

Legal with Leah: Ohio Farm Bureau Legal Fund

Joe Cornely: I think since the beginning of time people turned to Farm Bureau to help them in the legislative arena whether it's at the Statehouse or perhaps in Washington. More and more though we're relying on Farm Bureau in the legal world. That might be why we have an official policy counsel. Leah Curtis is with us today. We have a legal fund set up, Leah. What is it? Why do we have it?

Leah Curtis: The legal fund is just kind of just what it sounds like. It's a place for members or those who are interested in supporting our legal advocacy to donate funds that help us to engage in that legal advocacy. I think everyone knows lawyers aren't cheap. I work pretty cheap, but (laughter) it just helps us to continue to do those legal advocacy activities that we do here at Farm Bureau because more and more we're seeing things happen that are affected by the courtroom more so than the Statehouse.

Joe Cornely: Yeah let's go there a little bit further. People don't like the way the legislature rules so they just simply file lawsuits.

Leah Curtis: Yeah and sometimes that's the only way that you can deal with that. I mean if you, and you know this can go on both sides. We could be involved in a suit that is challenging the law that we didn't like, or we might be involved in a suit that is somebody else challenging a law that we do like. But oftentimes the courts are your resort, they're the the third branch, the coequal branch and so they're the way to have a court review whether something's constitutional, whether it's lawful and whether it has any problems with it.

Joe Cornely: We have this legal fund. What do you do with the money?

Leah Curtis: So the money in legal fund will largely help pay for our legal advocacy activities which are normally what's called an amicus brief. Amicus curiae means friend of the court in Latin and that's a chance for our Farm Bureau to weigh into the court on what Farm Bureau's thoughts are. We're not able to pay for anyone's individual legal bills due to IRS restrictions, but it does allow us to, if they are in a lawsuit to say hey not only do we support what's happening to them individually but on a broader scale this could affect a lot of other people and here are the ways it would affect them.

Joe Cornely: Probably worth repeating: we're not going to pay anybody's legal bills because we can't.

Leah Curtis: Yeah. So IRS restrictions on how nonprofits can use money particularly for legal actions limit the ability to actually pay for someone's individual legal bills. But it does allow us to pay for things like our amicus briefs and getting involved in that way so that we can kind of put forth a general public interest.

Joe Cornely: How do I keep tabs on some of the things that the legal fund might be engaged in?

Leah Curtis: So obviously our publications are always talking about what is kind of going on in the legal world. Some of the things that we have been involved in recently include a case that found that grain bins were not taxable as property. So that took a lot of people's grain bins off their property tax bills for the rest of the time they own that property. We also were involved in a lawsuit that confirmed that CAUV landowners can challenge CAUV

values at the Board of Tax Appeals which previously the Board of Tax Appeals had said they could not review those. Those are just two examples of big changes. And then of course the U.S. Supreme Court which we've talked about here on the podcast, that was one thing that we were able to do and weigh in on and that means a big difference for our members when eminent domain happens because they can now challenge that in federal court. They don't have to go through the state court procedures and they have a quicker route to resolution.

Joe Cornely: So if I want to kick in five bucks or 50 or 500, how do I do that?

Leah Curtis: You can go to ofbf.org/legalfund, you can go to the ofbf.org web page and just search legal fund. It should come up that way. It's a pretty simple way to just online make a donation and every little bit will help, but it's just something we wanted to have available for our members because we've had lots of people ask why we don't have that available. So now it is there if anybody's interested in participating and donating.

Joe Cornely: ofbf.org, look for legal fund. Our guest today Policy Counsel Leah Curtis from Ohio Farm Bureau.