



**Ohio Senate
Ways & Means Committee
Senate Bill 159 – Written Only Testimony
Wednesday, May 13, 2020**

Chair Roegner and distinguished members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee; The Ohio Soybean Association would like to express our support for Senate Bill 159.

My name is Trish Cunningham and I am testifying today on behalf of the Ohio Soybean Association (OSA) and its members. OSA is a member-driven, grassroots organization dedicated to improving the business climate for Ohio soybean farmers by providing leadership and advocating for sound policy at the state and national levels. As the sixth-largest soybean producing state, soybeans are an important part of Ohio's economy. Soybeans are Ohio's largest crop by acreage and largest export crop. The industry employs more than 30,000 people and generates more than \$5.3 billion in economic activity annually.

As a sixth-generation farmer, I discovered my passion for agriculture at a young age and studied Animal Science and Ag Economics at Oklahoma State University. On my farm I raise soybeans, corn and my daughter, Blair. In addition to the farm, I own a crop insurance agency serving farmers around Ohio.

One of the agricultural statistics most frequently cited is the increasing average age of farmers. As this increases, the need to support the next generation of farmers becomes more critical. The average age of farmers in Ohio increased from 54.6 in 2012 to 55.8 in 2017. While farmers are aging, the next generation of Ohio farmers are stepping up. Ohio is ranked among the top ten states in the growing number of new and beginning farmers.

Access to capital is one of the most significant challenges new and beginning farmers face. The start up costs are substantial – seed and fertilizer alone can easily deplete a \$150,000 budget, and this is just the tip of the iceberg in costs to consider. This bill helps beginning farmers build equity, while also incentivizing landlords and/or farmers to lease or sell their property to new farmers. This could work well for farm families, as an aging generation looking to retire from their career can pass it on to someone to continue the legacy. In the end, farmers are caretakers from one generation to the next. We never *really* own anything.

As an entrepreneur and farmer, a knowledge of financial management is essential for success. The tax credit for a financial management course in Senate Bill 159 will help new and beginning farmers more deeply understand the systems for allocating expenses, the real cost of production, and other important tools that make a business profitable.

We thank Senator Peterson for championing this bill in the Senate and Representative Manchester & Representative Patterson for working on solutions in House Bill 183 that address some of the difficulties that new and beginning farmers face. Agriculture is deeply rooted in Ohio and this bill is a step toward continuing that tradition.

Trish Cunningham Levering

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At-Large Young Leader
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