

Testimony submitted by Elizabeth Wixtead (Bender), Marion County.

As a past FFA member, our chapter President would ask, “FFA members, why are we here?” and our response would be, “To practice brotherhood, honor agricultural opportunities and responsibilities, and develop those qualities of leadership which an FFA member should possess.”

As a high school student, I’ve said this statement numerous times, and I didn’t really put much thought into what it really meant until a friend brought up what could be the best use of the Marion Correctional Institute’s 575 acres of farmland?

I have lived in Marion County my whole life except for when I was attending The Ohio State University earning a degree in Agribusiness and Applied Economics and a minor in Agricultural Communications and Agricultural Education. My family has been farming in southern Marion County for over 150 years and three generations have attended OSU and earned a degree in Agriculture so you can say farming has been in my blood for a long time. Currently, I work as a loan officer at our local farm credit office and volunteer for FFA and 4-H activities which Ohio has many FFA and 4-H members.

Now as a community member and agriculturalist, I have come back to the above statement and question to find a great opportunity for our county and the surrounding counties for more education and research opportunities for students closer to my area. I have talked to many farm families about where their kids have chosen to go for college, and I’m finding that they are deciding to either opt for a two- year degree or not attend higher education due to having to leave the farm. Many students don’t want to leave their family farm to attend college because they have an opportunity to become a part of their family’s operation after they graduate high school and want to stay close to the operation so they can learn from their families as well as attend college.

I would like to see the land transferred from the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to Higher Education. I see the land having potential for increasing agriculture education opportunities for students throughout a several-county area served by the Marion regional campus of Ohio State University as well as serving rural and urban high schools throughout our area. This transfer could create more opportunities for our area for a learning laboratory, research facility, OSU Extension use and job training for the agricultural industry.

Agriculture is the number one industry in world and is more than just cows and plows. Agriculture is science and there are many opportunities for students to pursue a career in science and conduct more research to benefit our whole world. All of this education and research could be conducted right here in our state and in Marion! Our great State of Ohio was a leader in 4-H, agricultural education, extension, and land grant universities and this all surrounded around educating our rural areas about agriculture and science.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your timely consideration.

Contact information:

740-225-1121

libbywixtead@gmail.com

1811 Irvin Shoots Rd. W.

Morral, OH 43337