



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

**House Government Oversight Committee
HCR 14 Proponent Testimony
Whittney Bowers, Director of State Policy and Grassroots Engagement
April 23, 2024**

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and Members of the House Government Oversight Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent Testimony on House Concurrent Resolution 14 on behalf of Ohio Farm Bureau. This resolution urges Congress to support the reauthorization of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which is an important component to the work being done in Ohio.

Currently in Ohio, GLRI has funded projects for developing agricultural best management practices, stream restoration, coastal wetlands, management of invasive species, and clean-up of contaminated sediments in Ohio's four targeted "areas of concern," which include the Ashtabula, Black, Cuyahoga, and Maumee Rivers.

One of those projects is the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network (BRDFN), which is a joint partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. The Demonstration Farms showcase and demonstrate conservation practices that improve agriculture's impact on downstream water quality in Ohio. Ohio Farm Bureau collaborates with stakeholders in Hardin and Hancock Counties, as well as NRCS and other partners, to identify farms to participate as demonstration sites.

The farms currently enrolled in the Demonstration Farm Projects are featured on the project website, <https://blancharddemofarms.org/farms/>, and I would encourage everyone to take a few minutes and learn about not only the conservation practices being used on those farms but also the families behind this progress. Hopefully, some of you have even had the opportunity to visit one of these sites as part of the regular demonstrations offered. With the help of these demonstration farm sites, we're able to study and showcase the impact of current and new on-farm conservation practices regarding water quality and nutrient management.

Ohio farm families rely on the land, striving to sustainably take care of the soil for future generations. They're also helping to protect the water quality of our streams, rivers, and lakes. Research conducted on these sites and the data that is collected help other farmers implement their own best management practices.



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The Demo Farms have been a hub for scientific, reliable, and first-hand information about conservation measures available to farmers and landowners. These sites have created opportunities for our industry partners to test their research, provide technical assistance, and develop program implementation to share industry-wide. The goal is to show how clean water and productive agriculture can coexist through on-farm tours, producer field days, and off-farm presentations. The funding provided by GLRI is an essential piece of the puzzle when working to make sure Ohio continues to be a leader in water management.

While not a part of the GLRI, and of course it is a state program, another key component that highlights the agriculture community's commitment to conservation can be seen in H2Ohio's agricultural program. Of course, this program was initially focused solely on farms located in northwest Ohio near Lake Erie and incentivizes farmers to implement science-based, proven best management practices to prevent nutrient runoff and improve water quality. But as we continue to build upon the success of programs like the Demo Farms, we look forward to expanding these programs into other parts of the state, where water concerns may take a different shape. Statewide enrollment for row-crop producers who farm in Ohio's 64 counties outside of northwest Ohio's Western Lake Erie Basin will soon open for those producers. The Ohio Department of Agriculture will enroll 500,000 acres into the program for a two-week sign-up period, beginning Monday, April 22, 2024, through Monday, May 6, 2024, with enrollment available on a first-come, first-served basis.

We are grateful for the opportunities provided to Ohioans through the GLRI program, and applaud our state policy leaders and our agricultural leaders as they continue to prioritize one of our most valuable resources. Ohio Farm Bureau is committed to partnering with and sharing the results of those working to protect water in Ohio.

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for your consideration of this resolution, and I would be happy to take any questions at this time.