

SB 329 – Written Testimony  
February 17, 2025  
Bryn Bird, President  
Ohio Farmers Union

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 329, legislation to prohibit the spreading of oil and gas waste from conventional wells on Ohio's roads.

My name is Bryn Bird. I serve as President of the Ohio Farmers Union, am a recent past Township Trustee from Granville Township in Licking County, and I am also a farmer. My family grows produce on land that depends on healthy soil and clean water. I was raised on a dirt road outside Granville, Ohio, and today, the fields that feed hundreds of families each week sit along those same dusty rural roads. When trucks pass, that dust does not stay on the roadway. It settles on fence lines, on ditches, and on the edges of farm fields. As a farmer, I need to know that the dust blowing across our crops and soil is safe. I need to know that is applied to the roads does not become part of the food system.

Radium in Licking County has long been an area of focus in my life. I completed my public health graduate thesis on radon gas in Licking County. Our county has some of the highest radon levels in the nation. Radon is a radioactive gas produced by the decay of radium, the same radioactive element present in oil and gas brine.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. That statistic is not theoretical to me. My mother died from an environmental lung cancer in 2018. So, when we discuss radioactive brine on our roads, this is not simply a regulatory conversation. It is personal. This conversation is about lessening our overall risk and accumulation of toxic radioactive material in our daily life.

Oil and gas wastewater, including conventional well brine, has been documented to contain radium-226 and radium-228, along with heavy metals and other contaminants. As Buckeye Environmental Network and other watchdog organizations have highlighted, when this waste is spread on roads, radioactive materials can accumulate in roadside soils and dust.

These materials do not disappear. They can wash into ditches, move through drainage systems, settle in agricultural fields, and enter waterways. They can also become airborne as dust.

In Licking County, I think about cyclists training on our rural roads, including Pelotonia riders raising funds for cancer research. It seems ironic central Ohio puts up our green ribbons each August but we could also be risking riders health and they may potentially be breathing dust from road applications that contain radioactive waste. That contradiction is difficult to ignore.

As a township trustee, I understand the financial pressures local governments face. Gas well brine is inexpensive. We can get it pennies per gallon. With the uncertainty of the future of

property taxes and the fact many smaller townships depend totally on the gas tax revenue, it really becomes a question of finances. Granville Township made the decision to eliminate the use of oil and gas brine after residents brought forward research and data about radioactive content and cumulative exposure in 2016. We had been using what we believed to be “tested” brine but could not get definitive answers on everything that was being tested.

In 2023, our road supervisor took it on himself and applied for and received nearly \$80,000 through the Ohio Chloride Reduction Grant program. With those funds, the township purchased equipment that allows us to produce our own brine from road salt and water. We store that brine in 10,000-gallon tanks and utilized it during this most recent wave of snowstorms. It works. It is effective. And it keeps radioactive waste off our roads.

Yes, this alternative requires upfront investment. For small rural townships, that can feel daunting and staff capacity is limited. Grant writing and compliance take time and townships need technical assistance. As a former trustee, I understand how stretched rural governments are and that is why I believe this program should not only continue but be expanded. Our goal is to create intergovernmental agreements between the township, village, school district, and local university. This can stretch the grant dollars further and protect the entire community. Solutions exist. Granville Township is proof of that. That is why I believe piloting technical assistance for these funds through county Soil and Water Conservation Districts could help rural townships and smaller municipalities navigate the process and implement safer alternatives more efficiently.

Lastly, I want to share the commitment from Ohio Farmers Union. OFU represents approximately 2,500 family farms and at our January 31<sup>st</sup> state convention, our membership voted to support this legislation as a Special Order of Business. Farmers understand risk management. We understand tradeoffs. But we also understand cumulative exposure and that our greatest asset is our soil. We hope this body will vote to protect Ohio’s soil health.

SB 329 does not eliminate every environmental risk. But it does reduce an unnecessary one.

I respectfully urge the committee to support this legislation.

Thank you.