

Invited Remarks on OSU Extension, OARDC, and Ohio Sea Grant

House Agriculture Committee Meeting Thursday, Feb 13, 2025

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Good morning, thank you Chairman Creech, Vice Chair Newman, Ranking Member Miller and the members of the House Agriculture Committee for giving me the opportunity to address you today. I am Dr. Cathann Kress and I serve as Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. I represent the 417 faculty, 1,331 staff, over 3,200 students, 46,160 living alumni, 11,598 animals, with nearly 11,200 acres in all 88 counties that make up our college. We are grateful for your support of OSU Extension, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Centers, and Ohio Sea Grant, which allow us to continue serving Ohioans.

From academics and research to providing invaluable outreach to every part of this state, our college is large and complex. We have three campuses (Columbus, CFAES Wooster, and statewide), including OSU Extension and Ohio 4-H, multiple academic units including the School of Environment and Natural Resources, research and experiment stations collectively known as “OARDC” or Ohio Agricultural and Research Development Center, and over 100 unique centers, institutes, and programs supporting a breadth of work around food and food systems, a wide range of production, environmental and ecosystem sustainability, policy and economics, and health.

In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Act, also known as the Land Grant Act, paving the way for states to create land-grant institutions of higher learning. In Ohio, the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, which later became The Ohio State University, was founded as a land-grant

institution in 1870. In 1914, Congress expanded the role of land-grant institutions with the Smith-Lever Act which established the Cooperative Extension Service – an outreach arm of land-grant colleges. The purpose was to “extend” agricultural and technological knowledge and research from land-grant institutions to the people of the state. As the land-grant college of The Ohio State University, the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES), is dedicated to serving the people of the state of Ohio and we operate as a cooperative with our stakeholders.

Our entire college enterprise of research, Extension, and education works closely with Ohio agriculture and food, and natural resources. In Ohio, the breadth of our agriculture is impressive - few states can claim the production of over 200 commodities. When you add to that the richness of our food companies and efficient food supply chain, the breadth grows further. But also add the 8 million acres of forests and the forestry industry, fisheries, and aquaculture - Ohio truly is the heart of it all.

Our college matches that breadth, and the capacity funds support robust programs statewide impacting Ohioans, whether they are in agriculture or not. From the largest commodities of soybeans and poultry to niche crops like our native PawPaw, our researchers and Extension specialists respond. From our internationally renowned Soybean Research Center or our specialty crops Extension station in Piketon. From our grape and wine station in Ashtabula County to the white oaks project in Gallia. From 4-H in our most rural areas to Urban Roots in Columbus. Our college has an impact supporting our industry and even further in farm safety, economics and trade, food packaging, meat science, water quality, and insect surveillance.

Investing in Ohio agriculture benefits families, businesses, and communities statewide. In the last two weeks alone, our researchers and Extension professionals have been working on issues related to HPAI (avian influenza), tariffs and trade and water drainage, along with the anniversary of the East Palestine train derailment and our response in the aftermath to ensure

safe forage for animals. All of this while creating responsive workforce credentials for people already in the workforce.

The budget bill includes critical funding for three line-items that help support the education, research and programs that benefit the agriculture industry and Ohioans throughout the state. Let me take a minute to discuss each of these important line-items.

Ohio State University Extension extends our college and the university to all 88 counties in Ohio. It provides front-door access to Ohio State right in our local communities and a significant partnership with county commissioners across Ohio. OSU Extension educates over 2.5 million Ohioans each year where they live, from 4-H youth to families, to senior citizens, with over 1 million learners engaged through virtual education. Current Extension efforts in local communities include a focus on food accessibility and security; precision agriculture; broadband connectivity and access; housing counseling; rural vitality; health and wellness; Master Gardeners, Ohio 4-H Pathways to the Future; and workforce development. The Executive Budget appropriates \$25.5 million in both fiscal years, which is also flat-funded at FY 24 levels, to support Extension programs in every county.

Through OSU Extension, our college not only partners with and supports our agricultural community and producers but also administers SNAP-ED programs and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program to 11,035 adults and 58,898 youth. We respond to urgent local issues – like the East Palestine train derailment – with cutting-edge university research, providing timely resources to help impacted Ohioans. Another important Extension program delivers financial literacy education to youth across the state. These efforts are all critical to the quality of life for Ohioans.

The dollars invested in our research, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) funding lines, are one of the only ways to support our infrastructure. It funds new studies assessing risk associated with field drainage, nutrition in dairy cattle, or health

implications from foods we grow in Ohio. The Executive Budget appropriates \$37.169 million each fiscal year, which is flat-funding from FY 24 levels, to fund this important work.

CFAES researchers are working on discoveries and innovations to improve our state, country, and the world by leveraging our research and experiment stations that make up OARDC. CFAES research expenditures increased 14% from FY23 to FY24, while the number of grant proposals submitted in FY24 increased by 10%. Since 2019, our research expenditures have increased by over 52%.

We recently established the “Transformation of American Rubber through Domestic Innovation for Supply Security” or (TARDISS) National Science Foundation Engineering Research Center (ERC) on our CFAES Wooster campus. The only NSF Engineering Research Center in a college of agriculture, the TARDISS ERC harnesses the power of nature, creating bridges between engineering, biology, and agriculture, to revolutionize alternative natural rubber production from domestic crops like the TK “rubber” dandelion. The initiative will also help create jobs, train a new and diverse engineering and agricultural workforce, and ease supply chain issues by building a domestic rubber supply, which is an essential part of national security.

We also work directly with our industries to solve emerging 21st-century problems. To help meet the ever-changing concerns of our 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 promotes applied research, technology transfer, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and transdisciplinary innovation in support of agricultural technology.

Sea Grant funds allow us to engage researchers across institutions to address water quality, fisheries, and issues specific to Lake Erie. Work supported by these funds impacts all Ohioans and makes a difference in the lives of every single person. The Executive Budget provides

\$308,000 both years of the biennium that is used as a state match for additional federal funding to improve water quality and management of Lake Erie, Ohio's biggest natural resource.

Ohio Sea Grant (OSG) continues to build partnerships across Ohio, better positioning the state to prevent and manage water quality issues. Sea Grant works to ensure that the outcomes of these collaborative research efforts are available to inform stakeholder behaviors and Lake Erie management decisions.

- 114 projects have been conducted as part of the Harmful Algal Bloom Research Initiative. These projects have changed farming practices and water treatment approaches and have informed state agency management decisions.
- As part of a six-state collaboration through Great Lakes ReNEW, an NSF Regional Innovation Engine, we are accelerating innovation and workforce development in the Great Lakes region.
- We have seen more than \$193M in economic impact, 160 businesses created or retained, and 4,098 jobs created and retained through Ohio State programs, research, and partnerships.

Serving Ohioans and focusing on student success is at the core of everything we do, and it is why our CFAES Columbus and Wooster campuses are strategic centers of workforce and economic development for all of Ohio. This fall, our student enrollment numbers were up again at both campuses. We are intentional about retaining and lifting our CFAES students to success, with our graduation rates exceeding the university's average and over 96% of our graduates employed within six months of graduation or enrolled in graduate education. Plus, 78% of our graduates stayed within the state of Ohio so we're helping to fill the workforce pipeline for the state.

Our college is committed to ensuring more young people across Ohio can attend and find opportunities within our food, agricultural, and environmental industries. Our enrollment initiatives focus on boosting undergraduate enrollment in the college. We do this by notifying applicants of admissions decisions sooner, increasing outreach to admitted students, and giving

extra consideration to FFA and 4-H involvement, as well as leadership experience during application reviews. New First Year Student enrollment in our agricultural programs on the Columbus campus was up over 18% in AU24.

Building a modern learning center for animal sciences education is critically important to the future of animal sciences education at Ohio State. Thanks to the investment from Governor Mike DeWine and the General Assembly as well as funding from Nationwide, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, and our commodity partners, we are currently constructing the new Multispecies Animal Learning Center or MALC out at Waterman here in Columbus. This facility will improve and modernize our animal learning opportunities and ensure Ohio students are prepared for the workforce of tomorrow. The MALC will bring people and animals together, creating educational opportunities around animal and human interactions and supporting education for Ohio State Students, K–12 students, and learners across the lifespan.

We believe that the state of Ohio, with its vast agricultural breadth, abundant water resources, and unique natural assets, is well positioned to be a key player in shaping the future of food, fiber, and fuel for our nation. With continued and consistent investment, we can keep pace with advancements in technology, shifts in policy, changes in weather and evolving risks—ensuring we effectively support our industry and meet its changing needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of CFAES and for your investment in our college. Your support of our line items: OSU Extension, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, and Sea Grant 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 food, agricultural, and environmental industries, 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.