

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Shaffer, Ranking member O'Brien and members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, My name is Matt Fisher and I am with Lake Erie Foundation. I appreciate you allowing me to present to you today, and Lake Erie Foundation applauds the leadership of the Governor and his Directors to take key steps to improve Lake Erie and Ohio waterways. We also thank Senator Peterson and Senator Dolan for taking the lead with Senate Bill 2.

Lake Erie Foundation is confident that there can be both clean water and profitable farming. We are very aware of the economic pressures facing farmers today and we want to help form a plan that navigates a path that can benefit both the Lake and agriculture.

There are practices that have almost universal agreement for improving water quality and nutrient conservation. There is science that backs up these practices. We need to make these practices economically viable for our farmers. The 4 Rs are based on these practices. A paper entitled – "Achieving Phosphorus Reduction Targets for Lake Erie" was written by 9 Lake Erie Scientists – several of whom are here – and was recently published and I have a copy for each of you. This paper outlines not only best practices, but also will tell you the current adoption rates of these practices by Northwest Ohio farmers and what percent are willing to adopt these practices in the future. It also talks about how adoption has changed in the last 3 years. Most importantly, the paper outlines obstacles

that we will run into in trying to encourage farmers to adopt these practices.

The practices in this paper are very similar to the 4 Rs.

Lake Erie Foundation requests that the plans and practices that are implemented with these resources measure performance. You as a committee should be able to ask the leaders of the team that shows you the practices recommended as to what has changed from the previous 3 years with the new implementation plan. We are concerned that the current state of discussion with the cross functional team are primarily spreading these funds and programs across a wide area of producers and not targeted these ideas where there will be the biggest return on investment.

I come from a corporate background where when we had a problem, we focused limited resources in a targeted manner so that we knew that what we invested in worked or didn't work. I'm concerned that we are not headed in that direction.

We request 4 principles that should be implemented with this initiative.

1. **Focused Geographic Area.** The program needs to be launched to a smaller, focused geographic area rather than spreading these resources throughout Northwest Ohio or the entire state. It can start with a small watershed, but we need to focus our limited resources on targeted area

so that successful results can be measured. This idea is gaining support from several key scientists and stakeholders. We talk about accountability, but a small watershed will truly improve chances of accountability and commitment on both the farmers and the people responsible for rolling out these practices. The retailers that provide services to these farms have the expertise that can help us focus on fields that need the most attention.

2. **Targeted areas.** In addition to a targeted focus on a small watershed, the balance of funds should also be targeted on fields of greatest need. We believe that the retailers I just mentioned know which farms need the most help in managing their nutrient run off. Again, this is actually in addition to the geographic focus. It is critical that we address the areas that have the most need.
3. **Confidential Data.** All information and data collected to help farmers needs to kept confidential. Lake Erie Foundation is 100% against all parts of the Lake Erie Bill of Rights, and we will not make progress unless we have this information to improve productivity and water quality, not for increased finger pointing.
4. **Adequate Resources.** Be sure that adequate resources are made available to farmers and to retailers and outfits that are assisting farms with management plans.

We support the practices of the 4 Rs, but with this level of investment, we need an added element of oversight to insure compliance and with recent project it is possible this oversight

is underway. As much as it is not popular to use words like regulations or requirements, we need to know that the producers participating in this initiative are complying so we can measure results and be confident in the performance.

I have an attachment that would be too long to read today, but it was put together with a couple colleagues – not in Lake Erie Foundation – to attempt to have more accountability. It is important to understand that although these recommendations are aggressive they would not be required to be implemented in 2020. We need reasonable timelines for implementations, whether it is 3 years, 5 years or even 7 years.

Thank you for your time today.