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**TESTIMONY OF OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE DIRECTOR DOROTHY PELANDA TO SENATE  
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
October 5, 2021**

Chairman Schaffer, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for inviting me to share some remarks with you about the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

As we think of the many challenges that Ohioans have faced over the past year and a half, one word that immediately comes to mind is resilience. Despite the many obstacles and interruptions to our normal lives that have recently taken place, the people of Ohio have consistently shown their ability to adapt to difficult and unanticipated situations. They have demonstrated the hard work ethic and can-do spirit that is emblematic of Ohio's citizens. Nowhere is that resiliency more evident than in our agricultural community. Ohio's farmers go to great lengths in protecting and preserving our cherished land.

Time and again, our farmers have shown an ability to weather the storm while continuously pursuing new ways to innovate their practices while feeding our families each day. From those tending the fields to those involved in our restaurant industry, 1 in 7 Ohioans are employed in this agricultural community that serve us with dedication and care.

We have a beautiful campus in Reynoldsburg, home to ten buildings. Many people do not know that behind these brick buildings hosts a flurry of scientific and consumer protection activity. In fact, it is the top comprehensive consumer protection lab safety network in the state, and one of only a few of its kind in the nation. ODA administers numerous regulatory, food safety, consumer protection, plant health and animal care programs for the benefit of all Ohioans. The department also provides leadership for Ohio's No. 1 industry – food and agriculture – to create greater economic opportunity for Ohio's farmers and processors and to preserve and enhance Ohio's bountiful resources. We do all of that with a staff of approximately 450 and by operating on a budget that represents a very small fraction of the state's overall budget.

### **Protecting Consumers**

ODA's consumer protection duties span far and wide and are some of the most critical overall functions performed by the department. The meal you ate with your family last evening was safe because of the work of ODA inspectors and scientists, working behind the scenes to make sure your food is safe. The Consumer Protection Laboratory analyzes samples originating in the food chain – from the farm, through processing and distribution, to the retail level. Our experts test food, feeds, fertilizers, pesticides and animal exhibition and racetrack samples. A special thank you is due to you as the recently passed capital budget provides critical funding to existing facilities and improvements at our campus.

ODA's Meat Inspection Division is the largest division at the department and makes sure that every single animal at slaughter is safe to enter the food supply. Dairy inspectors regulate on-farm production, as well as milk haulers and dairy processors to ensure compliance with federal Grade A milk rules. Food Safety inspectors make sure food produced at manufacturers and wholesale operations, such as bakeries, canneries, snack food and candy manufacturers, water and soft drink bottlers, seafood processors and food warehouses are produced according to stringent safety guidelines.



They also make sure foods are safe by testing for bacteria like Listeria and E. coli just to name a few. Not all our consumer protection functions are related to food. Our Weights & Measures Division helps to ensure equity in the marketplace by administering and enforcing laws that make sure a pound is a pound and a gallon is a gallon all over the state. Additionally, Amusement Ride Safety inspectors uphold the safety and regulation of all Ohio rides, evaluating everything from the structural safety and warning signs to general ride operations.

### **Safeguarding Plants and Animals**

Securing the health and disease-free status of the state's plants, crops, livestock, and other animals is a critical function of the department. Plant Health is the second largest division, and it has four core responsibilities:

- Supports Ohio's green industry by managing invasive species that pose a threat to trees, crops, and other plants such as the Gypsy Moth and the Asian Longhorned Beetle.
- Regulates commodity haulers and grain elevators and verifies label claims made on feed and seed packaging.
- In addition to licensing pesticide applicators, this area implements the Fertilizer Certification program, and regulates the use and distribution of pesticides and the manufacturing and distribution of fertilizer, lime, and agricultural additives.
- Ohio Plant Diagnostic Network – Partnership with OSU and other research entities that handle viral, bacterial, fungal and nematode pathogens, as well as insect pests.

Animal Health is responsible for animal disease management and many animal care regulations in Ohio: We license livestock dealers, renderers, raw rendering collectors and garbage feeders; regulate livestock shows at county and independent fairs; and dangerous wild animal owners and high-volume dog breeders. The Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (ADDL) provides support for disease control programs and services for veterinarians, livestock producers and agribusinesses, and performs nearly half a million tests annually. ADDL plays a critical role in animal disease outbreak that can have serious economic and food security impacts.

Under ODA's Dangerous Wild Animals Program, Enforcement Agents conduct approximately 24 investigations each year on individuals who are in illegal possession of animals that have been identified as dangerous to the public. ODA works closely with local law enforcement who routinely encounter these animals at private residences including alligators, venomous and constrictor snakes, serval cats, and bears.

### **Conserving Resources**

Governor DeWine has made it clear that water quality is a priority for this administration. Our Soil and Water Conservation Division works with 88 local soil and water conservation district offices to educate about best practices. Livestock Environmental Permitting inspectors regulate Ohio's largest livestock and poultry farms. Inspectors and engineers ensure the farms follow science-based guidelines for managing manure, mortalities, flies, rodents, and other pests.

One such priority in water quality is H2Ohio, a collaboration with ODNR, Ohio EPA, and the Lake Erie Commission. Through the passage of the budget in the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, the seeds for H2Ohio were planted. In the ensuing months that have transpired, this bold initiative has been tended to with exceptional care. H2Ohio has now come to fruition and exceeded our expectations.



This has been made possible through tireless work from the Administration and from you – our partners on the legislative side who have shown your commitment to the program. Above all, it has happened due to overwhelming interest from Ohio’s agricultural community.

It is my pleasure to report that, under ODA’s jurisdiction of the H2Ohio Initiative, 1 million acres of Ohio’s cropland was enrolled in the program in the original 14 county area of the Maumee River Watershed. In February, ODA began sending payments to the producers who are implementing the 10 Best Management Practices (BMPs). These practices are proven to reduce phosphorus runoff and prevent algal blooms.

The Main Operating Budget allowed us to expand the H2Ohio Program this year to include the remaining 10 counties in the Western Lake Erie Basin. Once again, we’ve had remarkable interest from farmers and have exceeded our enrollment goals. We also reopened enrollment in the original counties so farmers who were not able to enroll initially have that opportunity now.

We also recognize how important House Bill 7 is to the H2Ohio effort – passed late last year by the General Assembly. HB 7 creates a statewide watershed planning and management program with the goal of improving and protecting these areas as it pertains to water quality. ODA is tasked with hiring a coordinator in each of these seven watersheds, with specific experience and qualifications. We are currently in the hiring process for these positions and have a pool of qualified candidates. We are thankful to the Legislature for their diligent work with HB 7 and the H2Ohio Initiative as a whole.

Simply put, H2Ohio is a success story, and we are just beginning to see the long term, positive effects it will have on water quality in our state.

### **Promoting Agriculture**

Agriculture in Ohio is strong, and we continue to do our part to help the industry grow. ODA pays homage to Ohio’s oldest family farms through the Ohio Historic Family Farms program, recognizing farms that are 100 years or older. Our Farmland Preservation Division maintains land in agricultural use for perpetuity by distributing grants to local governments, county soil and water conservation districts, and local land trusts to purchase agricultural easements from landowners via the Clean Ohio Program.

With new leadership in the Division and a tightening of operations, we closed over 120 easement projects in the last 18 months. That is more than double the number closed in the two years prior. We anticipate closing nearly 80 additional easement projects between now and the end of 2022.

Ohio Proud promotes nearly 500 Ohio food and agricultural companies whose products are at least 50 percent made or processed in Ohio. The Ohio Grape Industries Committee supports Ohio’s wineries and the state’s marketing program to highlight the state’s fast-growing wine growing and production industry.

### **A New Season**

Just as many of Ohio’s families and businesses have had to tighten their belts in recent months, we at ODA have done the same. The COVID-19 pandemic tremendously decreased the number of inspections conducted by our dedicated team in our Amusement Ride Safety Division. It is critical to note that this Division has historically been funded primarily through revenue generated by inspection fees. Our team of 12 inspectors was reduced to two. We have worked hard to build that team back up I am pleased to report that we now stand at nine inspectors on staff.



We have seen an increase in work volume this year with the return of a full fair season and additional inspections required through HB 189, commonly referred to as Tyler's Law. During the previous General Assembly, the Legislature passed the bill, demonstrating their steadfast commitment to our Amusement Ride Safety Division. Our mission in the Amusement Ride Safety Division is clear: we will never compromise safety for expediency.

Mr. Chairman and committee members - I wish to conclude where I started. While we have faced our share of obstacles over the past year and a half, our beloved agricultural community has continually shown their ability to rise and meet challenges. They have done so with hard work, grit, and determination. They have done so with resiliency.

Finally, I would like to thank you for supporting your County and Independent Fairs. I enjoyed seeing many of you as I traveled across the state once again this year to visit with the youth and take in all that our fairs have to offer!

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the Ohio Department of Agriculture and I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.

