



*Working together for Ohio farmers to advance  
agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**House Government Oversight Committee  
HB 503 Proponent Testimony  
Whittney Bowers, Director of State Policy and Grassroots Engagement**

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Klopfenstein, Ranking Member Brent, and Members of the House Government Oversight Committee, my name is Whittney Bowers and I am the Director of State Policy and Grassroots Engagement at Ohio Farm Bureau. I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent Testimony on House Bill 503 on behalf of Ohio Farm Bureau and our members.

House Bill 503 benefits both consumers and agricultural producers, as it takes steps to help sustain the high levels of biosecurity needed in the food production industry by limiting the presence of feral swine in Ohio. It helps protect the bottom line of consumers who are already struggling with inflation at the grocery store, by implementing procedures to protect their food sources. Biosecurity provides food security, and food security is national security.

Feral swine, also known as wild boars or feral hogs, pose a serious threat to our state as a non-native and invasive species. Their prolific breeding, destructive foraging habits, and potential for disease transmission make them a menace to rural and urban areas. These animals are not only a threat to large herds or commercial livestock operations, but a threat to Ohioans and youth raising 4-H and FFA animals, or families trying to raise livestock for personal consumption, in addition to the specialty crops and industries within our state.

Feral swine are notorious for causing extensive damage to crops, pasture lands, and water sources. Their rooting behavior disrupts soil and vegetation, leading to erosion and loss of valuable agricultural and conservation resources. Ohio farmers work diligently to protect Ohio's water sources, and feral hogs can damage that work. This directly threatens the livelihoods of Ohio farmers and the overall stability of our local food production, not just for the pork industry, but all livestock and food crop producers.

Feral swine are known carriers of diseases that can affect both animals and humans. This has been illustrated extensively in European countries where domestic hog populations have been wiped out entirely by the transmission of African Swine Fever from feral swine to commercial hog barns. According to the USDA, Feral swine are known to carry at least 30 viral and bacterial diseases and nearly 40 parasites that can be transmitted to humans, pets, livestock, and other wildlife. The risks these animals present if their populations continue to grow far outweigh any perceived benefits.



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By eliminating the license to feed treated garbage to swine, you will mitigate the additional risk of foreign animal disease (FAD) transmission that remains with this practice. No facility in Ohio currently holds a license to treat the food waste associated with garbage feeding, and only half the US states currently allow this process, with the practice being largely prohibited in states battling a feral swine population.

Taking immediate steps to support biosecurity and the integrity of Ohio's food and agricultural systems is a proactive approach that benefits all. This bill will help Ohioans understand the most efficient process for eliminating feral swine.

This bill is not just about protecting livestock from foreign animal disease transmission, it's about the tangible security of Ohio's various agricultural industries. Recent census data for Ohio shows the dynamics of the farm economy shifting and adjusting to different scales, creating more diversity amongst the products and crops Ohioans are raising. As we make space for these ventures to continue to expand, like apiaries, viniculture, the production of hops, floriculture, small vegetable growers, etc., an expansion of the feral swine population would put all of those industries at risk for damages that would be devastating to their progress.

Thank you to Chairman Jones and Representative Peterson for bringing HB 503 for consideration, we ask that you as members of the House Agriculture Committee support this bill and help defend Ohio from the risk of feral swine.