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# HOUSE AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCE SUBCOMMITTEE

## FIELD HEARING TESTIMONY

### HEALTH OF LAKE ERIE

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Good morning. My name is Larry Antosch. I am senior director for policy development and environmental policy at the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the House Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee related to the health of Lake Erie. In my role as senior director for policy development and environmental policy, I have had the opportunity to represent OFBF and our members on several work groups and task forces related to the protection and enhancement of Ohio's precious natural resources.

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF) is the largest voluntary nonprofit agricultural organization in the state of Ohio. Our members produce virtually every kind of agricultural commodity and as a result, OFBF is strongly interested in the protection of Ohio's natural resources (soil, water and air). Current OFBF Policy is based on the premise that environmental policy and programs must be based on the collection and analysis of sound scientific data.

Current data indicate that:

- In recent years, the amount of dissolved reactive phosphorus (the form most readily available for plants to use to grow) being delivered to Lake Erie from a variety of sources has been increasing. Unfortunately, the reasons for the observed increase are uncertain.
- The increase in the dissolved reactive phosphorus load to Lake Erie has resulted in an increase in the number and areal extent of algal blooms.
- The mechanism(s) for dissolved reactive phosphorus transport are not well understood by the research community.
- Non-native invasive aquatic species accidentally introduced into Lake Erie have created a new dynamic ecosystem with fundamentally altered nutrient and energy pathways.

- It is clear that increased research and monitoring efforts are needed to better understand the changes in the nutrient dynamics and lake ecosystem changes.
- Weather patterns have been changing. We are experiencing more intense rainfall events resulting in increased peaks in surface runoff and increased volumes of wastewater being discharged to surface water via combined storm sewer overflows (CSOs) and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs).
- Point and nonpoint sources contribute to the dissolved reactive phosphorus load to Lake Erie.
- Even without all of the answers, stronger nutrient management actions from all sources are needed.

Long-term stream water quality data collected by Heidelberg University Center for Water Quality Research documents the increase in delivery of dissolved reactive phosphorus to Lake Erie. The land use (agriculture, urban, forestry, mining, etc.) occurring in a watershed has a direct influence on the quality of water draining from it. Since the principal land use in the Western Lake Erie Basin is agriculture, it is reasonable to say that agriculture is one of the sources of the dissolved reactive phosphorus. The relative proportion attributed to agriculture has not been well documented.

OFBF and our members have recognized the importance of agricultural nutrient management and have adopted several policies through our grass roots policy development process related to it.

#### OFBF Policies:

- Expect all farmers, regardless of size of their operation, to use environmental management systems to protect and improve water quality as well as complete and follow a comprehensive nutrient management plan.

- Support legislation that provides a safe harbor for farmers who follow industry accepted practices for nutrient management.
- Encourage all those (including non-agricultural) applying nutrients and crop protectant products to follow recognized management practices including the development of nutrient management plans with soil testing.
- Encourage continued research and use of sound conservation practices designed to minimize the offsite transport of nutrients from the application of manure and encourage the adoption of practices suitable for application on frozen and snow-covered ground to protect surface and ground water resources.
- Consider all sources of nutrients (organic and inorganic) equal and should be treated the same.

Over the years, Ohio's agricultural community has demonstrated time and time again it is willing to do what is necessary to meet our natural resource challenges. Be it the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, the Lake Erie phosphorus reduction activities of the 1980s or addressing the Lake Erie water quality challenges of today, Ohio agriculture is willing to do its part. The challenge becomes striking a balance between maintaining agricultural production at the levels needed to help feed the world and positively impacting our natural resources. A challenge successfully met in the past.

Thank you for considering these comments. The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation understands the importance of protecting the quality of our water resources. Our policies support the development and use of nutrient management plans and we will do our part to ensure their development while protecting the vitality of Ohio Agriculture.