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Committees:

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Chair Cirino, Vicechair Chavez, and fellow members of the Senate Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 287, to create the Farming and Workforce Development program.

With the currently more than 296,000 unemployed Ohioans across the state,¹ there is a large market of workers with the potential to enter a new field in Ohio. People are desperate to work, and many might be willing to learn the trade of one of Ohio's most profitable industries, if given the opportunity. For both the future of Ohio's families and the future of Ohio's economy, I urge you support of the Farming and Workforce Development Program, Senate Bill 287.

The Farming and Workforce Development Program will be housed in the Ohio Department of Agriculture and will offer the opportunity increase the number of young Ohioans entering the field of Agriculture. This program will be open to Ohio residents between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five, and it will teach participants the necessary skills to prepare for seasonal crop farming employment. The program guidelines will be developed by county offices of the Ohio State University Extension and Central State University Extension, as well as the policies for the application process, training coursework, and the ultimate implementation of the Program.

As one of Ohio's largest industries, agriculture generates \$124 billion annually and currently employs 1 in 8 Ohioans.² For Ohio, continuing to invest in our agricultural industry is an essential part of our future. However, the Ohio state profile in the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture data,³ shows some concerning data for the future of the agricultural industry if we cannot attract more farmers. The data shows that roughly 90% of producers in the state are 35 or older, with the average age of a farmer operator being reported at about 58 years of age.⁴ Most shocking of all, is that of the 132,912 producers surveyed in this data set, only 29% (39,103) were new farmers that had established their work within 10 years or less. This gap in new farmers is also reflected in the declining number of farms around the state, which decreased by 2.3% in the period between 2002 and 2022, and represented a 6.4% loss in farmland within the same timeframe.⁵

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.oh.htm>

² <https://agri.ohio.gov/home/news-and-events/all-news/oda-invites-ohioans-celebrate-national-agriculture-month-2025>

³ https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Ohio/cp99039.pdf

⁴ <https://cfaes.osu.edu/news/articles/passing-the-torch-farm-succession-strategies-for-ohio%E2%80%99s-next-generation#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202022%20U.S.,productivity%20that%20sustain%20rural%20communities.>

⁵ https://aede.osu.edu/sites/aede/files/publication_files/AgLandLosttoDevelopment2024.pdf

Senate Bill 287, to create the Farming and Workforce Development program, presents our legislature with a clear, executable answer to the quandary of addressing Ohio's unemployment rates and empowering tomorrow's leaders of an industry that is so distinctly a part of our state's success. I thank you for your consideration of this testimony and strongly urge your support of this bill. I stand ready to answer any questions.

