



Interested Party Testimony
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Amended Sub Bill 33- State Operating Budget
May 10, 2023

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Amended Sub Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association’s funding request which would appropriate \$250,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Soil and Water Conservation District Support line to administer a Soil Health Pilot Project.

My name is Amalie Lipstreu and I am the Policy Director for the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA).

OEFFA is an organization of approximately 4,000 members and 10,000 supporters advocating for sustainable farming for more than 40 years. Our members share a vision of a future where sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment. The majority of OEFFA members are sustainable and organic farmers and also includes educators, health care professionals, businesses and engaged citizens.

We all know that Ohio faces significant water quality challenges. What is often less understood is how good soil health practices can help mitigate this problem, while also helping farmers and ranchers with long-term profitability and resilience. Farmers are already having to adapt to more frequent extreme weather events and a growing number of them are interested in employing best soil health management practices. As they do so the soil is able to hold more water during droughts and allow for greater infiltration during heavy rain events. Additionally, the cost and availability of fertilizers is becoming an increasing problem for the viability of farms across the country. Building soil health takes time and making those investments will reduce the need for outside fertility and water quality mitigation in the future. But their success is dependent upon the ability to experiment locally and regionally with support and learn and share within farmer networks.

The State of Ohio has prioritized farming practices that restore water quality and promote soil health. OEFFA and the sustainable farming community represent an important sector to help reach these goals as sustainable and organic farming practices minimize the use of off-farm inputs that are a major source of water quality concerns.

For more than three years now, OEFFA has facilitated the Ohio Soil Health Initiative. This group of farming organizations, soil and water conservation districts, soil scientists, farmers and agencies

understand the importance of soil health- for water quality reasons and more. During that time, we have collectively held farmer listening sessions to learn about current soil health practices, what farmers want to be doing more of and what barriers stand in their way. Farmers and ranchers share a desire to learn about soil health practices from their peers, receive technical and financial assistance and participate in and learn from on- farm demonstrations. The most common barriers were lack of equipment or knowledge, cost, lack of mentors and risk to their cash crop.

This coalition believes that we can do more to seed and disseminate farmer innovation throughout the state in an efficient, and farmer directed way. This pilot project is the direct outcome of the many groups and individuals that have participated in this coalition.

OEFFA seeks to administer a Soil Health Pilot Project to advance these goals. These projects will not focus solely on the Western Basin, as we plan to support farmers in all regions of the state.

Governor DeWine has said, “As a state, we are committed to helping farmers adopt the practices that can make a real difference.” This is another way we can help farmers make a difference. OEFFA has had conversations with both H2Ohio and the Department of Agriculture, both of which see the value of the pilot project which would be additive to the work of H2Ohio, giving diverse farmers throughout the state the opportunity to improve their soil health practices.

American Farmland Trust conducted two soil health case studies in Ohio which illustrate how wider adoption and support for good soil health practices will yield considerable economic and environmental benefits for individual producers as well as the state of Ohio. If you are interested, I would be glad to get you that data.

This pilot project will not just serve the state in mitigating water quality issues but also seeks to improve the viability and profitability of farmers.

I respectfully ask you to support our amendment of \$250,000 in each fiscal year from the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Soil and Water Conservation District Support line to support the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association for the Soil Health Pilot Project.

I can take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you.

Amalie Lipstreu
Policy Director
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association