



OHIO DAIRY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

*Supporting Ohio's dairy production industry; optimizing profitability and productivity;
addressing issues that affect dairy producers*

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Scott Higgins, CEO
Ohio Dairy Producers Association
Amended Substitute House Bill 96
June 6, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HB 96, the state operating budget for Fiscal Years 2026-2027.

My name is Scott Higgins, and I am the CEO of the Ohio Dairy Producers Association. I appreciate the work of this committee and understand the tremendous undertaking as you deliberate on the budget.

By way of background, the ODP is a grassroots legislative, research, and producer education organization, representing dairy farmers from across the state, regardless of farm size, breed or production strategy, marketing preference, or political affiliation.

Ohio is home to 253,000 dairy cows that live on 1,400 farms and produce 653 million gallons of milk annually. The total economic impact of dairy products produced and sold in Ohio is just over \$35 billion, which generates 136,300 jobs for Ohioans.

Ohio is ranked 12th in total milk production in the nation and 5th in the number of processing and receiving plants. Ohio is proud to be ranked #1 in Swiss cheese and #2 in lowfat cottage cheese production.

The focus of my testimony today is in support of The Ohio State's College of Veterinary Medicine.

There are currently 18 counties that are USDA-designated rural veterinary shortage areas. Due to this critical issue, Governor DeWine's Executive Budget appropriated \$20 million each year the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine's line item to support the Protect OHIO initiative that will benefit the agriculture industry by addressing the states veterinarian shortage and public health across the state. The House Budget reduced that funding to \$15 million, while the current Senate substitute version before you today further reduced the appropriation level to \$7.5 million in FY 26 and FY 27.

I understand and appreciate that with every budget comes difficult decisions, **I respectfully request that the Senate restore the OSU CVM funding to \$15 million per year as included in the House Budget.**

This funding is essential to sustain excellence, train more veterinarians, and protect Ohio's animals, people and agriculture. The Ohio's only College of Veterinary Medicine's Protect One Health in Ohio (OHIO) initiative includes three interconnected pillars aimed at expanding veterinary education for Ohio students, especially those from underserved areas, by increasing class sizes and creating long-term strategies for recruiting and retaining large animal and rural veterinarians. Ohio needs more large animal veterinarians, and this funding will help us achieve that goal while meeting the needs of the underserved communities.

Additionally, the establishment of an Emerging Infectious Disease Center will enhance disease surveillance, risk assessment, and preemptive research to protect the state and its animals and people. The current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) provides a perfect case study for why the Emerging Infectious Disease Center is so critical to protecting Ohio's agricultural industry.

Ohio's dairy industry strongly urges the Senate to prioritize this critical funding for veterinary medicine programs in the biennial budget and provide the funding requested for this CVM initiative. Without this funding, the state will remain underserved with food animal veterinarians, be particularly vulnerable to infectious disease outbreaks that could decimate our animal agricultural industry and put people's health at risk.