results.

That is why Farm Bureau is supportive of SB 299 and appreciates the bill's targeted approach of prioritizing assistance to those sub-watersheds determined to have the highest total phosphorus and dissolved reactive phosphorus loading. Efficient use of funds in these areas, through such items as water management, edge of field drainage equipment, and equipment for subsurface nutrient placement will help those farmers to continue their efforts in reducing phosphorous runoff.

Further, soil and water district personnel are very important partners who work with farmers every day to implement conservation practices and provide technical assistance. The bill's additional support for those soil and water conservation districts in the Western Lake Erie Basin is welcomed.

This is a long and complicated process and getting resources on the ground in targeted areas focused on results as Senate Bill 299 does, is a sensible approach.

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