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Agriculture and Conservation Committee

H.B. 397 (Stewart, Kick)

Tadd Nicholson, Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association

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Chairman Koehler, Vice Chair Creech, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the Ohio House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association (OCWGA) thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 397, which aims to revise the agricultural lease law. OCWGA represents the interests of more than 30,000 grain producers across the state, and in that capacity, I am pleased to express our support of House Bill 397.

Across the Buckeye state, it is common for crop land to be owned by entities other than those who manage the farm operations on that land. Historically, agricultural producers have enjoyed broad access to productive land through handshake agreements with their land-owning neighbors. While many producers have opted toward more stringent, contractually bound arrangements, such handshake agreements are still found in farming communities throughout the state. For any number of reasons, those informal agreements can create negative circumstances for growers.

Grain producers plan many months ahead for their operations - working diligently to secure the necessary farm inputs, invest in equipment, and arrange the labor they will require for both planting and harvest. Handshake agreements simply do not provide the guarantees necessary to optimize that planning. In the worst cases, growers may lose access to the land they've already worked in preparation for planting or harvest, costing them significant losses for those inputs and damaging the bottom line for their businesses.

House Bill 397 aims to protect the interests of landowners and farmers alike. By creating a common standard for notification timelines, the bill takes a targeted approach to modernizing Ohio law and placing us in parity with other states across the corn belt. Most importantly though, this bill does not supersede the written contracts that many modern producers already utilize. While agriculture continues to evolve, measures such as this provide important protections without creating new, onerous regulations. We look forward to partnering with the state to ensure thoughtful, balanced measures like this continue to promote the longevity of Ohio's number one industry.

Our organization appreciates the efforts of Representatives Stewart and Kick in addressing this issue and thanks you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 397. We ask the members of the committee to support this bill.

