



280 N. High Street • P.O. Box 182383 • Columbus, OH 43218
614-249-2400 • Fax 614-249-2200
Web site: <http://www.ofbf.org>

November 18, 2014

Chairman John Shimkus
Environment & Economy Sub-Committee
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shimkus,

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation is the largest general farm organization in the state, with members in all 88 counties. Our organization's mission is to forge a partnership between farmers and consumers that benefits each other.

Lake Erie's water is no longer a discussion limited to tourism directors, fishermen, farmers and families who have a direct business or personal attachment to the lake. The lake's water is now on the minds of 400,000 of our fellow Ohioans who suddenly had nothing to drink for two days this summer. It's on the minds of small businesses that were forced to close. Clearly, it's on the minds of policymakers such as yourselves. And it's on the minds of citizens worldwide who are watching how we respond.

Responding to environmental challenges is what farmers do. Whether it was the Dust Bowl of the 1930s or soil erosion in the 1980s and 1990s, farmers have a proven record of adapting the way they farm in order to protect natural resources. We'll do the same now, as water quality moves to the forefront of our most pressing challenges.

It's our belief that one of the best things farmers can do is to work collaboratively on both short- and long-term solutions. That idea of cooperation is what led Ohio Farm Bureau to launch the Healthy Water Ohio initiative. More than a year ago, we partnered with conservation groups, bottlers, tourism agencies, lawn care companies, utilities, health agencies, educators, water providers and other farm groups to study the challenges that face Ohio. The fact-finding effort is underway and will lead to a 20- to 30-year strategy for protecting and improving the state's water resources. Two northwest Ohioans are serving on Healthy Water Ohio's steering committee: Larry Fletcher who directs the tourism efforts of Lake Erie Shores and Islands and Jack Williams who oversees the water utilities for the village of Ottawa, which is in the Western Lake Erie Basin.

Specific to agriculture, Ohio Farm Bureau appreciates how important Lake Erie is to the economy and to quality of life, both locally and statewide, and we accept that we need to be a part of solving the lake's problems. As we move toward those solutions, there are a couple of points that we hope the discussions include.

First, is that we should consider water quality and food production simultaneously. Clean water cannot come at the expense of food production nor can farming trump the need for clean water. Fortunately, we can have both. One is not exclusive of the other.

Clearly, our ability to protect both water and farming will be influenced greatly by the policies adopted by the state of Ohio as well as federal and even International laws, regulations and agreements. As the discussion on

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policy moves forward, we suggest that we not only focus on the end result but give thoughtful consideration to the specifics of how we should get to that result. Ready, fire, aim is not a sound model for making public policy.

We would suggest, too, that while we're looking at ways farmers can make changes to their farming practices over the long term, we look also at what other fixes are appropriate to address other sources of phosphorus or to treat drinking water. If short-term infrastructure improvements can be of help, Farm Bureau would be supportive. We need action items that can be done now while we begin work on long-range solutions.

While most of what farmers can do will take time, they are not sitting idly by. They have already voluntarily reduced phosphorus applications in the Lake Erie watershed by more than 180,000 pounds. They're learning new fertilizer practices that will further reduce nutrient runoff. They're investing tens of millions of dollars of their own money in establishing conservation practices on their farms and more than \$1 million into edge-of-field research to better learn how to prevent nutrients from escaping their fields. They're working to get federal farm bill monies invested into Lake Erie improvements.

At Ohio Farm Bureau, we committed \$1 million to our Water Quality Action Plan to fund research and demonstration programs, facilitate training and provide additional staff to support farmers' efforts. We'll work with Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, which also put forth \$1 million for its Field to Faucet initiative, which will result in improved farming practices, better water treatment and other effective steps. And we look forward to collaborating with various federal agencies to ensure that their resources and dollars are targeted effectively.

Within state government, Gov. John Kasich and his administrators at the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio EPA and Ohio Department of Natural Resources have worked closely with the regulated community to seek workable solutions. Two pieces of state legislation are noteworthy.

Passed this summer was legislation that is the first of its kind in the nation, which requires all qualifying farmers to obtain mandatory certification training if applying fertilizer in the state of Ohio. Over 700 farmers packed the first three training sessions offered by Ohio State University this fall. And just this week, Ohio Farm Bureau supported another bill that will ban application of manure and fertilizer on frozen and snow-covered ground in the Western Lake Erie Basin.

In closing, we would like to join all others who have expressed their admiration for the people of Toledo and how they handled an extremely difficult situation. Going forward, Ohio Farm Bureau is committed to doing what we can to ensure that Toledo, or any other Ohio city, does not have to go through such an experience again.

Ohio farmers are proud that they feed our families and provide strength to our local economies. They're equally proud to be willing contributors to the quality of Lake Erie and Ohio's other vital water resources. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written statement.

Sincerely,



Stephen F. Hirsch
OFBF President

cpy: John C. "Jack" Fisher
OFBF Cabinet