



Ohio Department
of Agriculture

Ohio Department of Agriculture Senate Budget Testimony FY 24-25 Director Brian Baldridge



ODA's Reynoldsburg campus.

Chairman Schaffer, Vice-Chairman Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of Governor DeWine and the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA).

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.

ODA's budget 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.

H2Ohio

The H2Ohio Program has seen success and expansion, thanks to the continued support of the General Assembly. ODA has increased its efforts toward improving the state's water quality and reducing phosphorous that contributes to harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Between the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and ODA, the 2022 phosphorous reduction is estimated to be nearly 290,000 pounds. This represents nearly 30% of Ohio's goal to reduce the phosphorous load by 1 million pounds.

Agriculture's H2Ohio practices alone were estimated to reduce the amount of phosphorous going into the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) by approximately 222,000 pounds in 2022. ODA has provided cost sharing on best management practices to more than 2,400 producers in the WLEB for Voluntary Nutrient Management Plans (VNMP), Phosphorous Placement, Manure Utilization, and Overwintering Cover.

More farmers are now implementing agricultural best management practices that reduce nutrient runoff into Ohio's waterways. The results have exceeded our expectations: H2Ohio has more than 1.5 million acres of farmland enrolled in the additional best management practices.

Farmers in the original 14 counties have now been implementing the practices for two growing seasons.

Based on this experience, ODA has adapted its process to help producers more accurately identify the practices that will work best on their land. This includes adding conservation practices like the Two-Stage Ditch program that complements the existing suite of water quality practices. Current enrollment has exceeded ODA's expectations and shows farmer interest in addressing Lake Erie's water quality concerns. Program enrollment for 2023 shows additional phosphorous

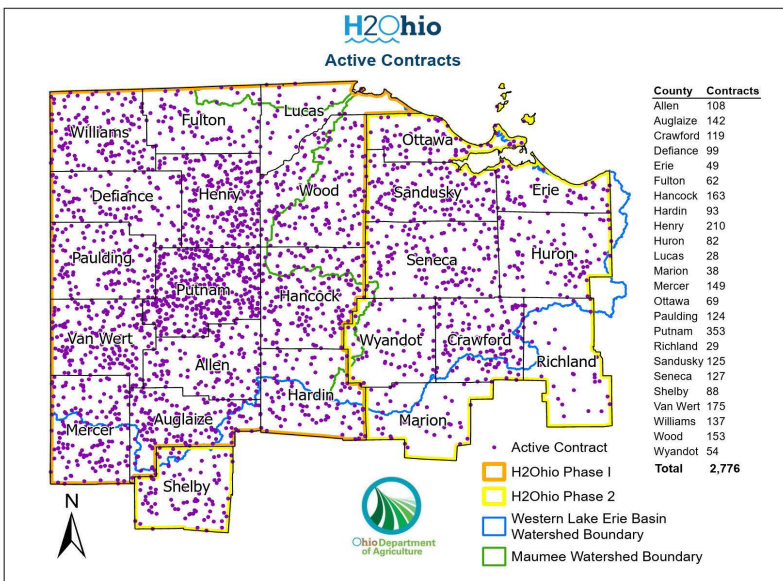
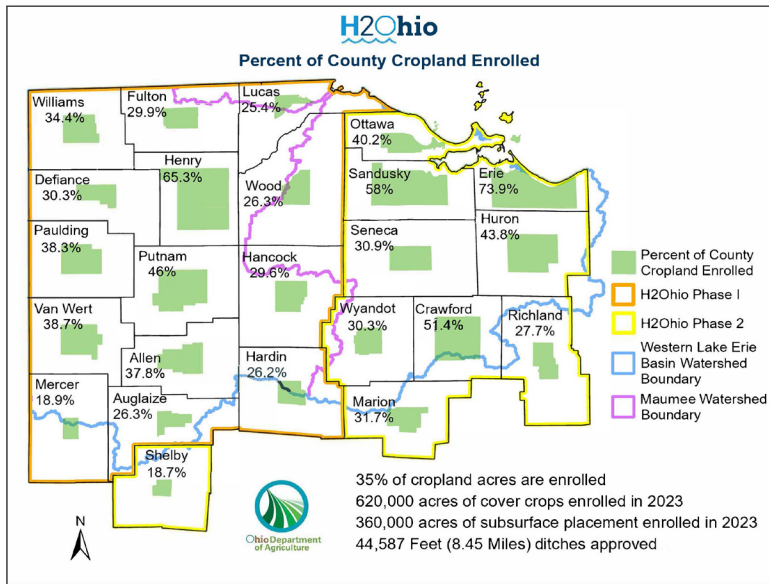
load reductions, and ODA expects increased enrollment in the H2Ohio program for 2024 and beyond.

The FY24-25 budget request will expand the investment in H2Ohio by streamlining practices and adding incentives specifically for the WLEB. ODA's goal is to increase program enrollment in the current H2Ohio project area to 2 million acres of cropland. With higher adoption rates and increased program enrollment, ODA projects continued progress toward the phosphorous load reduction goal for the WLEB. ODA's FY24-25 budget request includes \$69 million per year in H2Ohio funding to continue supporting and refining these practices in the WLEB and expand H2Ohio's footprint across the remainder of the state, targeting 500,000 acres of farmland. GRF funding is also requested to increase financial assistance to Soil and Water Conservation Districts that provide the boots on the ground in implementing conservation programming. As the program continues its growth, dedicated H2Ohio staffing is needed to implement the expansion and ensure accountability as we track and monitor progress. Nine ODA staff will help with producer VNMPs, enrollment, and the launch of H2Ohio in new regions.

ODA would respectfully ask for the restoration of \$2 million each year in staffing cuts and \$1 million each year in cuts to support Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in the current version of House Bill 33. State and local Soil and Water district staff are critical to meet program and phosphorous reduction goals. These individuals support producers

in the development and implementation of voluntary nutrient management plans, and track and monitor program implementation. They are integral to the success of the program.

We would also request that the Senate resist earmarks that dilute the program and erode our ability to manage it. If any funding is allocated for pilot programs, ODA would ask that it be funded separately and not earmark dollars away from our requested budget.





ODA High Path Avian Influenza response in 2022.

Animal Disease Preparedness and Response

In 2022, eight outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic 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 events in Ohio in FY24 and FY25.

HB 33 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.

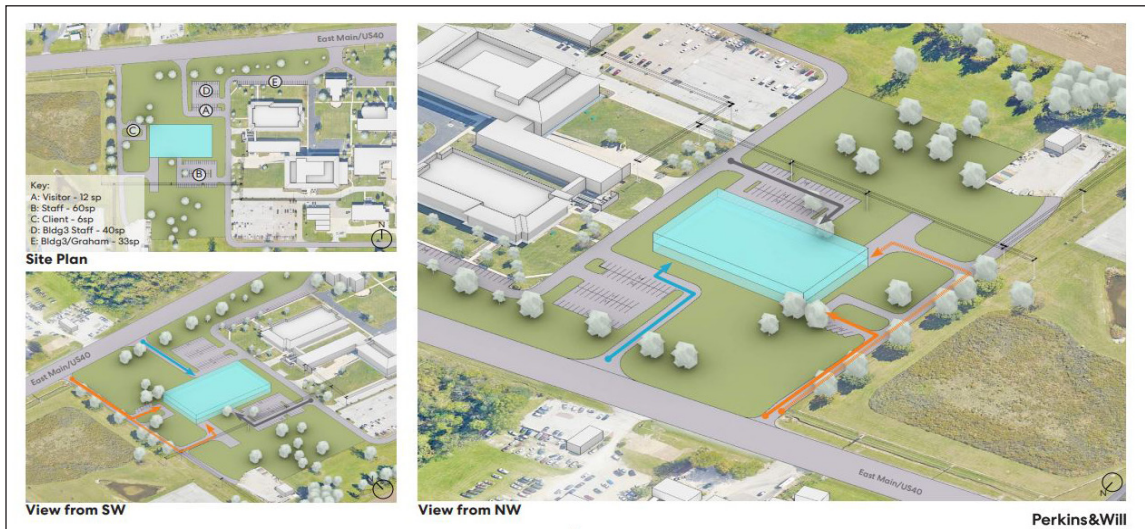
Modernization and improvement of ODA’s Information Technology infrastructure is our best opportunity to build long-term efficiencies that better serve the agricultural community. Investment in IT will enable ODA to replace paper-based processes with online client portals for HPAI monitoring, laboratory sample requests and test results, fee payments, permitting and licensing. These enhancements will offer our clients an easier, faster, and more consumer-friendly 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. Customers can now easily access information and make payments online. Upgrades have reduced the amount of time required to renew 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 OH-ID login developed for interaction with state government.

The screenshot shows the ODA Department of Agriculture website. At the top, there are navigation links: HOME, FAQ, MEMBERS, ADMIN, and My Account. The main heading is 'Certificates'. Below the heading, there is a note: 'Your certificate will appear below once your payment has processed, which could take 3-5 business days.' There is a button labeled 'Download multiple certs'. Below this is a table with the following data:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Certificate Number	Location	DBA	Year	Cert Status	View Cert
<input type="checkbox"/>	7517	DOLLAR TREE #02332		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9476	DOLLAR TREE #09287		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8982	DOLLAR TREE #9186		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8985	DOLLAR TREE #9242		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6748	DOLLAR TREE STORES INC		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6754	DOLLAR TREE STORES INC		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6855	DOLLAR TREE STORES INC		2023	Issued	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6865	DOLLAR TREE STORES INC		2023	Issued	

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.

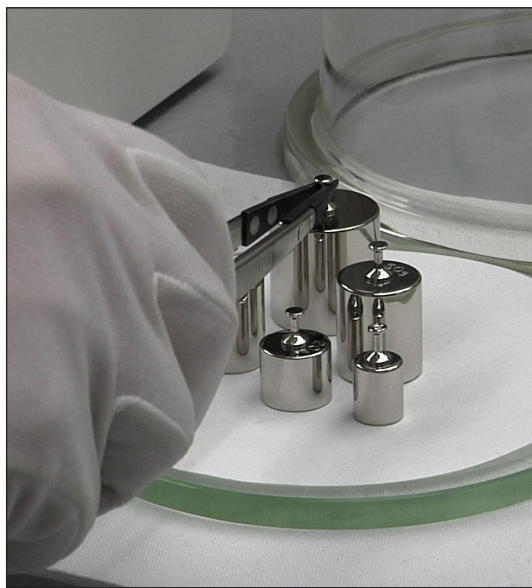
In the 2022 capital bill, the Legislature supported Governor DeWine's request to replace the aging Animal Disease and Diagnostic Laboratory. We thank you for that. Your support of ODA's FY24-25 operating budget will build on the lab's modernization by investing in replacing and improving our aging IT 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 (our largest Division at ODA) 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.

Funding is requested to offset the cost of certifying equipment to Ohio's County Auditors. These local officials have statutory responsibility to test measuring devices, such as fuel dispensers and scales, within their jurisdiction. 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 that 100% of our gas pumps and retail scales are tested for accuracy each year. This is, in part, thanks to the efforts of our local partners. 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. Funds allocated by the General Assembly are being used across the state to build new buildings, update aging infrastructure, and offer opportunities for Ohio's junior fair participants. ODA's FY24-25 operating budget includes administrative support to help serve our 94 County and Independent Fairs.

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



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

The Ohio State Fair, which has been running for 167 years and is one of the largest state fairs in the U.S., hosts nearly one million visitors each year from all 50 states, Canada, and Mexico. The fair has a long history of celebrating Ohio's products, its people, and their accomplishments – which include a robust agriculture industry.

The comprehensive and well-researched Expo 2050 Plan will ensure the viability of our great State Fair for generations to come.

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's residents to make sure safety is a top priority. At ODA – this includes ride safety. Responsibilities have been expanded in the Amusement Ride Safety Division to ensure the safety of the public. In the 133rd General Assembly, HB 189 (commonly referred to as Tyler's Law) required that ODA conduct a second annual inspection of large amusement rides.

The budget seeks permission for ODA to assess a fee for these 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.

Last year, the Legislature passed HB 321 which modernized Ohio's Auctioneer Program. The bill replaced an outdated apprenticeship education model with a continuing education program (CE), where auctioneers complete eight hours of CE every two years. The current version of the budget eliminates the language that has been in place for seven months and passed with overwhelming, bipartisan support. It is imperative our auctioneering community be kept up to date on the constantly shifting changes in the industry. HB 321 addressed these needed changes. We would respectfully ask HB 321 move forward in the manner it was intended, with the amendment added in the current version of the budget removed.

Supporting Economic Growth Through Agricultural Marketing

Ohio has a diverse and strong food and agricultural history. 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. This program helps underrepresented producers provide their products to foodbanks across the state. A recent revitalization of ODA's Marketing Division will boost collaborative marketing efforts and expands outreach to grow Ohio's economy.

Our roots in this state are in agriculture. It is an industry we will continue to value and support through preservation and conservation efforts. Ohio has a more than 20-year connection with local land partners and farm families to help them preserve productive agricultural land. Since the program's inception, more than 100,000 acres of productive farmland have been preserved.

In the Executive Version of the budget, additional GRF of \$3.5 million each year was requested in our Farmland Preservation Program. The additional funding would assist with implementing beginning farmer tax credits and in keeping up with the consistent demand in the program. In 2023, we received 128 applications totaling \$24.5 million. Additionally, Clean Ohio provides approximately \$6.25 million of funding to this program annually. The funding will allow ODA to enroll more farmers in the program and preserve more acres for Ohio's top industry – food and agriculture. We would respectfully ask for your consideration in restoring this critical funding.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I wish to conclude by saying that your support is critical to our success at ODA. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share our vision of Ohio's agricultural future. I appreciate your attention to my testimony today and I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.



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

