



Ohio Senate Ways and Means Committee

SB 159 Proponent Testimony, May 13, 2020

**Amalie Lipstreu, Policy Director, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association**

Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Blessing, and Ranking member Williams, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 159, the Family Farm ReGeneration Act.

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, or OEFFA, has more than 4,000 members of which about 75% are farmers. OEFFA has been operating a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant for approximately four years, working to connect retiring farmers with next generation farmers. During that time, we have seen first-hand the challenges faced by these early career farmers, including attaining knowledge, skills, and experience in production practices, business planning, and financial management; and accessing farmland, equipment, and capital, as part of the substantial investment farming requires.

As a natural outgrowth of our work with these farmers we have been providing farm succession and land transition planning workshops to give landowners information and assistance as they plan how their land will be passed on. We have also created Heartland FarmLink which allows farmers looking for land and landowners looking for farmers to post and search profiles as part of making that initial connection.

But providing education and making connections is just the first step in a long and often arduous process of farmland transition. We also need policies which support landowners, exiting farmers, and beginning farmers in this transition.

OEFFA has talked with staff administering a similar program in Minnesota which piloted this legislation several years ago. After little more than a year of operation, the program processed applications for more than 400 landowners and 400 land seekers. The tax incentive is indeed proving successful in making lasting connections between next generation and existing farmers as they transition out of agriculture.

Tens of millions of acres are changing hands as we speak. Those who own farmland are under increased pressure to sell to development, larger farmers, and investment companies. According to American Farmland Trust, Ohio continues to lose 3 acres a minute, as the price of farmland frequently exceeds what can be earned by farming.

All of this illustrates the need for a variety of tools and resources to overcome the challenges faced by an industry that is truly necessary for the survival of our society. During this time of

crisis, OEFFA has seen firsthand how resilient our small to mid-scale farmers growing food for their communities. They are surviving and thriving as they fill a need exacerbated by supply chain disruptions and bottlenecks.

After decades of farm loss, the number of farms in on the rise in Ohio and our state is sixth in the nation in the number of beginning farmers. We have a real opportunity to ensure that the social, economic, and food security benefits from a strong agricultural sector continue.

Senate Bill 159, introduced by Senator Peterson, holds great promise for success in connecting these two sides of the farming coin, both of which want to see land continued to be farmed into the future.

Please support this bill and move it forward to the Governor prior to the close of this legislative session.

Thank you,