



*Forging a partnership between farmers and consumers.  
•Working together for Ohio's farmers•*

**John C. Fisher  
Ohio Farm Bureau  
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House Agriculture and Natural Resources State Fair Committee**

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Good morning, and welcome to the Great Ohio State Fair. The State Fair is many things to many people, but above all it is an opportunity to showcase our agricultural industry here in Ohio. As you know, Ohio agriculture contributes \$107 billion to our state's economy each year and is responsible for one in seven Ohio jobs.

I am here today in part to talk about our wonderful industry, in part to thank you for helping us to continue to grow Ohio agriculture, and in part to look toward the future and start a conversation about how we can continue our collaborative efforts to help Ohio's families, communities, and businesses. We have more than 11.5 million Ohioans who love to eat, need transportation, and participate in agri-tainment.

When we look around our beautiful, bustling fairgrounds, it is not always immediately obvious what a hub of economic activity we have right here. In 2009, the Ohio Expo Center hosted 156 events lasting approximately 355 days and an estimated 2.7 million visits. The State Fair alone accounted for 833,000 visitors over twelve days. Ninety-eight percent of these folks were attendees, 40% of whom were from outside the Greater Columbus Region. Aside from the State Fair, the ten largest events included the All American Quarter Horse Congress, Goodguys Rod & Custom Show, Equine Affaire, Ohio-Michigan Equipment Dealers Show, Ohio Designer Craftsman Show, Deer & Turkey Expo, Central District Athletic Board, Central Ohio Home & Garden Show, Oktoberfest, and the Central Ohio RV Dealers Show.

The economic impact of the Ohio Expo Center is substantial. The State Fair alone generated an estimated economic impact of \$68.5 million in 2009. That same year, the total economic impact of the Expo Center was about \$478 million. This included almost \$8 million in state and \$1.1 million in local tax collections. We are sharing this great news with Mayor Coleman, Experience Columbus and local businesses.

It is because of this economic impact that we are especially appreciative of your efforts and support of a \$1million capital appropriation to update the Expositions Center. Continued reinvestment in our facilities will allow us to keep existing attractions and grow new ones. In many ways, this is the ideal example of a public private partnership. You can expect an attractive return on your investment.

As a private partner, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF) is especially proud of the Nationwide Donahey Ag and Horticulture building here at the State Fairgrounds. I would invite you to our building, if you have not already visited. It is not only a showcase celebrating Ohio agriculture, but it is an opportunity to reach out to the consuming public who may not have any

other link to Ohio agriculture. A great deal of planning and coordination goes into the effort, which is spearheaded by OFBF's Cara Lawson and a team of interns who serve as State Fair Ambassadors. Some of these Ambassadors are here today, and I would like to recognize them for their accomplishments.

We are also excited to partner, once again, with the Ag is Cool program at the State Fair. This is one way to help continue to carry the message to the public about what Ohio agriculture is really about. It has been a pleasure to work with Governor Kasich, Director Daniels, and a number of others to bring this program to our young people.

Speaking of public private partnerships, Ohio Farm Bureau is committed to promoting Ohio and Ohio's agriculture industry. By working with organizations such as Jobs Ohio and Columbus 2020, we can continue to lift up the importance of Ohio agriculture to our economy.

Matching the young people of today with the skills needed tomorrow is key to growth in our agricultural economy. Ohio Farm Bureau is strongly invested in helping our young people to see not only a bright future for Ohio agriculture, but also that they have a role in that future.

Ohio Farm Bureau has strong partners in both the Legislature and the Administration. It is no secret that the economic climate has taken its toll on every industry in the state. However, we believe that one of the bright lights at the end of the economic tunnel has been Ohio agriculture. The Ohio General Assembly should be commended for its thoughtful deliberation of a number of issues that are critical to Ohio Farmers. We appreciate that in tough budget years you have continued to prioritize funding for Ohio State's Extension and OARDC programs, ensured funding for critical food safety programs central to the mission of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, continued funding for Soil and Water Conservation and agricultural education, and invested in infrastructure and Clean Ohio. We are especially appreciative of your efforts to eliminate the state estate tax. The elimination of the state estate tax will likely go down in history as one of the key reforms to maintaining the family farm. While we are concerned about where Congress will go on this issue in 2012, we know that Ohio has done the right thing.

We've also seen numerous other accomplishments here at the state level, and we are proud to be partners with you in those accomplishments. Together we have passed a balanced Great Lakes Compact implementing program, expanded the Ag-LINK program, corrected Ohio's animals at large law, and identified on-farm energy development opportunities. We will continue to be your partner as we address nutrient management, water quality, and companion animal issues. Most importantly, we have worked with the Livestock Care Standards Board to provide certainty to Ohio's farmers and agribusinesses that are looking to locate or expand their operations in this state.

I've asked Suzie McMullen, a resident of Coshocton County and a senior at the Ohio State University studying Agriscience Education to speak to you a little about how we work with young people to help them prosper.

Good morning. My name is Suzie McMullen. As Mr. Fisher noted, I am a senior majoring in AgriScience Education at The Ohio State University from Coshocton County. I have been involved in 4-H and FFA and have had the opportunity to serve as an Ohio FFA State Officer. Last year I served as the State Jr. Fairboard President. The Ohio State Fair is very special to me

as it provides so many opportunities for Ohio Youth to be involved in showcasing our agricultural industry.

This year, I am also serving as the intern to the office of the Executive Vice President. While at OFBF, I have focused primarily on compiling the history of Ohio Farm Bureau, discovering agriculture's economic impact in each of the new congressional districts, and working to design a program that allows high school and college students to be more involved in Farm Bureau.

Ohio Farm Bureau has a long history of engagement in workforce development and lifelong learning. Long before STEM became an educational buzzword, Ohio State Extension's 4-H program and high school FFA organizations were giving students an enhanced, intensive, hands-on educational experience that combines science, technology, engineering, and math. Ohio Farm Bureau has long been a partner to Ohio State University's College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CFAES). Working with both Extension and the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center (OARDC) has made us strong partners here in Ohio. Students from the OSU CFAES are fortunate to benefit from high placement rates after graduation; an estimated 92% of students have jobs within six months of graduation. If anything, we need more students who are passionate about agriculture, because the demand for students who are prepared for careers in the agbiosciences exceeds the number of graduates that we have, and the demand is expected to grow. It is for this reason that we have enhanced our partnership with Ohio's Association of Agricultural Educators and it is why we continue to work with Senator Widener and other legislative leaders on the development of an Ag STEM school.

This is exciting for me because I am going to be graduating in less than a year and I know that I have many opportunities available to me. Whether I want to go straight into teaching high school agriscience education, continue on to graduate school, or work in the industry, I am confident that my experiences with Ohio Farm Bureau and OSU CFAES have prepared me well for whatever I may choose. One thing that is for sure is that Ohio agriculture will continue to grow and the demand for highly qualified employees to fill the diverse careers in Ohio agriculture is going to increase. This partnership we have with Ohio Farm Bureau, Colleges, AgriScience Educators, and Legislators is going to be invaluable in preparing Ohio Youth for these careers. Together we can work together to make Ohio a better place to live for all Ohioans. Thank you for allowing me to be here with you today.

Thank you, Suzie. Suzie has been a wonderful part of our team this year.

The future of Ohio agriculture is bright, but it is not without difficulty. We are currently facing a very serious drought here in Ohio and across the Midwest. Ohio Farm Bureau has actively been working with our members to assess and respond to the drought situation. We have created a resource page at: <http://ofbf.org/news-and-events/news/2663/>. We also appreciate Governor Kasich's drought related executive order and the response efforts of the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

Drought conditions in this state and much of the Midwest are a stark reminder that we cannot foresee every eventuality in agriculture. What we can do, however, is prepare for the future. It is for this reason that Ohio State, as Ohio's Land Grant University, with its mission of research, teaching, and outreach is so critical to Ohio agriculture. We are fortunate to have a top caliber land grant in this state. Much of the success of Ohio State's CFAES can be attributed to the

leadership of retiring Dean, Dr. Bobby Moser. Dr. Moser is here today, and if I could, I would like to briefly recognize him and his investment in Ohio agriculture. Bobby's accomplishments are too many to list here today, but I've been honored to work with him as a partner and a friend.

Also critical to a strong agriculture economy is a strong Department of Agriculture. It has been a pleasure to work with the Kasich Administration and Director Daniels. ODA is possibly the least known and most critical agency in the State of Ohio. Ohioans are fortunate to have one of the safest, most plentiful, most affordable food supplies in the world. This would not be possible without the work that the Ohio Department of Agriculture does. From farm to fork, ODA helps to ensure food safety and availability. It is for that reason that Ohio Farm Bureau has consistently advocated for a strong, viable, properly funded department of agriculture.

Lastly, Ohio's farmers share the responsibility to listen to our consumers and respond. For many years, our members took the position that they wanted to work hard to do what was necessary to feed the world. While we did that, our consumers became more and more disconnected from the farm. Farm Bureau has seen the value of forging a partnership between farmers and consumers. We have become significantly better at helping farmers to tell their story to their neighbors, their communities, and the world. However, we still need to work to listen to consumers. We cannot just tell them that what we do is important; we need to also listen to hear what is important to them. We value you as a partner in that conversation, because our farmers and consumers are your constituents.

Thank you, again, Chairman Hall and members of the Agriculture Committee for inviting Farm Bureau here to testify. It continues to be a pleasure to work with you. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.