

Testimony

By Virgil Strickler, General Manager of the Ohio Expositions Commission

*Before the House Agriculture Committee and the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
August 1, 2023*

Thank you all for visiting the Ohio State Fair today. I appreciate you allowing me this opportunity to speak to you. My name is Virgil Strickler, and I am the General Manager of the Ohio Expositions Commission. It has been an honor and pleasure to serve the state for the last 30 years, and as I join you today, it is during my last fair as General Manager of this great State Fair, as I will be retiring in the months following this year's fair. I am passionate about Ohio, about agriculture, and about providing a year-round event facility that allows a wide variety of events to call Central Ohio home.

Although I will soon be moving onto my next chapter, I know that the future of Ohio agriculture, and the future of the Ohio Expo Center & State Fair, is bright. Senators and Representatives, I greatly thank you for your support of the Expo 2050 Master Plan. Thanks to your assistance in the current operating budget, we will see these grounds transform over the coming years. In fact, during next year's fair, this event will be in a new home, as this building is among the few that will be removed to make way for bright, beautiful, functional new spaces that will benefit the Ohio agricultural community, the Ohio State Fair, and the hundreds of non-fair events held here at our facility the other 353 days a year.

As we begin Phase 1 of the Expo 2050 Master Plan, we will see the a new entry gate on the north side of the grounds, which approximately 80% of our fair guests will enter when they park near Historic Crew Stadium. This new grand entrance is slated for completion for the 2025 Ohio State Fair. In addition, we will see a new Town Square area emerge, anchored by the new Ohio Showcase Building on the footprint of the current Ohio Building, where Ohio's agricultural commodity groups serve food. The new Ohio Showcase will tell the story of Ohio in conjunction with the Ohio History Connection, and will provide opportunities to showcase regional foods from Ohio.

And, like I mentioned, this building in which we currently stand will be replaced. We will see a massive new Ag & Hort Building, that will be the new home of the Land & Living Building and Ohio's agricultural commodity groups and the Taste of Ohio Café. Because you'll be able to learn about agriculture, and have a meal served to you by a real Ohio farmer, you will get the entire farm to fork experience right here. During the remainder of the year, the new Ag & Hort Building will be an amazing multi-purpose facility that we envision will be home to many diverse non-fair events, and will enhance existing events such as the All-American Quarter Horse Congress and Good Guys Car Show.

Both of the new buildings I mentioned are slated for completion prior to the 2026 Ohio State Fair. That means that the next couple of years will look different. We, and our partners, will work together to adapt during the periods of construction as we all await the beauty and improvement that we will see with the completion of Phase 1 of the Expo 2050 Master Plan.

Senators and Representatives, I thank you again for your support of the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget, as well as Governor DeWine for his leadership and support through this process. This historic investment into the Ohio Expo Center & State Fair will help transform our facility. Because of you and your support, our future is bright.

Thank you for your support, and for joining us during the Ohio State Fair today.