



Joint House and Senate Agriculture Committee  
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Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture  
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Chairman Creech, Chairman Schaffer and Members of the House and Senate Joint Agriculture Committee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2023 Ohio State Fair! In my two terms as State Representative, I was proud to serve on the House Agriculture Committee. It is my honor to stand before you this morning as Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture and I sincerely hope you take this day to explore what this amazing Fair has to offer.

For 168 years, the Ohio State Fair has hosted visitors from all over the United States and beyond, demonstrating why Ohio is truly the heart of it all! The Fair has a storied tradition of showcasing Ohio's many products and the people behind them. This Fair is additionally a showcase for our youth in agriculture and the incredible hard work that they exhibit. Last and certainly not least, the food is pretty darn good.

I want to begin by talking about my friend Virgil Strickler. Beginning his service in 1993 and moving up to the role of General Manager in 2004, Virgil's time and attention to our youth exhibitors and Ohio's agricultural industry is just one example of his incredible dedication. This property welcomes nearly one million people during the Fair and hosts hundreds of events annually. It has been in caring and steady hands during Virgil's tenure. His impact has been felt with the Youth Reserve Program, which has allocated nearly \$5 million in scholarships to those youth exhibitors Virgil cares so much about. In June, Governor DeWine announced the program shall be known as the Virgil L. Strickler Youth Reserve Program. I know I speak for all of us when we say *thank you Virgil* for your 30 years of service to this State Fair and to the State of Ohio. We wish you all the best in your next chapter.

To my friends and colleagues in the Legislature, thank you for your commitment to Ohio's agriculture industry. In the state budget that was recently signed into law, this commitment was evident. From the successful H2Ohio program, to ensuring that our rides are safely inspected, to grants that assist those in the Meat Processing industry, we at the Department of Agriculture appreciate your support. Through the budget and other legislation, you have demonstrated your steadfast assistance to Ohio's 94 County and Independent Fairs. As you can imagine, I visit many of those Fairs throughout the summer and early fall. 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. I know they appreciate the help you have provided to them over the past few years.

The same types of upgrades that apply to our County Fairs also apply to the property we are at this morning. I would like to express our appreciation for your support in the budget of the Expo 2050 Plan. This comprehensive and well-researched plan will ensure the viability of this wonderful State Fair for generations to come.



I want to mention some upcoming activities at the State Fair. Today at 1:00pm, ODA's Ohio Proud program will celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday! Ohio Proud promotes food and agriculture that is made in and grown in Ohio. We will be celebrating with cake at the Taste of Ohio Café. At 2:00pm, our friend Dr. Cathann Kress from *The Ohio State University* College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) will be holding the Dean's Charity Steer Show at the Voinovich Livestock and Trade Center. I would encourage you to stop by if you're able this afternoon!

This Thursday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Director Mary Mertz will be hosting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual ODNR Cardinal Games from 2:00-4:00pm at the Natural Resources Park. This friendly battle between members of the Cabinet and the General Assembly is always a lot of fun to compete in or watch. I know we can agree that no matter what team what you play for, it is guaranteed to be a good time. May the odds be ever in your favor!

Also on Thursday, we have the *first* ever Ohio House and Senate Pork Off. Taking place at 6:45pm at the O'Neill Swine Barn, we have five State Representatives and five Senators competing in a hog showmanship showdown. With some helpful coaching by 4-H and FFA exhibitors and with the competition being judged by the Honorable Don Jones and Bob Peterson, I promise you this will be a fine swine time.

Committee members – please take the time to enjoy this day at the Fair and once again I thank you for your presence today.

