



Working together for Ohio farmers to advance agriculture and strengthen our communities.

**Proponent Testimony House Bill 95
House Agriculture and Conservation Committee
Bennett and Liza Musselman
March 2, 2021**

Chair Koehler, Vice Chair Creech, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 95, creating a tax credit program for new and beginning farmers in Ohio.

We are Bennett & Liza Musselman part owners/operators of Musselman Farms. Musselman Farms is a 4th generation grain crop operation in Orient, Ohio located in Pickaway County. Together we farm alongside Bennett's parents and our two boys. We are also both employed off the farm, Bennett is a Crop Insurance Agent and Property and Casualty Agent with Leist Mercantile, while Liza is the Finance and Development Director at Pickaway County Community Foundation and owner of eMusselman Photography & Design. Bennett is Vice President of the Pickaway County Farm Bureau, sits on the Pickaway County Fair Sales Committee and a Pickaway County Farmers Club member. Liza sits on the Pickaway Competitive Network, Ag Committee and a member of Ohio Agri-Women.

We are past co-chairs of OFBF's State Young Agricultural Professionals Committee. Young Ag Professionals are 18 to 35-year-old individuals who are interested in improving the business of agriculture, learning new ideas and developing leadership skills. The group includes full and part-time farmers, OSU Extension agents, teachers, consumer educators, former Ohio Farm Bureau Youth members, FFA and 4-H alumni, farm media communicators, livestock and equine enthusiasts, seed representatives, green industry employees, gardeners, foodies and more.

In our role as chair couple, we had the opportunity to regularly hear from new farmers all over Ohio and the challenges they face entering agriculture. There are many barriers to full-time farming beyond access to land and capital like the lack of employer-sponsored health insurance plans, lack of broadband access, high premiums for crop insurance, and minimal mentorship opportunities. However, the biggest challenge is limited capital, credit and land. This can be addressed through succession planning, but that is typically for interfamily transitions occurring at the time of death. HB 95 would incentivize transfers during the retiring farmer's lifetime and possibly provide a connection for mentorship.

Formerly, I was Vice President Agribusiness Banker at Heartland Bank, which has deep roots in Ohio agriculture. Started in 1911 in the farming community Croton, Ohio, Heartland Bank continues to serve the agricultural industry. In 2015 Heartland Bank felt that young and beginning farmers were being underserved with access to sound, reliable credit. We saw a need



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to help the next generation of farmers and agriculturalist establish and build their operations. We set out to learn, understand, utilize, and administer the several programs available through the Farm Service Agency to provide opportunities for young and beginning farmers. Our work was recognized by FSA's Preferred Lender Program, which allowed lenders to expedite the loan process. Although there is a streamlined process for this loan program, the time that it takes from application to loan closing is significantly longer than a traditional loan. Young farmers have an added obstacle of finding a seller that is willing to wait additional days for a sale to be completed. The passage of HB 95 will give a financial incentive for sellers to work with a young beginning farmer, and thus help level the playing field.

In my current role at Leist Mercantile, part of my duties as a crop insurance agent are to help beginning farmers manage risk. The volatility of the markets adds another layer to the challenges beginning farmers face. More established farmers are able to better weather periods of low prices simply because they have more resources. Established farmers typically have a lower debt to asset ratio and more resources to fall back on. In many cases beginning farmers have to overextend themselves financially to get into a position of financial profitability but then are susceptible to significant financial risk during periods of low commodity prices. HB 95 would incentivize established farmers to help beginning farmers navigate the uncertainty of agricultural markets.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to support HB 95 today. We will now answer any questions the committee has for us.