

Members of the esteemed Ohio Senate,

My name is Emma Helsinger, and I am writing as a passionate advocate for the vital role of agricultural education in shaping the future leaders and innovators of our state. I am currently an 8th grader at Covington Exempted Village Schools in Miami County. My journey through agricultural education, particularly within the FFA and my Supervised Agricultural Experience Program (SAEP), has been nothing short of transformative, and I am eager to share its profound impact on my aspirations and future contributions to Ohio's agricultural landscape.

This past year, my Agriscience Fair project provided me with an incredible opportunity to connect with cattle breeders across 12 different states. The fact that this project placed in the top 4 at the Ohio FFA Convention underscores the caliber of experiential learning fostered by agricultural education. This experience wasn't just about research; it was about building a network, understanding diverse breeding practices, and recognizing the interconnectedness of our national agricultural community.

My SAEP has been the cornerstone of my agricultural education. It has been a hands-on, immersive experience that has extended far beyond the classroom. Through conducting research projects, I've learned the rigor of scientific inquiry and its direct application to real-world agricultural challenges. Breeding and raising cattle has instilled in me a deep understanding of animal husbandry, genetics, and the intricacies of livestock management. The ability to sell cattle to individuals in various states and purchase cattle from out-of-state breeders has provided invaluable insights into the agricultural marketplace and the importance of building relationships.

Furthermore, volunteering with various breeders in both the swine and cattle industries has broadened my perspective and allowed me to learn from seasoned professionals. However, the most rewarding aspect of my SAEP has been the privilege of working alongside a leader in agricultural marketing and service right here in Ohio. This mentorship has exposed me to the business side of agriculture, the importance of effective communication, and the crucial role of service in our industry.

These diverse experiences, all nurtured through agricultural education, have solidified my passion for animal agriculture and have guided my career aspirations. I am now determined to pursue a career focused on animal behavior and health, with a specific interest in exploring homeopathic and non-invasive methods. I believe that the foundation laid by my agricultural education, with its emphasis on scientific inquiry, animal welfare, and practical application, has uniquely prepared me to contribute meaningfully to this field.

Agricultural education is not just about farming; it is about cultivating critical thinking, fostering leadership skills, and inspiring the next generation of agricultural professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs, and advocates. It provides students with tangible skills, invaluable networks, and a deep appreciation for the vital role agriculture plays in our economy and society.

Investing in agricultural education is investing in the future of Ohio. It empowers students like me to explore our passions, develop expertise, and ultimately contribute to the continued growth and innovation of our agricultural sector. Thank you for your time and consideration.