

95th House District

Washington, Guernsey,
Noble, Belmont, and
Harrison Counties

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center
77 S. High Street, 11th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111
(614) 644-8728
Rep95@ohiohouse.gov
www.ohiohouse.gov

Committees

Finance
*Subcommittee on Agriculture
Natural Resources and
Development, Chair*

Primary & Secondary
Education

Agriculture

Commerce & Labor

Don Jones State Representative

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee; I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 683.

This past August, the United States Department of Agriculture declared a drought emergency in several counties in southeast Ohio. In the months to follow, the number would rise to 51 counties who received at least a D2 designation for "severe drought". During this time, I have traveled to many different parts of the state and talked to many different farmers. The stories are endless, paying as much as \$80 a bale for hay, being forced to sell off large numbers of livestock and struggling to make ends meet. During this time, I was reminded of the FFA creed; Less need for charity and more of it when needed.

It is time for the state to act. As a farmer from southeast Ohio, I can tell you that we are the last people who would ask for help, and we are asking. While the federal government does provide some assistance, more is still needed. This bill provides \$10m to the Department of Agriculture to spend on drought mitigation at their discretion. While my discussions with Director Baldrige are still ongoing, I am confident that the program will be administered quickly and will go to the areas that have been most impacted. During this hearing, you will hear from experts in the field of agriculture, farmers who have been affected and state leaders. They will illustrate to you just how detrimental this drought has been for Ohio farmers.

This legislation is the result of months of careful research and conversations with farmers, local leaders, and stakeholders. It is modeled after legislation that was passed in West Virginia that provided their Department of Agriculture with \$10m. The money will be administered through local Soil and Water districts because there is one in each county. It is our goal to provide ODA the fewest number of administrative and regulatory hurdles possible so that relief can be administered quickly. This is our first bite at the apple. It is my fear that \$10m will not be enough, but with respect to state revenues I have tried to ask for the lowest amount possible. The drought is an ongoing issue that will not be fixed over the winter. Hay fields will need to be reseeded and hay yields will be down significantly next year. By doing this bill now, we can provide immediate relief to farmers as they prepare to ramp up for next season. To that end, we have included a \$500k appropriation from the Controlling Board Emergency Purposes fund to the Ohio State College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental science for their Farm Financial Management and Policy Institute. The Farm Financial Management and Policy Institute was an unfunded mandate in the most recent budget. The money will allow CFAES to hire a director of the institute who can be responsive to farmers needs as they rebuild from the drought.

A drought is a natural disaster, where people and businesses are impacted because of a natural event outside of their control. For every other form of natural disaster, the state has mitigation and relief programs in place and administers them to those who are impacted. I am asking the committee today to provide natural disaster funding in response to a natural disaster, which is something this state has done for decades.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and I would be happy to take any questions.

95th House District

Washington, Guernsey,
Noble, Belmont, and
Harrison Counties

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center
77 S. High Street, 11th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111
(614) 644-8728
Rep95@ohiohouse.gov
www.ohiohouse.gov

Don Jones
State Representative

Committees

Finance
*Subcommittee on Agriculture
Natural Resources and
Development, Chair*

Primary & Secondary
Education

Agriculture

Commerce & Labor