

Good morning, members of the Ohio Senate. My name is Jessica Helsinger, and I am here today to advocate for the immense value of extended programming within our agricultural education programs across Ohio. I have taught in the State of Ohio since 2009, my first 4 years in Stark County at Marlinton and the remainder of my teaching career in Miami County within Newton and Covington districts as satellites of the Upper Valley Career Center.

These programs, go beyond the traditional classroom setting, and are cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs. We often think of agriculture as simply planting and harvesting, but the reality is far more complex and dynamic. Extended programming, such as Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs), with internships and research opportunities, provides students with invaluable hands-on learning that brings classroom concepts to life and ignites their passions in ways that traditional instruction alone cannot.

Consider the powerful impact on students like a freshman who embarked on his SAE journey working with a local environmental drainage company. This wasn't just a summer job; it was an immersive experience in a vital and evolving sector of agriculture. Through dedication and the skills he developed, he not only excelled in his SAE project, earning state and national recognition, but he also demonstrated the value he brought to the company. Today, just a few years later, he is a partner in that very business, a testament to the transformative power of early, hands-on engagement. This young man's story exemplifies how extended programming can create direct pathways to meaningful careers and economic growth within our state.

Furthermore, these opportunities shape students' academic and professional trajectories in profound ways. Take, for instance, a college student. Her involvement in observing agricultural research and undertaking her own research projects through our extended programming opened her eyes to the scientific rigor and innovation driving modern agriculture. This firsthand experience wasn't just an extracurricular activity; it was a pivotal moment that solidified her passion and directed her academic pursuits. She is now a dedicated college student pursuing an advanced degree in agricultural research, poised to contribute to the future of our industry through scientific discovery. Her story illustrates how extended programming can inspire the next generation of agricultural scientists

and researchers, which is crucial for maintaining Ohio's competitive edge in this vital sector.

These are not isolated incidents. Across Ohio, extended agricultural education programs are fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, leadership abilities, and a strong work ethic in our students. They are providing real-world context to their learning, allowing them to explore diverse career pathways within agriculture, from agribusiness and technology to environmental science and research.

Investing in and expanding these extended programming opportunities is an investment in the future of Ohio agriculture. It ensures that our students are not just learning about agriculture, but are actively participating in it, gaining the skills and experiences necessary to thrive and lead. By supporting extended programming, you are empowering our students, strengthening our agricultural industry, and cultivating a brighter future for Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to recognize the profound value of extended programming in agricultural education and to support its continued growth and success.