



Ohio Cattlemen's Association

**Ohio Cattlemen's Association
Proponent Testimony on HB 683
Before the House Finance Committee
November 20, 2024**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Elizabeth Harsh and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Cattlemen's Association ("OCA"). On behalf of the OCA and its members, I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 683.

OCA is a membership organization that represents the business interests important to farm families that raise cattle. It serves as the voice of Ohio's cattle industry and works to enhance the business climate necessary for industry success. OCA is a respected source of information for Ohio's cattle and beef industry and its mission is to maintain the profitability and growth of the state's industry, while providing consumers with safe and wholesome beef.

Ohio's cattle farmers support HB 683 and appreciate sponsors Representatives Jones and Edwards for their understanding of the important need for this legislation and for making it a priority. Addressing Ohio's 2024 historic drought conditions has been and continues to be a top priority for OCA. It is a priority because Southern and Southeastern Ohio farm ground is more suitable for beef cattle production and as a result the drought has had the greatest impact on our members located in these counties. Primarily the beef cattle portion of Ohio agriculture, and to some extent, all livestock located in these disaster designated counties, have experienced the most significant economic impacts from this year's drought.

My family has also experienced first-hand the tremendous negative impact of the drought, as they raise beef cattle near Cumberland located in Guernsey County but situated near the Morgan County line. In late August, our family's farm ponds were reduced to levels where it was impossible to pull water from them, forcing us to haul water for the cattle. In addition, the drought negatively impacted forage growth in pastures to the point where our family began feeding their hay supplies stored for winter. Yet many cattle families were hit much harder experiencing an even greater reduction in hay yields and have hauled water for their cattle since June.

When Athens and Meigs Counties were designated as D4 exceptional drought conditions in August, it marked the first time since the drought monitor was created in 2000 that parts of Ohio were designated as such. Experts indicate that conditions as severe as this drought only occur every 50 to 100 years. Since then, the D4 drought conditions continued to spread throughout the area reaching a high of 12.6% of the state.



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I will not repeat a lot of numbers that many other qualified experts will share in their testimony. However, OCA does want to acknowledge the high level of responsiveness that state and federal agencies, The Ohio State University Extension and many others demonstrated as they moved quickly to provide management information and access to assistance programs at every level. Many cattle producers have received some assistance from existing USDA Farm Service Agency disaster programs; however, this assistance does not come close to addressing the economic losses their families have experienced.

Some of these losses include being forced to early wean and sell calves to reduce numbers when water, pasture and hay supplies are limited. These actions cause cattle producers to miss farm income opportunities that come with planned weaning and pre-conditioning programs that add value and take advantage of market highs. As drought conditions worsened some producers were even faced with the dire necessity of sending their cows to market. These actions meant cattle producers were forced to liquidate at reduced prices their cow herds that may have taken years of genetic selection to develop. And today the long-term impacts from the drought are not yet fully realized and even unknown. Cows that are stressed nutritionally or otherwise, may not breed back, or may abort their pregnancy resulting in a reduced number of calves born next spring and further impacting farm income in 2025. These are only a few examples of the deeper negative economic impacts of the drought beyond the lack of water, forages and hay supplies.

Thank you Chairman Edwards and members of the House Finance Committee for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 683. We urge its passage and are happy to answer any questions.