



**House Finance Committee  
HB 683 Proponent Testimony  
Ashley Kasler, Organization Director  
November 20, 2024**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and other members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 683. My name is Ashley Kasler and I serve as an Organization Director with Ohio Farm Bureau, serving Athens-Meigs, Gallia, and Lawrence Counties, as well as working with my husband's family on our fourth-generation cow-calf/hay operation. This year's drought has been an unimaginable experience for many people around the state, and I am here today to share my story and how the bill before you all can help farmers get through what for many could be the year that decides whether their family continues to farm or not.

Back in early spring, it was a very wet start to the season, with many farmers worried that it would continue through planting season and beyond. First cutting of hay went by, and it may have been a little dry, but most operations didn't have any alarm bells ringing yet.

Then the rain stopped.

Fields that were once worried about being too wet, now looking like they had never seen water at all. Second cutting for hay came in 60 days if it came at all, with yields being abysmal compared to recent years, third cutting was all but an afterthought. Most operations ran through their winter hay stashes by mid-summer instead of Spring of the next year. To put this into perspective for those not as familiar with a cow-calf operation, we would normally start feeding hay around mid-November.... Now. We have been feeding it since mid-June. Normally for those needing to buy round bales, you would pay \$40-45 per bale, it's now close to \$80-85. Think what your business would go through if 6 months of unexpected, overhead costs popped out of nowhere and the price doubled. Water sources for livestock began to dry up. Some producers were fortunate enough to have multiple water sources on their farms or even public water. Other less fortunate began to haul in public water in order to water their livestock. A creek that runs through our property has been dry with no water movement since early June. Most livestock herds in Southeast Ohio are pasture-based, with few animals on feedlots like other parts of the state, mainly due to the terrain. At home what were once hay fields were now used as pasture fields to try and hold off on feeding hay as long as we could. Pasture fields that we would normally stockpile grass on for the winter were gone, just to keep from feeding hay.

I perceived this crisis through a unique lens because of my role with the Farm Bureau as well as having my own operation. It was my job to help my members in time of need, while also going through the same situation many of them were facing. While we have received rain, it has been nowhere near enough to refill the water table. Yes, the grass has become green again, but that truly means nothing in the grand scheme of things. The type of winter we have depends on the



amount of hay animals consume along with what the spring could potentially bring us. The water table not receiving much moisture this Winter is going to make for a very difficult and challenging Spring if not the whole 2025. If pastures and hay fields can not begin to grow, what will our livestock producers do? Producers have already started to sell livestock to take the stress off of their fields and the stress of their pocketbooks. I went to work one day and came home to a few of my favorite older bred cows that had been sent to the sale barn to try and lessen the stress. What would you do if you had to make a business decision like that on who should stay and who should go? Farm Stress has been ramped up even more in these unprecedented times. Farmers are trying to find any option they can to keep their legacy alive! In late September questions began of how I can help my members and other farmers in my area. By the beginning of October, all of my county boards had given me permission to send out a drought needs survey. Questions such as what are you in need of, round bales, square bales, large squares, or cornstalk bales? How many could you use between now and Christmas? How many could you use between Christmas and Spring? The numbers differed from county to county. To date we have 21 surveys turned in and are in the process of working through what each county board would like to do. Some producers that I have talked to after sending out the survey have been able to track down their needed hay for now, but that could change depending on the winter that we have.

My husband buys and sells hay and straw to various people every year. Typically we make plenty of hay at home for him to sell. He only goes out to buy straw and maybe a load or two of small squares of hay. This year we had zero second cutting square bales and only enough first cutting to sell to a feed store. Calls began to flood in asking him if he had hay for sale, he felt a need to try and get more hay in for people to purchase and began driving to the Mansfield area and Southern Michigan to find hay. He hauled in nine semi loads, over 6,000 small square bales of hay in the last 30 days and the bales have all been bought and moved. People came with pickup trucks and trailers along with a minivan and a four-door Subaru. Things have been very interesting over the last few months and I don't know what this Winter is going to look like.

I thank Rep. Edwards and Rep. Jones for introducing the bill, and I encourage you all to vote for its passage. I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.