

**Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Hearing on House Bill 96, Ohio's Two-year Operating Budget
May 28, 2025**

**Written Testimony in Support of Increased Farmland Preservation Funding
Kevin E. Joyce, Chair of the Board of Supervisors
Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District**

Significant farmland loss in Ohio

Research by Ohio State University has resulted in disturbing findings about the rapid pace of farmland loss in Ohio from 2002 to 2020 and the extent to which loss of agricultural soils is greatly outpacing farmland preservation. Ohio lost 931,089 acres of farmland from 2002 to 2022. According to OSU, Lucas County is among the five counties experiencing the largest agricultural loss to development, 93%, between 2001 and 2021.

Since its founding in 1998, the ODA Office of Farmland Preservation has protected 106,064 acres of farmland, little compared to the 931,089 acres of farmland lost. 6.4% of farmland was lost while only 0.7% was preserved through perpetual agricultural easements.

Economic impact of loss of farmland

Ohio's economic losses are significant. An American Farmland Trust study (outside Ohio) found an annual economic loss of \$9,800 per acre from a 1,115-acre farmland loss.

The annual budget of ODA's Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) for purchase of agricultural easements is only \$6,500,000, unchanged since the early 2000s. (In comparison, Pennsylvania spends \$60 million per year and preserves substantially more farmland.) Agriculture and food is Ohio's #1 industry, contributing \$124 billion to our state economy and providing one out of eight jobs. Absent an adequately funded farmland preservation program, continued farmland losses will decimate the agriculture industry. We must devote significantly more financial resources to farmland preservation, and do so forthwith.

The Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts has passed a resolution "that the OFSWCD supports the ODA's developing policies and procedures to accelerate the pace of farmland preservation including by increasing the allocation from Clean Ohio...."

Data center construction could provide a consistent revenue stream

For more than a decade, data centers have become more common in our state. As of January, "there [were] 173 data centers in Ohio," according to The Columbus Dispatch (Data centers galore? January 26, 2025). As examples, Amazon recently was investing \$7.8 billion for more data centers in Ohio and Facebook was spending \$1.5 billion for data center expansion (Data centers continue to grow in Columbus, Cbus Today, November 14, 2023).

Data center and other technology facility construction usually results in increased energy demands, the sale of a parcel of 70 to 300 acres, rezoning, and construction expenses in the billions of dollars. What is often ignored about these projects is that many result in the loss of dozens of acres of farmland.

Tech businesses such as Microsoft, Apple, Amazon and others are some of the largest in the world in market capitalization. From a construction investment exceeding \$1 billion, they can easily afford to reimburse Ohio's agriculture industry for the loss of prime agricultural soils, based on the value of the land lost.

In order to reduce the loss of Ohio's prime farmland to development, we request a revenue enhancement for farmland preservation. An assessment would be made upon the construction of commercial facilities of 40 acres or more, on agricultural soils, based on the fair market value of the farmland lost.