



Cathann A. Kress, PhD

**Ohio State Vice President for Agricultural Administration and
Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences**

Good morning, Chairman Schaffer and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson. I am Dr. Cathann Kress and I serve as Vice President of Agricultural Administration and Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. I represent the 408 faculty, 1,305 staff, nearly 3,000 students, over 47,000 living alumni, 11,598 animals, 88 counties, and 11,400 acres that make up our college.

Our college includes three campuses (Columbus, CFAES Wooster, and statewide), OSU Extension and 4-H, multiple academic units including the School of Environment and Natural Resources, Stone Lab, and 12 research stations that make up the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, known as OARDC. We are committed to scholarship across our three mission areas (teaching, research, Extension) with a commitment to serving our state, as well as our country and world.

I am here to testify as a proponent of Amended Substitute House Bill 33, that includes three percent increases for the next two years for OSU Extension (FY2024 - \$25,504,000; FY2025 - \$26,269,000), the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Centers (FY2024 - \$37,169,000; FY2025 - \$38,284,000), and Sea Grant (FY2024 - \$308,000; FY2025 - \$317,000), as well as a historic \$10M investment for the Multi-Species Animal Learning Center (MALC).

Increasing enrollment and creating more pathways to agricultural studies is of the utmost importance. In Ohio, 1 in 8 jobs are in the fields of food, agriculture, and the environment. Nationwide, the number of jobs and opportunities is much greater than the number of graduates in agriculture and related fields. A recent study by USDA indicates the agricultural, food, and natural resource sectors are experiencing a demand for 59,400 jobs annually for graduates with a four-year degree. Currently, public and land-grant universities are only graduating 36,100 per year. For us to meet the demands of our industries, we must continue to foster a thriving pipeline to our college for our traditional student populations, as well as those who have not traditionally found careers in food, agriculture, or environmental sciences.

CFAES has aimed to increase enrollment by prioritizing early admission notification for early action applicants, including additional consideration in the application review for FFA and 4-H participation, leadership experience, and recognition of skills learned in farming experiences. Our CFAES recruitment and new enrollment pilot efforts are paying off - we are expecting a 32% enrollment increase for traditional agriculture majors, with a total increase across the college of 16% over last year.

Building a modern learning center for animal sciences education is critically important to the future of animal sciences education at Ohio State. We are well on our way with the fundraising for the Multi-Species Animal Learning Center (MALC). This public/private partnership is receiving funding from Nationwide and support from Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and the commodity groups to improve and modernize our animal learning opportunities and ensure Ohio students are prepared for the workforce of tomorrow. We were pleased to see that the House included a strategic, one-time capital investment for the MALC in Substitute House Bill 33. This \$10 million is needed to meet the goal of obtaining the OSU Board of Trustees' approval of the project. The MALC will bring people and animals together, creating educational opportunities around animal and human interactions and supporting education for CFAES students across the lifespan.

OSU Extension, the outreach arm of our college, is housed in all 88 of Ohio's counties. As a land grant, we are part of a cooperative structure that includes key partners all dedicated to integrating research, education, and extension to improve the food and agricultural sectors, the environment, and the quality of people's lives. OSU Extension has been working on several high-impact initiatives including:

- A partnership with Broadband Ohio, where we worked with 13 rural Ohio counties to help them make critical decisions regarding broadband. Together with county commissioners, Extension Community Development specialists worked to create plans of action, and we are looking forward to implementing this program on a wider basis with support from the General Assembly.
- The Farm Financial Management and Policy Institute, helps Ohio farmers manage their businesses as the agricultural industry changes and evolves. The institute created a Beginning Farmers' Program certification, which provides beginning farmers the opportunity to pursue tax breaks passed by the General Assembly in 2022.
- The CFAES Emergency Response team addresses challenges related to the food and agricultural production systems. This team played an integral role in preparing the state for challenges with the

Avian Influenza outbreak last year. Working closely with Ohio EMA, the Ohio Department of Agriculture, and other state entities, Extension was able to provide trusted scientific information to meet these challenges. On our CFAES Wooster campus, the Plant and Animal Agrosecurity Research facility is one of three biosafety level 3 labs in the United States. It provides us with a unique ability to work on vaccines for diseases like African Swine Fever and Avian Influenza.

- In the wake of the train derailment in East Palestine, Extension has worked closely with EMA to help answer questions from farmers, community members, and public decision makers, and ensure the public has the resources needed to confirm food, water, and human safety. Ohio State specialists also provided research and support, including toxicologists specializing in food safety and agricultural production.

CFAES researchers are working on discoveries and innovations to improve our state, country, and the world by leveraging our 12 research stations that make up the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, known as OARDC. From FY21 to FY22 CFAES saw an increase of more than 20% in research expenditures. Over 220 proposals were submitted in FY22 that were interdisciplinary involving multiple departments, colleges, and/or other universities. In the last 5 years, CFAES research expenditures have increased by over 40% and total invention disclosures have increased by 43%.

We also work directly with the agricultural industry to help solve emerging 21st century problems. To help the industry meet the ever-changing concerns of its stakeholders, we partnered with Nationwide to form the AgTech Innovation Hub. Nationwide and CFAES are working together to encourage the development of innovative solutions that help the agricultural ecosystem while better understanding, managing, and mitigating climate risk. The Innovation Hub will promote applied research, technology transfer, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and transdisciplinary innovation in support of agricultural technology.

Production of food in controlled environment greenhouses, often using soilless and hydroponic methods, will be key to feeding the world in the future. Our new Controlled Environment Agricultural Research Center at our Waterman Agricultural and Natural Resources Laboratory opened in September. Over \$10 million in funding has already been secured by CFAES for research utilizing this new complex.

Ohio Sea Grant (OSG) continues to build partnerships across Ohio's academic institutions, better positioning the state to prevent and manage water quality issues. OSG works to ensure that the outcomes of these collaborative research efforts are available to inform stakeholder behaviors and Lake Erie management decisions. For instance, Ohio Sea Grant and 12 other institutions co-manage Ohio's Harmful Algal Bloom Research Initiative (HABRI). Ohio Sea Grant is convening a consortium of Ohio academic institutions to assess the effectiveness and future role of implemented and planned wetland restoration projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of CFAES and your investment in our college. Your support of our \$10M request for the Multi-Species Animal Learning Center and three percent increases for the next two years for our line items: OSU Extension, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Centers, and Sea Grant will allow us to keep serving Ohioans. As a land-grant institution, The Ohio State University has a significant legacy of impact and leadership in Ohio's agricultural industry, but we must continually seek ways to broaden that impact. Thank you, all, for your dedication to this work. After all, our work is the ultimate work. We sustain life.