



*Working together for Ohio farmers to advance  
agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**House Finance Committee  
HB 33 Interested Party Testimony  
Evan Callicoa, Director of State Policy  
March 30, 2023**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding HB 33. The 2024-2025 Operating Budget includes many opportunities to help agriculture in Ohio continue to be the economic driver it is today. We would like to highlight our support for the funding in the budget that promotes Ohio agriculture and strengthens our rural communities.

**Ohio Department of Agriculture**

The Ohio Department of Agriculture plays an important role in ensuring Ohio farmers can provide consumers safe and wholesome food. The department's role in providing thorough and efficient inspection services for Ohio's dairy, meat and poultry producers, detecting and preventing animal disease outbreaks, protecting soil and water and preserving farmland are critical to our industry. ODA's general funding increase reflects the myriad of duties they are required to perform. It is imperative that the department have the resources they need. Among our highest priorities included in the executive budget proposal include:

- Increased funding for the department's animal health programs which helps provide more staff to respond to large-scale disease outbreaks and response activities;
- Increased support for Ohio's Soil and Water Districts, an invaluable tool for protecting soil and water across our state;
- Increased support for the departments meat, dairy and poultry inspection services

**Ohio Expo Commission**

The Ohio Expo Center and the Ohio State Fair provide for one of the best opportunities for rural-urban interface that our state has to offer. The centralized location off of I-71 provides access for all Ohioans to learn more about Ohio agriculture, not only during the state fair but during countless events throughout the year. We applaud Gov. DeWine's commitment to the state fair through his work to establish the Expo 2050 Task Force. The goal of the task force is to develop a strategic vision for the 360-acre Ohio Expo Center property, and the \$190 million in the budget are important to Ohio agriculture. Those dollars will be used to support the Ohio Expo 2050 master plan established by the task force, which includes construction, modernization, and renovation of several buildings and other initiatives to bring this vital resource into the future.

**H2Ohio and Water Quality**

Through the continued leadership of Gov. DeWine and the members of the General Assembly, the H2Ohio program has been instrumental in helping farmers keep nutrients on their fields and out of our waterways. To encourage participation in H2Ohio, the agriculture community, university researchers, soil and water districts, conservation, and environmental groups formed



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the Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative (OACI). As a result, over 2,000 farmers in the Western Lake Erie Basin have enrolled in H2Ohio. Through OACI's certification program, farmer's conservation practices are evaluated and proposed practices are reviewed to ensure promised completion to obtain funding.

Investment in farmer best management practices has been a huge success. For example, recent soil test data from The Fertilizer Institute, found that the number of soil samples tested for Ohio increased from about 69,000 in 2001 to nearly 274,000 in 2020. Over the same period, the median soil test phosphorus levels dropped 32%. Over 1.5 million acres in the Western Lake Erie Basin are now managed by farmers through voluntary nutrient management plans (VNMP's) that not only help reduce the phosphorus load going into Lake Erie, but ensure the vitality of Ohio's water quality for generations to come.

Over the past 5 years there has been a steady downward trend in the flow weighted mean concentration of dissolved reactive phosphorus observed at the Waterville monitoring location. While we are optimistic that this trend will continue, it can only do so with the continuation of the technical and financial support provided to Ohio's farmers under Governor DeWine's H2Ohio Initiative.

### **Workforce and Agricultural Education**

Ensuring that our youth have access to the best educational opportunities is an integral way to prepare them to be a successful part of Ohio's workforce. Agricultural education and career tech are an integral part of those opportunities. HB 33 contains numerous appropriations that invest critical resources to help our students realize their full potential. Just to name a few:

- A 3% increase to all extension services across Ohio, including the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, as well as the same increase for The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, whose graduates make up more than 80% of Ohio's practicing veterinarians.
- \$100 million to establish or expand career-technical education programs with equipment costs and \$200 million for construction projects that establish or expand career-technical education programs
- Doubling the "5th quarter" funding for agricultural education teachers to \$1.2 million, which helps these teachers who often spend most of their summers assisting students with hand-on learning experience called Supervised Agricultural Experience's (SAE's).

We also encourage the House to support a request from the Ohio State's College of Food Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) request for support of a new world-class Multi-Species Animal Learning Center. The building, part of a needed modernization of Waterman Farm on the university campus, will provide CFAES students a hands-on learning environment as well as allow K-12 school children and the general public to see the day-to-day workings of modern livestock production.



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### **Farmland Preservation**

Preserving Ohio's farmland has been and will always be a priority issue for the Ohio Farm Bureau. Farmland has come under increasing threat from a multitude of development pressures in recent years. According to the American Farmland Trust, if recent trends continue, more than 500,000 acres of Ohio's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture by 2040. One program we ask you to support in the budget is the CleanOhio Farmland preservation program. Through voluntary easements, acres in this program represent a commitment to keeping land in agricultural production. We appreciate the increase in funding for this program and hope it and others like it continue to flourish. We also urge your support of efforts like the Brownfield Remediation program, which represents a smart-growth policy that allows for development to continue to come to Ohio, without sacrificing prime farmland.

### **Orphan Wells**

The plugging of orphan wells not only provides for the health and safety of those near them, but also for the health of the soil and water in the surrounding area as well. Continuing to find and plug these wells remains a priority for our members to protect not only their land, but the health of their families and neighbors as well. We support the increased funds being directed to this important program in the budget.

### **Meat Processing**

One of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic was seeing how vulnerable our supply chains could be without proper planning and preparation. One way we aimed to be better prepared in our food supply chains for the future was the creation of the Meat Processing Investment Program. This program gave grants to established small meat processors to upgrade equipment and facilities, as well as train new employees. Continuing to assist these processors will allow us to be better prepared for supply chain disruptions and support small businesses at the same time. We humbly request \$4 million to fund the remaining eligible applications in the queue to ensure the continuation of this vital program.

### **Ethanol Retailer Tax Credit**

Ethanol burns cleaner, is more fuel efficient, and provides cost savings at the pump, not to mention increase demand for Ohio-grown corn. Last year, HB 165 proposed a tax credit on the sale of high ethanol blend motor fuel (between 15-85% ethanol) that would help provide further savings at the pump and encourage retailers to offer this type of fuel. We support an amendment to the introduced version that would allow this tax credit to help all Ohioans save at the pump and increase demand for one of our most vital crops.

Thank you for your consideration of these important priorities for Ohio agriculture. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.