



Ohio Fair Managers Association
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Good morning Chairman Koehler, Vice Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Brent and all members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 375 on behalf of the Ohio Fair Managers Association. My name is Rod Arter and I am currently the President of the OFMA.

To say that Ohio's county agricultural societies have had a rough 2020 is an understatement. As you probably know county fairs are run and planned by volunteer fair boards. These community events take almost the entire year to plan. We are a place to showcase Ohio's agricultural industry, promote youth involvement and represent a tradition like no other.

The COVID-19 pandemic took us all by surprise, but our fair boards and the OFMA rose to the occasion and were able to quickly make adjustments in the interest of safety. OFMA participated on the work group to develop the Responsible Restart Protocols for county fairs. Those were signed and released June 16, 2020. You might remember the OFMA testifying before this committee on May 20, 2020 with our ideas on how to safely hold and manage a fair. Many of those proposals were included in the June 16th announcement.

After the protocols were released several fairs were able to be held and others could finalize their plans. However, on July 30, 2020, the order was revised to limit fairs to Junior Fair activities only. This upended the planning fair boards had been doing and forced us to revise our course and plan yet again.

The OFMA certainly prioritizes the Junior Fair activities at our fair. They are a cornerstone of the event and allow Ohio's youth to be recognized for the hard work they put towards their projects and raising their livestock. However, Junior fair alone does not make a county fair financially stable. The Governor and the legislative leaders recognized this and were able to make available CARES funding to assist fairs. We greatly appreciate that support.

While this funding was a lifeline to our fairs, they are still operating a severe deficit. Many of our fairgrounds stay afloat by off season events and rentals. This income is all but gone in the wake of public health orders and closures.

Now our local fairs are looking ahead to 2021. Our local fair boards need to start planning now. They are already submitting their 2021 dates to the Ohio Department of Agriculture. While we understand everything is far from certain, the legislature can assist us with a proposal such as SB 375. Our county fairs prioritize the safety of our participants and attendees, but we need consistency to be able to plan.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for your consideration today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.