



**Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 111**

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Chairman 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 proponent testimony on Senate Bill 111, which would establish an Urban Farmer Youth Initiative Pilot Program.

OSU Extension is uniquely positioned to collaborate and help carry out the Urban Youth Initiative Pilot Program detailed in Senate Bill 111.

Ohio State University Extension is the community-based outreach unit of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. Extension "empowers through education," and helps all Ohioans build better lives, better businesses, and better communities. OSU Extension delivers knowledge from Ohio State to every county in Ohio, both urban and rural. Extension works with people right where they live to strengthen their own lives and communities. Extension connects with people in all stages of life – from young children to older adults – from families and children to farmers and business owners, community leaders and elected officials.

Ohio 4-H can serve as a conduit for the Urban Youth Initiative Pilot Program in Senate Bill 111. 4-H, the youth development program, was born in Ohio, and has been part of OSU Extension since the early 1900s. It is now part of Extension programs across the country. Today, 4-H is the largest youth development organization in the nation, empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. Young people in 4-H can learn about an endless variety of topics, from archery and woodworking to baking, astronomy, writing, and STEM topics like robotics. Additionally, 4-H also offers programming for youth to focus on their college and career goals following high school. Although the scope of 4-H has grown since its beginnings in 1902, its original mission to teach youth about nature and agriculture is still very much alive with numerous projects, clubs, and programs focused on the natural world, agriculture, and growing food.

Traditionally, 4-H consists of clubs with members who take individual projects over the length of a year and then showcase them at the fair, where they are judged. 4-H offers several fruit and vegetable gardening projects for individual members, including "Grow Your Own Vegetables," "Growing with the Seasons, and "Edible Landscapes." These projects walk youth through planning, designing, growing, and harvesting their vegetable gardens and fruit trees. There are also many projects related to urban animal production (think backyard poultry) and entomology (think beneficial insects such as pollinators as well as correction such as invasive pest control). Although these projects are geared toward individuals, the

information could be tailored toward groups of young people and used to aid the goals of Senate Bill 111.

In addition to projects for individuals, OSU Extension offers many group-oriented and school-based opportunities for youth to learn about growing food. One such opportunity is the national Farm to School Program, which supports procuring, serving, and teaching about local foods in schools and early childhood education sites. Since 2011, Ohio State University Extension has led the Ohio Farm to School Program and convened a state-level Farm to School Network. In partnership with the Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Education, OSU Extension currently has six regional farm to school networks across Ohio, and is working to create two additional networks in the north west and north central regions of the state. Teachers, volunteers, and 4-H club advisors also have access to 4-H programs such as “Growing Together” and “Junior Master Gardeners” to teach gardening and garden-based science. We also have agriscience programs in a variety of schools across the state to introduce urban youth to agricultural science and careers. Because OSU Extension already has experience delivering programs like Farm to School or Junior Master Gardeners to youth, these programs could easily be adapted or used as part of the curriculum for the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative Pilot Program.

Through OSU Extension, 4-H also offers special interest or “SPIN Clubs” in many Ohio counties. SPIN Clubs are for youth in grades K-12 and focus on a particular topic of interest for the entirety of the short-term club. Some SPIN Clubs take place within an existing framework, such as schools, after-school programs, or community recreation centers, whereas others are more stand-alone clubs. Previous SPIN Clubs in Franklin, Cuyahoga, Mahoning and Summit Counties have focused on topics like soils, gardening, and livestock. SPIN Clubs are very adaptable and often take place in the communities they are serving. The SPIN Club framework could be used under Senate Bill 111 to deliver agricultural programming to young people learning in urban areas.

Another community-based program that OSU Extension could draw from when assisting with the implementation of the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative Pilot Program is Cleveland’s “Summer Sprout.” Summer Sprout is a community gardening program led by OSU Extension in Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland Department of Community Development. The program first began in 1976, and OSU Extension has been a partner since 1977. The Summer Sprout program provides soil testing, seeds, starter plants, soil amendments, tilling services, raised bed materials, educational outreach, and support to participating gardens. OSU Extension collaborates with community partners, including the City of Cleveland Land Bank, which develops land licenses for garden sites. The community gardens are diverse; led by neighborhood clubs, schools, faith-based groups, non-profit agencies, and other resident groups. The Summer Sprout program could serve as a potential blueprint for activities carried out under the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative Pilot Program—the same activities and resources could be modified to cater toward urban youth in the pilot communities.

In Columbus, the Extension program Urban ROOTS is funded by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners to engage 8th-grade students in immersive educational experiences and agricultural careers. This is another program that could be adapted to the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative. Through all these projects, programming, and activities, OSU Extension is developing the next generation of Ohio’s workforce, not only in the agricultural sector, but also in STEM, natural resources, and beyond.

OSU Extension is excited about the potential of the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative in Senate Bill 111. As potential partners in carrying out the program, we are excited for the opportunity to reach new youth

audiences with information and immersion in the food and agricultural space. We hope to leverage our long-time work and knowledge in this arena to help ensure that the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative is successful.

Chairman Schaffer and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

