

Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Senate Bill 2  
Proponent Testimony  
May 22, 2019

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Schaffer and Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Scott Higgins and I am the CEO of the Ohio Dairy Producers Association. As representatives of Ohio Livestock farmers, we submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 2, as introduced by Senators Peterson and Dolan.

SB 2 works to create the Statewide Watershed Planning and Management Program for the improvement and protection of Ohio's watersheds and create a watershed coordinator in each watershed region to collaborate with organizations representing agriculture, conservation, the environment, and higher education to establish a certification for farmers that utilize practices designed to minimize impacts to water quality.

On behalf of the Ohio Dairy Producers Association, Ohio Cattlemen's Association, Ohio Poultry Association, Ohio Sheep Improvement Association and Ohio Pork Council, thank you for the opportunity to present the following testimony on SB 2. We have long said that the solutions to water quality in Ohio will not be easy nor simple and we believe that SB 2 is a critical piece to the overall effort. The agriculture community values the role and services provided by the local soil and water conservation districts and look forward to working with them to carry out a comprehensive statewide watershed plan. The need for financial support of the agricultural community in implementing conservation practices and farming techniques is essential to improving Ohio's water resources.

While our farmer members recognize the condition of Lake Erie is unacceptable, they continue to work toward improvement, and continue to embrace the opportunity to be a part of the solution. In addition to supporting additional regulations on manure and fertilizer application through Senate Bill 1, which restricts nutrient application in the Western Lake Erie Basin during certain weather conditions. Our farmer members demonstrated their willingness to educate others on the new regulations through workshops and literature. In addition, livestock and poultry organizations support the ongoing effort to certify farmers through Senate Bill 150, which has certified nearly 19,000 Ohio farmers on appropriate nutrient application.

Additionally, a unique collaboration of stakeholders representing the agriculture, conservation, environmental, and research communities have joined forces to develop and deploy a statewide water quality initiative. This unprecedented partnership brings together diverse interests to establish a baseline understanding of current on-farm conservation and nutrient management efforts and to build farmer participation in a new certification program.

The *Agriculture Conservation Working Group* recently held a two-day retreat in Ostrander, Ohio, where sub-committees focusing on best management practices, education development, governance, data management, certification and public outreach engaged in robust dialogue around strategies for introduction and implementation of the program. Much of the conversation centered on identifying the path to healthy waterways in the state, and the complex approaches necessary to

understand existing practices and successfully engage farmers in education and certification. A group like this, with representation from across the environmental, academic and farm communities, has never come together before with a commitment to the shared objective of improved water quality.

Research continues to demonstrate that there is no singular action or farming practice change that will produce noteworthy and immediate nutrient reduction in certain waters of the state. The results that everyone wants to achieve will take a suite of changes in conservation and new farming practices using techniques and technological innovation that far exceed one farmer's capacity to afford financially. As a result, if we want to continue to be a food producing state and maintain safe clean water, there must be a shared financial responsibility between farmers and consumers.

The farming community needs a commitment for financial support and for Ohioans to express a willingness to lean in, support farmers, and help to shoulder the transformation needed in food production that will lead to even better land preservation, keeping nutrients from moving, and seek solutions together without the ongoing threat of lawsuits, and undue accusations, while truly working together in solving the water quality issues.

We must do all that we can to assist the next generation of beef, pork, poultry, sheep and dairy farmers. These industries make a significant contribution to Ohio:

- Ohio's cattle farmers raise approximately 307,000 beef cows, with a total value of cattle and calves at \$1.45 billion
- There are about 1,997 dairy farms in Ohio, with an economic impact of \$2.35 billion
- Ohio raises more than 2.95 million hogs each year, with an economic impact of \$576.8 million
- Ohio is one of the largest egg farming states in the nation, producing 9.5 billion eggs a year, with an economic impact of \$3.3 billion
- Ohio is the largest sheep producing state East of the Mississippi River with approximately 3,400 farms producing 130,000 sheep and lambs with an economic impact of \$24 million

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 2 and happy to answer any questions.

				
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