

2020 Year in Review

There is much to note about the stressful year of upheaval that was 2020, but one thing that stayed unchanged was Ohio Farm Bureau's commitment to fighting for members despite all the challenges and disruptions brought to bear by the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest and a contentious general election.

Farm Bureau advocated for agriculture on various fronts throughout the pandemic by helping secure federal and state aid for small businesses as well as pushing for personal protective equipment and better rural broadband access. As the state moved to a stay-at-home mandate, Farm Bureau didn't miss a beat and remained open, continuously updating members as COVID-19 protocols changed rapidly. Through it all, county Farm Bureaus stepped up to the challenge in their communities, helping to secure and distribute food at schools and food pantries across the state.

All the while, farmers kept farming. While Mother Nature was still unpredictable in parts of the state, prevent plant acres were minimal in 2020. In Ohio, weather prevented farmers from planting 63,538 acres this year, down 95.7% from a disastrous 2019. That number includes 55,656 acres of corn and 7,032 acres of soybeans. A (mostly) gorgeous autumn awaited the harvest. Still, uncertainty remained.

Embarking on a new year can bring with it a fresh start, but there is a lot of carryover. Take a look back at an unprecedented 2020.

PANDEMIC IMPACT

OFBF surveyed members twice and their strong response helped both the organization and the state government work toward solutions for those issues identified as the most pressing during this pandemic.

Ohio Farm Bureau Federation released the first results in late April, which found that 65% of those involved in Ohio's food supply system were negatively or very negatively impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The statewide Farm, Food and Agribusiness COVID-19 Impact Survey, distributed by Ohio Farm Bureau and a number of other agriculture groups, collected data to pinpoint areas of concern for every aspect of agriculture, including producers, retailers and food processors. With over 1,200 surveys returned, statistics showed:

45% of respondents had their market distribution channels disrupted.

29% of those taking part in the survey had cash flow issues.

Almost **15%** of people polled cannot access the sanitation and protective equipment items required to operate (masks, sanitizer, etc.)

The second survey specific to Personal Protective Equipment allowed Farm Bureau to disseminate information on available providers to those in need.

ADVOCATING FOR AG DURING COVID-19

In mid-March, Ohio Farm Bureau county presidents were in their last day in Washington, D.C. for the annual advocacy trip to meet with legislators when the spread of COVID-19 across the country was making an impact at an accelerated pace. They started working before they even came home, as Farm Bureau began doing all it could to help members and all of Ohio agriculture, which includes the food supply system, navigate the uncharted waters of the novel coronavirus pandemic.



COVID-19 FUN FACT (The only one)



**One cow equals six feet
of social distancing**

OFBF supported the following critical actions during COVID-19:

- Worked closely with Gov. Mike DeWine and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to make sure those in Ohio's food supply system were deemed essential, allowing anyone from farmers to truckers to processors, to grocers to farm markets and greenhouses to continue the important work of keeping food available.
- Advocated for delaying federal and state tax filings and for additional funds for the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program.
- Fought for access to SBA grant/ loan programs, which historically excluded agriculture.
- Looking at every possible solution at the state and federal level to increase access, speed and affordability of rural broadband.
- OFBF staff was included in the governor's County Fair Task Force to develop guidelines and practices for county fair boards to use for county fairs. When the Ohio State Fair was canceled, OFBF partnered with Nationwide to help sponsor the Ohio Youth Livestock Expo so some animals could be safely shown at some capacity on a state level.
- Pushed for \$14 billion set aside specifically for agriculture to replenish the Commodity Credit Corporation, which is the funding mechanism for programs such as Price Loss Coverage and Dairy Margin Coverage.
- Worked to ensure waivers for hours of service and weight limits for trucks delivering critical supplies, including food and groceries, were granted.
- Worked with USDA to promote assistance to regional and local food banks to purchase \$3 billion in fresh produce, dairy and meat. County Farm Bureaus stepped up to organize food bank donations and make connections between farmers willing to give and food banks in need.
- Compiled specific resources for members that address the unique stress placed on farmers; trained Farm Bureau staff to be able to have caring conversations with members regarding mental health.
- Assisted members with resources to keep their employees healthy and workplaces operating safely.
- Advocated for the release of CARES Act dollars to farms for supplies and improvements to employee housing.

LEBOR

Toledo voters passed the Lake Erie Bill of Rights in 2019, giving Toledoans the legal right to sue anyone accused of violating the lake's right under LEBOR to "exist, flourish and naturally evolve." Exactly a year later, LEBOR was definitively ruled invalid in U.S. District Court. The city of Toledo pursued an appeal but in early May, the city voluntarily dismissed its own appeal, thus marking the end of the road for LEBOR and protecting farmers in the Western Lake Erie Basin from litigation. A settlement for attorneys' fees was reached in September, ending the case in its entirety. The city of Toledo agreed to a settlement in September to pay over \$200,000 in Drewes Farms' attorneys' fees. This ended the case in federal court.



H2OHIO/OHIO AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Despite anxiety about whether the launch of Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio water quality initiative would need to be delayed or cut due to the coronavirus pandemic, farmers in northwest Ohio learned in May that \$50 million was available to fund the first year of the program. In October another \$42 million was set aside for year two. Farmers who are enrolled in H2Ohio also have to participate in the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative Farmer Certification Program, which will help farmers take conservation programs to the next level.



BLANCHARD RIVER DEMONSTRATION FARMS

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service signed a new, five-year agreement to continue research taking place at the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network. After the establishment of the project in 2015, three demonstration farms in northwest Ohio were created as models for new innovations that reduce and prevent agricultural nutrient runoff and have shared those discoveries with local farmers, land management agencies and the public.



MENTAL HEALTH

As stresses mounted throughout the state and country during the COVID-19 crisis, the mental well-being of farmers became even more critical for each farmer, his or her family and the nation. Farm Bureau continued to encourage farmers to speak out about mental health needs with one another. Several mental health resources remain available, including the COVID CareLine, whose staff has been trained to recognize and support the unique mental health needs of farmers.



TRADE

January saw a trio of trade deals come to fruition, impacting agriculture in a number of positive ways. President Trump signed the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, a trade agreement reached with Japan at the end of 2019 also went into effect and Phase One of a deal with China was established that month as well.

REWARD PROGRAM INCREASE

The Ohio Farm Bureau Property Protection Program, more commonly known as the \$2,500 Reward Program, was increased to \$5,000. The program started in 1971 with the purpose of deterring crime in rural areas. It initially began by offering a \$500 reward. In recent years, there had been requests by members to consider another increase along with other updates to this popular program. Through the program, a \$5,000 reward will be paid to anyone providing information to law enforcement that leads to the arrest and conviction of persons for eligible property crimes committed against a Farm Bureau member's property.



FOUNDATION

Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation saw the establishment of new scholarships and new memorial funds, while hosting a successful, virtual Cultivating a Cure and a golf outing in September in Grove City that raised more than \$74,000. A new scholarship program was established by Richard Cocks of Hamilton County. A beneficiary gift was left through the estate of former OFBF State Trustee Gale Betterly. Kelly Burns was named the new executive director of the foundation.



Burns

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Ohio Farm Bureau Senior Vice President Keith Stimpert retired after 42 years of service to the organization. Jack Irvin was elevated to vice president of public policy while Pete Leonard was named chief information officer, taking on a new role in the organization.



Stimpert



Irvin



Leonard

NATIONWIDE PARTNERSHIP

Ohio Farm Bureau's partnership with its No. 1 partner Nationwide continued on a growing path in 2020. Nationwide and Farm Bureau hosted a series of webinars for members regarding financial strength and co-sponsored several events, including the Black Farmers Conference in September. Policy team worked on these non-pandemic issues:

- Water quality
- Nutrient management
- Mental health
- Trade
- Tax reform
- Landowner rights
- Rural broadband
- Livestock care
- Wildlife management
- Energy development
- Beginning farmer initiatives



ENERGY NEWS

Farm Bureau urged landowners receiving settlement payment offers from oil and gas companies to read the fine print before agreeing. Farm Bureau also provided a solar checklist for landowners across the state who have been approached by various companies to establish solar arrays on their property. OFBF intervened in a number of solar permit cases at the Ohio Power Siting Board, advocating for required repair and remediation, as well as protection from noxious weeds.



MEMBER BENEFITS

Four new member benefits were added in 2020, including Stone X, a specialized financial services firm, which offers members exclusive discounts on Stone X's catalog of agricultural risk management tools; Xerox for discounts up to 50% for select products and services; and Dollywood, which offers members discounts on tickets to the amusement park and its water park in Tennessee. Rounding out the new benefits in 2020 was new partner Great Lakes Ag Labor Services, a full-service agent helping farms secure labor through the H-2A foreign worker visa program.



AFBF CAE WINNERS

Ohio's county Farm Bureaus won four of the 12 County Activities of Excellence awards presented by the American Farm Bureau in 2020. The awards celebrate unique, local, volunteer-driven programming and are models of innovation for local program development. Ohio's winners and projects:



Delaware and Pickaway counties:

Farms to Food Banks – The counties purchased 43 head of locally raised hogs and beef cattle from member-producers and junior fair exhibitors. After processing, more than 10,000 pounds of freezer pork and beef were distributed to 15 food banks in the counties during COVID-19.



Henry County: Farm Bureau members planned a Farmer and Landowner Appreciation Dinner for members and nonmembers Oct. 1, 2019, bringing the agricultural community together to let them know they were appreciated, had support options and were not alone in dealing with the devastation of the 2019 planting season.



Scioto County: A Conservation School is Cool event targeted emerging homesteaders and celebrated rural lifestyles in the county by providing sound guidance to those getting involved in agriculture.



Tuscarawas County: Cows 2 Kids – In March was an effort that resulted in 7,000 gallons of milk donated to families in eight schools, plus homeless shelters and a food pantry, by local dairy farmers. The farmers, all Farm Bureau members, planned the project, solicited sponsorships, sourced the milk and transported and delivered the product to the schools and facilities for distribution.

YOUNG AG PROFESSIONALS

With more than 600 attendees, the 2020 Winter Leadership Experience at the end of January was one of the last large events held in person for Farm Bureau before the pandemic protocols hit Ohio. The event was hosted by the Young Ag Professionals state committee. Co-chairs of the committee were Charlie and Casey Ellington and Aaron Harter. Nathan and Lynn Steiner of Wayne County were winners of OFBF's 2020 Outstanding Young Farmer Award. Drs. Josh and Sarah Ison of Clermont County were winners of the organization's 2020 Excellence in Agriculture Award. Micah Mensing of Wayne County won the 2020 Discussion Meet competition. The Ohio Youth Capital Challenge was held virtually, with 40 high school students serving as delegates and an additional 10 as mentors in the program. Also, 17 students graduated virtually from AgriPOWER Class XI. Due to the pandemic, AgriPOWER Class XII was canceled for 2020-2021.



YVONNE LESICKO

Yvonne Lesicko, Ohio Farm Bureau vice president of public policy, passed away June 18 from an unexpected medical issue. In her honor, the Lesicko family established the Yvonne Lesicko Memorial Fund with the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation. This fund was established to support the causes and initiatives that she cared so deeply about, including but not limited to, farmer mental health, women in leadership, agricultural and environmental policy and youth scholarships. It had secured more than \$70,000 in gifts by the end of October.

OUR OHIO WEEKLY

Our Ohio Weekly launched in January and shares the story of Ohio agriculture and Ohio Farm Bureau. Each week, this radio



program and podcast features guests who represent leaders in agriculture, government, academia and the food industry, among others. Host Ty Higgins talks to interesting guests and brings the story of Ohio agriculture to life. Our Ohio Weekly can be heard on 21 radio stations throughout Ohio, including 610 WTVN-AM in Columbus, as well as on many major podcast platforms like iHeart Radio.

#GETSOCIAL

In a year when getting online was imperative to the workings of everyday life, the second annual Ohio Ice Cream Battle took center stage in July, which is National Ice Cream Month. After Deersville General Store's inaugural win in 2019, it was Michael's Ice Cream in Jackson County that came home the winner. Thousands voted in this year's contest as families throughout Ohio spent time driving to their favorite ice cream shop over the summer.



MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Thanks to the efforts of Ohio Farm Bureau volunteers and staff, the organization had an increase in its "active" membership for the 2020 campaign, despite the challenging year. Active members are farmers or other Ohioans whose jobs or livelihoods are directly impacted by the agricultural industry. As active members, they are eligible to vote on Farm Bureau policies and hold elective office in the organization. Over half of the state's county Farm Bureaus received the Milestone Award for achieving a gain in active members, and 18 volunteers won the Murray Lincoln Award for signing up at least 50 new or winback members to Ohio Farm Bureau.