

Education Committee: 5th Quarter Agricultural Education Grant Testimony
H.B. No 96

It is my pleasure to submit a written testimony on behalf of this bill, specifically for the 5th Quarter Agricultural Education grant. The Agriculture Education Fifth Quarter is a state-funded grant to support year-round, work-based learning instruction for students enrolled in agricultural education. The grant assists local schools and career centers with supplemental fiscal resources for the delivery of extended instruction to develop student Work-Based Learning through an organized, supervised agricultural experience.

For the past 6 years, I have had the opportunity to be part of Union and Seneca Counties and open my classroom doors to over 100 students per year. I currently teach at Seneca East Local School District in the eastern part of Seneca County. My heart has always been in education. I have had a passion to serve others through the lens of teaching and learning. Although I have had opportunities to leave the classroom, I have chosen to stay in the teaching profession for 6 years, and I plan to continue my career in this line of work because of the opportunities provided to young people on an individual basis through agricultural education.

Over the course of my career, I've had the privilege of teaching hundreds of students as they prepare for life beyond high school. Helping young people navigate an ever-changing career landscape is both rewarding and emotionally demanding. Each student who enters my classroom brings a unique background and is searching for direction as they take their first steps toward a productive future.

As educators, we constantly strive to create meaningful and authentic learning experiences that support the growth of our students into responsible, productive adults. In agricultural education, this challenge is heightened by the rapid pace of innovation within the industry—requiring us to rethink how we teach and connect with this generation.

One of the most effective approaches I've found is integrating Work-Based Learning through Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs. SAEs offer students a diverse range of hands-on opportunities that build valuable, transferable skills and lay the groundwork for thoughtful career exploration.

Over the past 6 years, I have passionately advocated for students to engage with professionals and businesses across Ohio. These connections have helped students discover their career interests and expand their networks through real-world mentorship. I firmly believe that SAEs extend learning far beyond the classroom and serve as a powerful strategy for reimagining education beyond the traditional model of seat time.

I'd like to share a few examples of SAE projects I've supported over the years that exemplify the impact of learning beyond the classroom. One of the most impactful SAE projects I've witnessed involved a 14-year-old student who began with just a few acres of hay and straw. With determination and vision, he gradually expanded his operation by renting additional land and purchasing old, worn-out equipment, which he restored himself into full working condition. Over

three years, his dedication grew his operation to 17 acres. His hands-on experience and mechanical skills opened the door to a high school internship with a local John Deere dealership during his junior year. He now works over 20 hours a week during the school year and full-time in the summer. This experience not only solidified his career goals but also earned him a scholarship to pursue a degree in diesel technology. He now has guaranteed full-time employment with the dealership upon graduation. His SAE journey is a powerful example of how real-world learning can lead directly to career success.

Another outstanding SAE example comes from a student who serves as an unpaid intern at a local veterinary clinic. Through this experience, she assists veterinary technicians with animal visits, surgeries, vaccinations, and a variety of hands-on procedures. Thanks to our supportive school administration, she's able to complete many of these experiences during the school day, allowing her to fully immerse herself in the veterinary field. One of the most unique opportunities she's had was traveling out of state with the veterinarian to assist with a complex livestock C-section—an experience few students her age ever encounter. This immersive internship has provided her with an exceptional foundation as she works toward her goal of attending veterinary school.

Each of these examples illustrates the powerful impact of providing students with meaningful, real-world experiences that extend far beyond what can be offered within traditional classroom walls. While I strive to create engaging and educational experiences in my classroom, these individualized SAE projects allow for deeper personal growth and career exploration. Career and technical education, particularly within agricultural education, plays a vital role in preparing future leaders who will advocate for agriculture, help feed a growing global population, and contribute to meeting the world's increasing energy and resource needs. One of the ongoing challenges I've encountered is the varying interpretation of educational experience guidelines by different school administrations. Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs are directly aligned with Work-Based Learning and create essential connections between students, educators, and industry mentors—opening doors to greater career awareness and opportunity. Every student deserves the chance to identify their personal growth goals and pursue experiences that extend far beyond what any one classroom or teacher can provide alone.

The stories I've shared today are not unique to my school or program. As a former American Degree recipient and Agriscience Education Intern, I've had the privilege of seeing exceptional educators across the state advocate tirelessly for their students to access meaningful experiences beyond the classroom and outside the traditional school day. This bill has the potential to open doors and create even more opportunities for our youth. It is essential that we stand behind it. Every month, I hear from educators and students who lack the support needed to expand work-based learning experiences. This bill empowers both students and teachers who are willing to go above and beyond to prepare for successful futures. I truly appreciate your support and commitment to investing in the next generation of leaders. Thank you.