



Interested Party Testimony-
House Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources Subcommittee
HB 33- State Operating Budget
March 21, 2023

Chair Jones and Ranking Member Troy - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association's funding request which would appropriate \$250,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Soil and Water Conservation District Support line to administer a Soil Health Pilot Project.

My name is Amalie Lipstreu and I am the Policy Director for the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA).

OEFFA is an organization of approximately 5,000 members and 10,000 supporters advocating for sustainable farming for more than 40 years. These members share a vision of a future where sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment. The majority of OEFFA members are sustainable and organic farmers and also includes educators, health care professionals, businesses and engaged citizens.

Ohio faces significant challenges to water quality and good soil health practices can not only help mitigate this problem, it can also help farmers and ranchers with long-term profitability and resilience. Farmers are already having to adapt to more frequent extreme weather events and are interested in employing best soil health management practices that will create soils that hold more water during droughts and allow for greater infiltration during heavy rain events. Additionally, the cost and availability of fertilizers is becoming an increasing problem for the viability of farms across the country. Building soil health takes time and making those investments will reduce the need for outside fertility and water quality mitigation in the future.

The State of Ohio has prioritized farming practices that restore water quality and soil health. OEFFA and the sustainable farming community represent an important sector to help reach these goals because sustainable and organic farming practices minimize the use of off-farm inputs that are a major source of water quality concerns.

OEFFA conducted listening sessions across the state to learn of farmers' current and desired soil health practices and the barriers to adopting these practices. Farmers and ranchers share a desire to learn about soil health practices from their peers, receive technical and financial assistance and participate in and learn from on-farm demonstrations. The most common barriers were lack of equipment or knowledge, cost, lack of mentors and risk to their cash crop. To meet the wants of

farmers, OEFFA seeks to administer a Soil Health Pilot Project. The Soil Health Pilot will support small groups of farmers and ranchers who want to increase farm productivity, profitability, resiliency, and positive impact on their community by increasing the health of their soil. These projects will take place in different regions of the state, not just focused on the Western Basin, allowing the benefits to reach statewide.

Governor DeWine has said, “As a state, we are committed to helping farmers adopt the practices that can make a real difference.” This is another way we can help farmers make a difference. OEFFA has had conversations with both H2Ohio and the Department of Agriculture, both of which see the value of the pilot project. This project would be additive to the work of H2Ohio, giving more farmers opportunity to improve their soil health practices.

American Farmland Trust conducted two soil health case studies in Ohio which illustrate how wider adoption and support for good soil health practices will yield tremendous benefits for individual producers as well as the state of Ohio.

Homewood Farms, located in Delaware County had their net income increase by \$56 per acre per year or by \$102,366 annually on the 1,830-acre study area, achieving a 142% return on investment by using strip tillage and planting cover crops.

MadMax Farms located in Delaware & Marion Counties had their per acre yields go from 165 to 195 bushels for corn and from 45 to 65 bushels for soybeans with at least half of the improvements resulting from soil health management system. Overall, the farm’s bottom line improved by \$38 per acre and by \$47,569 on the more than 1200 acres in the study area.

This pilot project will not just serve the state in mitigating water quality issues but also seeks to improve the viability and profitability of farmers.

I respectfully ask you to support our amendment of \$250,000 in each fiscal year from the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Soil and Water Conservation District Support line to support the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association for the Soil Health Pilot Project.

I can take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you.

Amalie Lipstreu
Policy Director
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association