



*Working together for Ohio farmers to advance
agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**House Technology and Innovation Committee
HB 646 Proponent Testimony
Evan Callicoat, Director of State Policy
February 24, 2026**

Chairman Claggett, Vice Chair Workman, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the House Technology and Innovation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 646. My name is Evan Callicoat, and I serve as the Director of State Policy for the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. The Ohio Farm Bureau appreciates Reps. Click and Deeter for introducing a bill that would create a Data Center Study Commission to evaluate the multiple impacts caused by the proliferation of data centers within our state. While these types of development may provide a benefit to Ohio's citizens and economy, Farm Bureau members have concerns about data centers and their potential long-term impacts.

OFBF thoroughly analyzes all legislation in conjunction with the policies approved by our grassroots members to ensure any potential legislation best serves the interests of Ohio agriculture and rural communities.

We fully recognize that the technology we use in modern agriculture could not exist without data centers and other related technological advancements. However, the amount of agricultural land and other resources (water, utility-scale power generation, energy transportation infrastructure and access to natural gas for on-site, "behind the meter" generation fuel) that are being devoted, or rather committed, to these projects has raised many concerns and questions among our members across the state. While development has been centered around Columbus and central Ohio, we have members involved with local governments and site developers looking at major industrial projects in every area of the state. Many are asking if the benefits of attracting data centers at this pace outweigh the costs. Establishing a study commission enables an in-depth cost-benefit analysis to ensure we do what is best for our state in the long term before we reach a breaking point.

According to the Office of the Ohio Consumers Counsel, Ohio has around 200 data centers, the fifth-highest in the country, and nearly double the number of any of our neighboring states. There are probably several reasons Ohio has become a target for data centers. A major factor is the availability of large quantities of water. Ohio has abundant water resources with minimal regulation of water use. Another aspect is likely access to Ohio's electric infrastructure. Because of our size and population, many areas can easily access the power resources they need. Ohio is also within a reasonable distance of nearly 60% of the U.S. population, which allows for quicker data delivery, and it has fiber-optic infrastructure already available. Ohio has a favorable tax structure, a sales tax exemption for data centers, and flexible zoning. Business decisions are



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typically made based on a number of criteria, and it is safe to say that Ohio has become a target location for those developing these types of projects.

OFBF appreciates the wide range of impacts the bill charges the commission with studying regarding data centers. Top of mind for OFBF members (in no particular order) are environmental impact, water use, effects on the electrical grid, and the impacts on farmland. When considering environmental impacts and water use, I will point to the recent draft permit proposed by the Ohio EPA for data center water discharge.

The draft general permit states, “It has been determined that a lowering of water quality of various waters of the state associated with granting coverage under this permit is necessary to accommodate important social and economic development in the state of Ohio.” In the last decade alone, Ohio has spent nearly \$1 billion improving its water quality through the H2Ohio program. Improving water quality helps all citizens, protecting both water quality and quantity. Does one industry really get to undo all the progress we’ve made? Various communities have grown concerned about the impact of data centers on their local water sources, and we could encourage the General Assembly to share that concern. Addressing water quality is often a long and difficult process, but nothing compared to having water quantity discussions.

Farm Bureau members have also seen the staggering amount of electricity these data centers consume, which cause the market to respond in unprecedented ways. The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) has recently agreed to a tariff structure with AEP that will allow AEP to charge data centers up to 85% of their estimated power needs, in order to prevent shifting the costs of that generation onto the broader customer base. This tariff is the first of its kind in Ohio, and we will likely see more if further changes do not occur. Recently passed HB 15 allows these centers to co-locate their own power generation facilities “behind the meter.” Members are asking how grid reliability and electricity costs will be impacted by these development trends.

Moreover, current proposals show that acreage needed to accommodate on-site power generation will noticeably add to the total acreage being earmarked for the entire development project. We are now looking at potential projects that encompass several hundred to over a thousand acres. How will these projects work to preserve/protect surface and subsurface drainage structures and conservation practices that serve the needs of all homes, farms, and small businesses located within the local watershed well beyond project boundaries?

Farmland preservation and land use is without a doubt, the number one issue of concern for OFBF’s members. Data centers are only a part of this conversation, as other development and urban sprawl encroach on prime farmland as well. According to the USDA, Ohio has lost 1 million acres in farmland over the past 20 years. As of 2024, the total land in farms in Ohio is



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down 200,000 acres from 2023. As a state and country, we must recognize that farmland is a strategic resource and a vital part of our nation's security. And once farmland is lost, it is likely gone forever as a productive agricultural resource.

Most data centers occupy at least 250 acres, with hyperscale data centers reaching 1,000 acres or more. If we continue to locate development projects of this size, data centers or not, in our state with no long-term land-use plan, we will see Ohio agriculture suffer. The farm economy is in one of its worst stretches since the 1980's, and no farmer can compete with multibillion-dollar companies for land, even in the best of record years. One of OFBF's founding principles was to protect private property rights, but that also assumes that all potential landowners are on a level playing field. We ask the legislature and/or the future commission to keep this concern top of mind when considering HB 646.

While data centers may provide some benefits to our country, state, and local areas, the absence of a robust regulatory framework and long-term planning may lead to unforeseen repercussions. OFBF and its members recognize the difficult nature of this issue and stand ready to work with all interested parties and levels of government to create a world in which data centers can best serve our citizens without causing long-term, harmful effects on other parts of the economy and the environment. We again wish to thank Reps. Click and Deeter for introducing this bill, and the committee for allowing us to provide comments today. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.