

Ohio Farmers Union Special Orders of Business for 2018

As Adopted by the Delegates to the 84th Annual Convention
Columbus Airport Marriott
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Special Order of Business
2018-01
Impaired Designation for Western Basin of Lake Erie

Lake Erie is the source of drinking water for 11 million people and contributes over one billion dollars annually to Ohio's economy. Restoring and protecting Lake Erie and its watershed has been a significant challenge over the years.

The Ohio Farmers Union has supported voluntary initiatives such as the 4Rs program, cover crops, filter strips, buffer zones and blind outlets in efforts to reduce nutrient runoff into Lake Erie.

However, more land management practices are needed to reduce algae and meet a 40 percent reduction in phosphorus by 2025 as recommended by the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). According to a recent White Paper developed by top local researchers, agriculture is now the single largest source of nutrient pollution entering Lake Erie, however sewage treatment plants, combined sewer overflows, home sewage treatment systems, and lawn care products continue to be sources of phosphorus in the WLEB.

In recent years, the State of Michigan has declared its portion of Lake Erie to be "Impaired", while Ohio has enacted that declaration only its shoreline areas, despite serious, recurring problems well beyond the coastline. More recently, The USEPA indicated that OEPA may have erred by its resistance to declaring their portion of Lake Erie's open waters to be "impaired"

Should Ohio EPA decide to change their declaration to include the open waters of Lake Erie, they would be empowered to work with other state and federal agencies to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the watersheds draining into Lake Erie. Once TMDLs were established, they would work with USEPA, State Agencies and local community leaders to develop a plan for achieving the goals.

The Ohio Farmers Union understands that most farmers use chemical fertilizers and manure with care, but so far, voluntary programs have not been enough to achieve the reduction goals established by the GLWQA and supported by the Governor.

TMDLs could be a valuable planning tool for Ohio, helping guide where reductions in phosphorus discharges are necessary and how they might be most effectively achieved. The Ohio Farmers Union would look forward to participating with federal, state and local stakeholders to assure that local nutrient reduction plans were practical, effective and implemented in a way that was consistent with agronomic goals and responsible stewardship.

Special Order of Business
2018-02
Net Neutrality & Rural Broadband Download Speeds

Recent actions by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are threatening to degrade the already- substandard provision of broadband internet services in rural Ohio. In December of last year, a divided FCC voted to end the package of regulations known as the “net neutrality” rules that barred internet service providers from creating payment-based, slow and fast lanes for different internet sites and services. Ending the net neutrality rules will disproportionately affect rural broadband service which is already more expensive to deliver to remote households, since less-scrupulous providers will now have the ability to throttle-back or block certain sites unless rural users agree to pay higher fees.

Also, since 2015, the FCC has set the minimum target for rural home broadband service at 25 megabits per second (mbps) download speeds. These speeds are typically achieved by running fiber optic wire to the home. However, under the new administration, the FCC is considering counting wireless internet accessed over a smartphone --at a speed of only 10 mbps—to be counted as “broadband service” for unserved rural areas. Such a move would eliminate any requirement for the federal government (or internet service providers using federal funds) to upgrade services in those areas to 25 mbps and would leave rural areas stranded with substandard technology. With speeds of up to 100 mbps fast becoming the norm in urban areas, such a move would relegate rural America-- and its fragile economy-- to a permanent, second class status. In this day and age, affordable, high speed internet should be made available equally to every household in the country—urban and rural.

The Ohio Farmers Union calls for the prompt restoration of the FCC’s net neutrality rules and stridently opposes any effort by the FCC to lower the broadband delivery speeds in unserved and underserved areas of rural America. Specifically, OFU calls on our federal lawmakers to use existing congressional authority to override the FCC’s net neutrality vote. Further, OFU calls upon Ohio Attorney General Mike Dewine to join twenty-one other States’ Attorneys General in their federal court challenge of the new net neutrality rules.

Special Order of Business
2018-03
Increased Accountability for State & Federal Checkoff Funds

Consistent with OFU's long-standing policy in favor of commodity checkoffs only if they are voluntary, with the decision to opt in made by the producer at the original point of sale, and;

Consistent with the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that checkoff contributions are mandatory "government speech" and that producers cannot become exempt from the obligation to contribute, even if they disagree with the actions and positions taken by checkoff organizations;

We propose that federal and state checkoff funds be paid directly to the appropriate Federal or State treasury and then be audited by the corresponding federal or state auditing agency.

**Special Order of Business
2018-04**

Maintaining Link Between Agricultural Policy and Public Nutrition

The Ohio Farmers Union believes that it is critical to maintain the linkage between agricultural policy and public nutrition in the Farm Bill. We recognize the importance of this historic partnership among taxpayers, producers and consumers. Ohio Farmers Union is committed to working with other groups in Ohio to keeping the nutrition title in the Farm Bill.

**Special Order of Business
2018-05**

Applying Nutrients in Western Basin of Lake Erie at the Agronomic Rate

In 2016, the state of Ohio committed to reducing phosphorous runoff from the Maumee Watershed into the Western Basin of Lake Erie by 40 percent by 2025. The water quality issues in the Western Basin of Lake Erie fuel annual harmful algal blooms and are well-documented. Well before this 40 percent reduction was agreed to among signatories of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the state of Ohio and Ohio's farmers had been taking steps to mitigate farm runoff in northwest Ohio.

To date, these efforts have not moved the needle toward a 40 percent reduction in agricultural runoff.

The Ohio Farmers Union's past efforts to establish watershed-level data collection and reporting on manure collection and disposition have fallen on deaf ears in the Ohio General Assembly, as has our efforts to close loopholes in the state's Confined Animal Feeding Operation laws and ensuing regulations.

The Ohio Farmers Union is now advocating for state government action that would prescribe that applications of fertilizer, including manure, in any impaired watershed, would be applied at a rate no higher than the "agronomic rate."

The agronomic rate being the minimum rate at which optimum crop growth can be attained, based upon: the nutrient demand of the crop to be planted, the current soil tests, the nutrient content of the fertilizer or manure used, and the rate of application.

Exemptions would require the use of application technologies that have been demonstrated effective in avoiding nutrient runoff, along with on-going monitoring of local watersheds.

Special Order of Business
2018-06
Supporting Renewable Energy in Rural Ohio

In 2014, the Ohio General Assembly enacted the most restrictive wind turbine siting requirements in the nation, bringing utility-scale wind development in Ohio to a virtual standstill. Prior to this misguided legislation, a wind turbine was required to be set back a reasonable distance of 550 feet (1.1 times the height of the tallest turbine) from a property line. Then, without public testimony, the legislature voted for new setback requirements which nearly tripled the setback distance from property lines to 1,300 feet—making commercially viable development of wind farms almost impossible in Ohio.

Since wind farms are typically sited on leased farmland in high wind areas of the state, rural townships and counties have been paying the price for this backward-looking legislation. The economic benefits of wind farms, such as lease payments to farmers and property tax payments to rural school districts, have dried up as wind developers have left the state or put their projects on hold. For example, the Blue Creek wind farm in Van Wert and Paulding Counties—which began construction in 2011 before the legislature prevented future developments—pays over \$2.7 million annually to local school districts in those counties, in addition to substantial payments to landowners and local governments.

Meanwhile, in southern Ohio, an historic solar energy project is in the works. Last year, Columbus-based American Electric Power (AEP) announced a request for proposals for the development of up to 400 megawatts (MW) of solar electric generation in Appalachian Ohio. The project, if awarded by AEP and approved by state regulators, would be the largest solar electric project in the eastern United States.

The sizing of the AEP project was deliberate. Based on prior discussions with solar equipment manufacturers, a 400 MW solar array is sufficient to justify locating a new solar panel assembly plant and related supply chain businesses in the nearby region. This could bring up to 1000 permanent solar jobs into rural southern Ohio, in areas previously hard hit by coal job losses.

The Ohio Farmers Union recognizes that wind and solar development provides unique benefits to Ohio's rural economy. The transition to wind and solar generation is also a necessary step in our response to global climate change. Unnecessary political obstacles to wind and solar deployment should be immediately removed and rectified. To this end, OFU urges the Ohio General Assembly to support legislation restoring the pre-2014 wind setback requirements for wind turbines. Further, we support prompt regulatory approval of a utility-scale solar generation project in Southern Ohio, linked to supply chain business development in the region.