



# Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Ohio House of Representatives  
House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources  
House Bill 33  
March 21, 2023

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to provide testimony before your committee this morning. My name is Jeff Duling. I am a farmer from Putnam County. I have row crops, hogs and some beef cattle. I am a supervisor for Putnam SWCD and the newly elected President of the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

I know many of you have great relationships with Soil and Water Districts in your communities. Our 88 county SWCD's pride themselves on being "boots on the ground" to get essential conservation work accomplished. Each district is diverse and is "locally-led," which means each district serves to address the vast array of conservation, agriculture, natural resources and environmentally-based issues focused on the needs to the communities each district represents. SWCDs operate critically needed programs centered around soil health and water quality and rely on non-mandated funding allocated at the local and state level.

Ohio's SWCDs consist of 440 locally elected, uncompensated board members who employ over 500 people statewide. We work "one-on-one" with farmers and communities to survey and design environmentally responsible projects such as surface and subsurface drainage and livestock waste management facilities, and provide resources for stormwater assistance, among others; We work collaboratively with partners to deliver technical assistance, financial support and valuable conservation programs to land owners; and, we engage and educate the public about natural resources issues through special programs, workshops, events and academic experiences.

Ohio SWCDs have been funded through a combination of local and state match funding with a goal of 1:1 match. Local governments have, for the most part, tried to remain strong and provide some funding to the SWCDs. The state match comes from four different places: General Revenue Funds, a fee on Construction and Demolition Debris, a fee on Solid Waste and a Scrap Tire Fee.

Before I go too much further in this process, I want to thank Governor DeWine and the members of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly for the confidence and trust they have placed in Soil and Water Districts. Our districts had previously had some difficult times, but the Governor and the 134<sup>th</sup> invested in our districts, through state match and H2Ohio funding and I am pleased to say our districts have stepped up to the challenge. With this investment, and the help of many industry partners we have reached out to new farmers and have assisted in putting meaningful conservation practices on the ground.

"The Leader in Promoting Natural Resources Stewardship to Enhance Ohio's Quality of Life".



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Districts have a lot to be excited about in the Governor's proposed budget. The increase in the 5BVO or "tipping fees" fund will help direct more money to districts with no new taxes or fees.

We support the changes in the H2Ohio line items that will consolidate these programs into one line item. We are grateful for the program's continuation and the ability for farmers to reinvest in conservation practices. I am a participant in the H2Ohio program. I commend the department for putting together an excellent program that has evolved and changed to become a better program each year. I am a conservation-minded farmer and have been since I realized that the practices my dad was using on our farm were just as profitable (if not more so) than the tillage practices my brother and I were trying to implement. Over time, I have seen our soil health improve as we continued those practices, but I am also not ashamed to admit that H2Ohio has taught me a thing or two. Because of H2Ohio, I make it a point to get my cover crops out earlier and keep them on later. At the Federation, we believe "Good Things Happen Under the Covers." We like cover crops and appreciate the opportunity for others to try this practice. It also helps us to "just say no to SNIRT."

We also appreciate the line items that will allow for additional staff support to help implement the H2Ohio programs.

Finally, I want to address state match. The Governor's proposed budget includes additional funding for our districts. Our goal will always be a 1:1 state match, but as you might imagine, that is a challenge to anticipate because we never really know what local match will look like. The proposed budgets will allocate an additional \$1.5 million in appropriations as a result of the tipping fees currently being collect. With this increase, we anticipate the state budget will provide SWCDs with a match of approximately 90 cents for every dollar of local revenue received. I can assure you that we appreciate this proposed budget and will make good use of those funds in delivering locally-led solutions to the people in our communities.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions.