
Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
House Bill 96
Proponent Testimony
May 14, 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice-Chairman Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the Ohio Department of Agriculture's FY26-27 budget request.

The Ohio Pork Council is proud to represent approximately 2,500 members dedicated to advancing the Ohio pork industry and its products, while simultaneously raising awareness of the challenges our sector faces. The total economic output of the pork industry in Ohio stands at \$3.4 billion, which encompasses \$1.4 billion in value-added activity. This sector employs 28,175 individuals and contributes over \$115 million in state and local taxes.

Our organization is committed to advocating for family farmers who prioritize animal health, food security, environmental stewardship, and economic vitality. In reviewing the budget for FY26-27, we identify several key priorities that are essential for ensuring the long-term strength and sustainability of Ohio's agricultural sector.

Investment in Protecting Ohio

Foremost among our requests is the full funding of two critical initiatives designed to enhance animal health and ensure public safety and economic resilience for Ohio agriculture.

We strongly advocate for the adequate funding of the "Protect OHIO" initiative at The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, seeking the allocation be increased back to \$20 million per fiscal year (SC1289). The state currently faces a shortage of large animal veterinarians, particularly in rural regions where their services are most needed. Given that Ohio's agricultural sector exceeds \$125 billion, the presence of veterinarians is vital for maintaining animal health, which directly influences our food security and public health. The shortage of veterinarians, especially in rural areas, poses a significant threat to our agricultural infrastructure, increasing our vulnerability to potential outbreaks of animal diseases.

The College of Veterinary Medicine is poised to address this issue with a comprehensive plan focusing on enhancing veterinary infrastructure, improving disease prevention strategies, and expanding rural veterinary services. The proposed investment will support the expansion of the student body and facilitate the creation of an Emerging Animal Disease Center dedicated to proactive research and surveillance. This effort is crucial to safeguarding both Ohio's agricultural economy and public health.

Additionally, we urge an increase of the funding for staffing of the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (ADDL). Operated by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the ADDL is an essential component in monitoring, diagnosing, and containing animal diseases that pose threats to agriculture and public health. Recent outbreaks, such as the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), underscore the urgent need for effective disease response capabilities. Unfortunately, the ADDL is under-resourced, jeopardizing our ability to respond effectively to these threats. An investment of \$2.51 million to add ten full-time employees will significantly enhance our diagnostic capabilities, enabling timely responses to disease threats and ultimately preserving the livelihoods of Ohio farmers and securing food for our residents. We support the increase in the Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab line item (700401) and the Poultry Inspection line item (700415)(SC0477).

Support Collaborative Approach for Water Quality

Moreover, we call upon the General Assembly to restore full funding for the H2Ohio initiative as introduced by Governor Mike DeWine. This program exemplifies the effectiveness of public-private collaboration in promoting environmental sustainability and improving water quality throughout our state. Since its launch, H2Ohio has successfully reduced agricultural runoff, particularly in the Western Lake Erie Basin, where harmful algal blooms have presented a growing challenge. By incentivizing sustainable agricultural practices, this initiative not only supports farmers but also protects the vital water resources that are essential for all Ohioans.

Furthermore, we appreciate the House's efforts to include language for an Ohio pork marketing program. We further request that the Senate support some technical changes needed to make the program workable for producers. Should the National Checkoff program be phased out, Ohio's family pig farmers would face significant setbacks in maintaining the momentum gained in consumer demand, producer-funded research, and educational and certification programs. The absence of a checkoff would undermine a unified mechanism to fund advertising and marketing efforts, posing a risk to pork consumption and market share—particularly critical in a competitive protein market. Therefore, the language is necessary to ensure that a pork marketing program continues in Ohio, if the National Checkoff program is phased out.

In conclusion, these funding priorities represent critical steps toward safeguarding our agricultural future, enhancing food security, and promoting environmental sustainability in Ohio. We respectfully urge the General Assembly to prioritize these funding requests to bolster the pork industry and protect the well-being of our communities.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Day".

Executive Vice President
Ohio Pork Council