



Ohio Department
of Agriculture

Ohio Department of Agriculture House Budget Testimony FY 24-25

Director Brian Baldrige 03-15-2023



ODA's Reynoldsburg campus.

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of Governor DeWine and the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA).

With the support of Governor DeWine and the Legislature, ODA has emerged stronger from the financial challenges of the past two years. With a team culture, a balanced and transparent budget, and a positive vision for the future, ODA is poised to vastly improve our services to the agricultural community in the upcoming biennium.

From those tending the fields, to those processing food and agricultural items, to those involved in our food service industry, 1 in 8 Ohioans is employed in the food and agricultural community. Ohio farmers have shown an ability to continuously pursue new ways to innovate their practices while feeding families each day.

The budget before you today, expands our partnership with this community and seeks to maximize the opportunities for innovation and economic growth. It prioritizes issues ranging from water quality to protecting against the threat of animal disease, to the modernization of ODA information technology systems and investing in a variety of programs that will support our contribution to Ohio's thriving agricultural economy. The Ohio Department of Agriculture's budget request includes \$193 million for FY24 and \$196.8 million for FY25.

Animal Disease Preparedness and Response

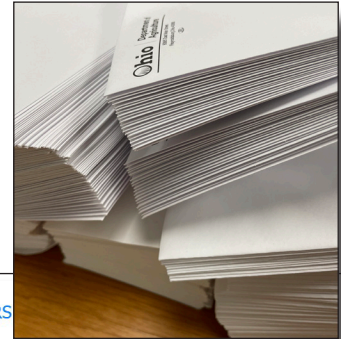
In 2022, eight outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) across Ohio emphasized the dedication of our Animal Health staff. ODA spent \$2 million responding to a single large-scale outbreak in which over 3.7 million layer chickens were depopulated. This prevented the spread of the disease to the 45.8 million chickens in Ohio and 45.6 million chickens in nearby Indiana. Extensive ODA overtime and the assistance required from the U.S. Department of Agriculture staff and private contractors highlighted understaffing in the Animal Health Division. There has already been one HPAI outbreak in 2023 and we expect an uptick through this year. The virus continues to spread across the country, strongly indicating ODA will need to respond to additional large-scale events in Ohio in FY24 and FY25.



ODA High Path Avian Influenza response in 2022.

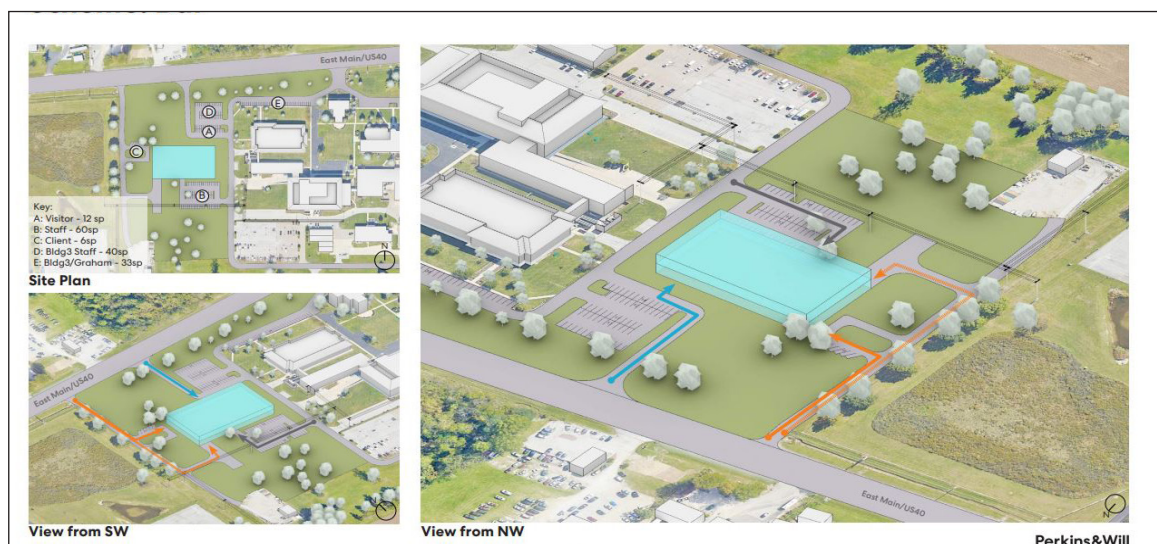
Our budget request includes additional funding to provide animal inspections, laboratory testing, and administrative support to help prevent and respond to ongoing animal disease threats in Ohio, such as HPAI, Chronic Wasting Disease in deer and African Swine Fever, while also supporting the growing needs of Ohio’s animal agriculture industry.

Modernization and improvement of ODA’s Information Technology infrastructure is our best opportunity to build long-term efficiencies that better serve the agricultural community. Investment in IT will enable ODA to replace paper-based processes with online client portals for HPAI monitoring, laboratory sample requests and test results, fee payments, permitting and licensing. These enhancements will offer our clients an easier, faster, and better experience.



ODA’s IT Division has recently removed the manual tasks of physical mailing, data entry and check processing for 3,200 customers registered with our Plant Health Division. Clients can now easily access information and make payments online. Upgrades have reduced the amount of time required to renew customer applications and given staff more time to focus on other important tasks. We want all ODA customers to be presented with online, transparent, and immediate views of their service requests. Applications that use obsolete software will be rebuilt, improved, and made available online, making use of the single OHID login developed for citizen interaction with state government.

ODA is modernizing and streamlining operations to help clients quickly and efficiently take care of business.

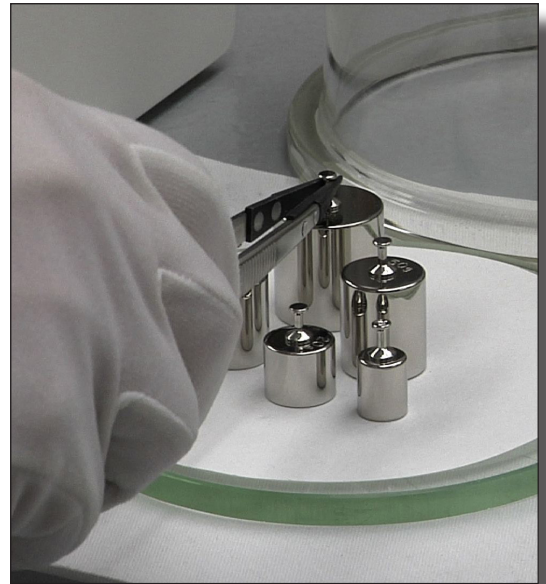


Draft rendering of ODA’s new Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory.

In the 2022 capital bill, the Legislature supported Governor DeWine's request to replace the aging Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. Your support of ODA's FY24-25 operating budget will build on the lab's modernization by investing in replacing and improving our aging IT applications.

Supporting Agriculture and Protecting the Public

Funding requested for targeted staff, maintenance, and equipment needs will substantially increase ODA's contribution to Ohio's thriving agricultural economy. Additional funding for the Meat Inspection Division is needed to offset a reduction in the amount of our federal grant. If future federal funding increases, the requested state support will match federal dollars to add inspectors. Additional inspectors are needed to accommodate the increased number of Ohio processors in the Cooperative Interstate Shipping (CIS) program. The CIS program allows state-inspected Ohio facilities to sell their products online and ship to other states.



ODA certifies county-owned equipment needed to uphold accurate weights and measures standards.

Funding is requested to offset the cost of certifying equipment for Ohio's County Auditors. These local officials have statutory responsibility to test measuring devices, such as fuel dispensers and scales, within their jurisdictions. ODA certifies the county-owned equipment which is needed to test these devices, and we are currently assessing a cost-recovery fee for this laboratory service. This funding will allow ODA to eliminate the fee, providing relief to already-strained local budgets. County Auditors, we heard you. Ohio is one of few states which can boast 100 % of our gas pumps and retail scales, are tested for accuracy each year, thanks, in part, to the efforts our local officials. This crucial work provides an estimated annual savings of more than \$360 million to Ohio's businesses and consumers.

We would like to thank the General Assembly for its continued support of Ohio's county and independent fairs. They are the heart of rural communities and provide countless opportunities for our youth. HB 45 provided \$4.5 million last year to the 94 agricultural societies. These funds, in addition to the \$7,289,000 in last year's Capital Bill, are being used across the state to build new buildings, update aging infrastructure, and offer new opportunities for Ohio's junior fair participants. ODA's FY24-25 operating budget includes administrative support to help serve Ohio's fairs, which are the highlight of summer in Ohio.



The requested budget will support increased inspections of amusement rides, food processors, and growth in laboratory testing for the bull stud, poultry, and swine industries.

We owe it to Ohio residents to make sure safety is a top priority, and at the Ohio Department of Agriculture this includes ride safety. Responsibilities have been expanded in the Amusement Ride Safety Division. To help ensure the safety of the public, a second annual inspection of large amusement rides - required by HB 189, commonly referred to as Tyler's Law - is now provided.

ODA's Amusement Ride Safety program keeps public safety a priority at amusement parks and fairs.

The budget seeks permission for ODA to assess a fee for these second inspections, in the same amount currently paid for the initial annual inspection. The revenue will allow ODA to hire an additional ride inspector to reduce overtime costs and continue to complete the additional work.

Supporting Economic Growth Through Agricultural Marketing

Ohio has a diverse and strong food and agriculture industry within our state. From top crops and local products to family farms and agritourism, marketing all Ohio agriculture has to offer is an opportunity to engage communities and support the \$124 billion industry. Funding is requested to market Ohio agricultural products through the Ohio Proud and Ohio Wines programs, and our brand-new initiative Ohio Community, Agriculture, Nutrition program or Ohio CAN, which helps underrepresented producers provide their products to foodbanks across Ohio. A recent revitalization of ODA's Marketing Division will help boost collaborative marketing efforts and expand outreach to grow Ohio's economy.



ODA's marketing programs helps support farmers and promote Ohio's food and ag industries.

ODA's FY24-25 operating budget is an opportunity to promote economic growth through expanded animal and plant health, and weights and measures services. Farm animals and the public will be better protected with increased laboratory testing and amusement ride inspections. With H2Ohio, the quality of Ohio's most important natural resource, the waters of our rivers, lakes, and streams, will continue to improve, providing a legacy of health and economic security for future generations.

I wish to conclude by saying that your support, as always, is critical to our success at ODA. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share our vision of Ohio's agricultural future.

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy and members of the committee, I appreciate your attention to my testimony today and I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.