

December 10th, 2024

Dear Chairman Jones, Vice Chairman Klopfenstein, and Ranking Member Brent,

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of House Bill 568. My name is Molly Sowash and I co-own and operate [MoSo Farm](#) where my husband and I raise grass-fed beef and pastured pork in Athens, Ohio. I also direct the Sustainable Agriculture program at Rural Action, a non-profit serving the Appalachian counties of Ohio. Despite working these two jobs, this bill is important enough to me to drive up here today to provide testimony in person.

We began raising cattle *because* we understood from working on other farms the positive impact that grazing livestock can have on soil health. The land we rent from family members has experienced a long history of extractive agriculture. It was a sheep farm 100 years ago, then became a conventional dairy until the late 60s, and then was row cropped until the 90s. These operations took more from the soils than they gave back. And we see it in our soil tests. In 2020, our soil tests showed just 1.7% organic matter. For comparison, most productive agricultural soils have between 3 and 6% organic matter.

Each day as we rotate cattle to new paddocks, we aim to give our soils the fertilization and rest they need to improve that soil organic matter. Because as our soils improve, they retain more water – which is immensely important during drought years like this one, they sequester more carbon from our atmosphere, and they provide more forage for our animals. Healthier soils can sustain more head of cattle on the same acreage, which means we can increase our production and our business's profitability simply by focusing on soil health.

I want to share some words from the US Department of Agriculture. This book, called *Soils & Men*, was published in 1938 when our country was coming out of the Dust Bowl. Secretary of Agriculture at the time, Henry Wallace, writes “Nature treats the earth kindly. Man treats her harshly. He overplows the cropland, overgrazes the pastureland, and overcuts the timberland. He destroys millions of acres completely... This terribly destructive process is excusable in a young civilization. It is not excusable in the United States in the year 1938. We know what can be done and we are beginning to do it... The public is waking up, and just in time. In another 30 years it might have been too late.”

Now it is 2024 and [according to a study](#) released by the Union of Concerned Scientists, if soil continues to erode at current rates, U.S. farmers could lose a half-inch of topsoil by 2035—more than *eight times* the amount of topsoil lost during the Dust Bowl. Ohio is the [11th top agriculture producing state](#) in the country – we have a duty to bring our soils back.

Farmers are on the frontline of this issue. Therefore, I believe it is our collective responsibility to support farmers in adopting practices that benefit everyone. That risk and responsibility cannot sit on the farmers' shoulders alone. If we are to improve the commons through soil health practices that reduce runoff, retain water, sequester carbon, and support life, we need financial support and risk mitigation to take on that challenge. House Bill 568 would do just that.

If we remember history, we know that civilizations come and go based on the health and productivity of their soils. As The Ohio State University's own Dr. Rattan Lal says in his [TED Talk](#), "Soil and humanity are intricately interconnected." Given this, I urge the Ohio legislature to establish a Healthy Soils Task Force which will develop an actionable well-resourced plan to support Ohio farmers and communities in restoring our precious soils. This is an opportunity for you to help Ohio farms and communities – please don't pass it up.

Thank you,
Molly Sowash
Owner and operator of MoSo Farm
www.mosofarm.com