

Proponent Testimony – SB 128

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Good afternoon Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 128. I'm Sam Custer, and I serve as the Interim Assistant Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources for Ohio State University Extension. Extension is the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) at The Ohio State University - serving Ohioans in all 88 counties through the delivery of science-based programming to better their lives, businesses, and communities.

In 1862, the enacted Morrill Act allowed states to establish land grant universities for the study of agriculture. Ohio established the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, which later became The Ohio State University. Thus, CFAES serves as the cornerstone college that originally gave our institution part of its name and has been a critical force in shaping the university for 150 years through its research, teaching, and extension.

In alignment with this land-grant tradition and per the Ohio Revised Code Section 3335.38, The Ohio State University Board of Trustees is required to “establish a farm financial management institute in OSU extension to train interested and qualified persons to assist farmers needing help with farm financial management problems.”

SB 128 reaffirms this commitment and renames this institute to better reflect the broad range of audiences served including farmers, farm managers, financial lenders, agricultural teachers, agency personnel, and OSU faculty and extension educators who directly interact with agricultural producers and support the state's \$125 billion agricultural economy.

Housed in OSU Extension, and in partnership with the college's Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics, the CFAES Farm Production, Policy, and Financial Management Institute will serve as a unified center for the integration, translation, and communication of our farm management and ag policy presence that addresses critical food, agricultural, and environmental issues affecting Ohioans.

The Institute will be critical in supporting the changing areas of focus for OSU Extension - in response to the changing demands of the state's agricultural economy - by unifying expertise across areas that include agricultural marketing, budgeting and financial management, land use, labor law, agricultural trade, agricultural and environmental policy, and others. The Institute will continue the strong traditions of the Farm Office, and continue the University's focus on partnerships by leveraging the contributions of external stakeholders.

The current and emerging challenges to Ohio's agricultural industry cannot be overstated. From inconsistent climatic conditions to invasive species like the Spotted-Lanternfly, from a volatile international trade environment to pandemic-induced constraints on the food supply - these are challenges that the Farm Production, Policy, and Financial Management Institute will be well positioned to triage and effectively address through its expertise.

Farmers and agribusinesses across Ohio rely heavily on the unbiased research and education provided by The Ohio State University and OSU Extension to guide them through these challenges, and to maximize yields and farm profitability in an environmentally friendly manner.

Ohioans have improved their yields through research completed at the university and applied on farms around the state. OSU Extension Water Quality Associates are working directly with farmers and other agencies to identify and validate those practice that help us improve Ohio's water quality.

As the former county agriculture and natural resources educator in Darke County, and now in my current interim role, I look forward to how Ohio agriculture will benefit from the centralized synergy created by the CFAES Farm Production, Policy, and Financial Management Institute, a responsive resource to the state of Ohio in meeting the ever-growing challenges in providing a sustainable agriculture system in our state.

The vision and mission of the Institute is fully aligned with the university's vision to be the model 21st - century public, land-grant, research, urban, community-engaged institution and CFAES' grand challenge areas of Sustainability, One Health, the Rural-Urban Interface, and Preparing the Next Generation of Scientists and Leaders. In fact, we're proud of plans to build and broaden partnerships between the institute and the university's Fisher College of Business, the Moritz College of Law, the John Glenn College of Public Affairs, and others to further cross-disciplinary reach and amplify positive impact across the communities we serve.

We thank the General Assembly once again for continuing to support CFAES's mission to sustain life through its teaching, research, and extension.

Thank you, Chairman Johnson, and members of the committee for allowing me to speak on SB 128, and I'm happy to answer any questions.