

# **Ohio Farmers Union Special Orders of Business for 2019**

As Adopted by the Delegates to the 85th Annual Convention  
Lima, Ohio  
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**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-01**  
**Current Policy Focus of Ohio Farmers Union Concerning Lake Erie**  
**Water Quality and Nutrient Management**

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 in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB).

In 2018, the Ohio EPA declared the "open waters" of Lake Erie as "impaired." OFU calls upon federal, state and local authorities to work with agricultural stakeholders in the development of a concrete, workable plan to identify and reduce nutrient loading for the watersheds draining into the Western Basin of the Lake. OFU recommends that this plan be developed under the impaired watershed program in the federal Clean Water Act.

Furthermore, OFU reiterates our acknowledgement that much sound science has gone into the identification of 8 major watersheds where impairment status is most profound but we acknowledge that any effective strategy must be based on "Adaptive Management," allowing for the constant review of new data and reassessment of action plans.

OFU calls upon the Ohio State Soil & Water Conservation Commission to accept the compelling science upon which the recommendation for the impairment designation is based and to work with state and federal agencies and local farmers, to develop and implement effective plans reduce nutrient runoff. We suggest that up to 40 percent of the funds for a cleaner Lake Erie made available in S.B. 299 (July 2018), be used for additional soil and water testing to determine the location of so-called "hot spots", where further spreading of manure or other phosphorous bearing nutrients should be suspended.

Finally, OFU's long-standing advocacy for watershed-level data collection and reporting on manure applications have fallen on deaf ears in the Ohio General Assembly and within regulatory agencies.

We continue in 2019 to advocate for 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.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-02**

**The Will of Congress Should Prevail on SNAP Work Requirements**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a vital part of the U.S. social safety net as the foundation of federal efforts to fight hunger across the nation. The U.S. Congress engaged in debate during consideration of the 2018 Farm Bill over more strenuous work requirements for SNAP recipients. In the end, Congress chose to leave existing work requirements unchanged and the Farm Bill was passed and signed into law.

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue has started a rulemaking process within USDA to limit states' ability to waive the existing work requirements. Workforce readiness, poverty and adequate employment are localized issues and the states should have the ability – as they already possess – to maintain state-level flexibility in administration of SNAP.

The Ohio Farmers Union urges Secretary Perdue to abandon this rulemaking process. Should USDA continue along this path, OFU urges Congress to act to protect the existing flexibility in state-level SNAP administration.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-03**  
**Support for the Renewable Fuel Standard**

The Ohio Farmers Union wholeheartedly supports the President's October 9, 2018, order to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to initiate rulemaking to enable year-round sales of E15.

OFU agrees with U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley's comment regarding the President's action that it is "good, good, good" for farmers, ranchers, consumers, the environment and the economy.

The year-round use of E-15 in the U.S. will utilize an additional 2 billion bushels of corn annually, drawing down worldwide stocks and helping to make farmers more profitable both here and abroad.

Additionally, this opens the door for more advances in cellulosic and other feedstock fuels. More bioprocessing plants will invigorate rural economies in all agricultural states and spur new uses and markets. Neither trade agreements nor trade wars can change that.

E15 – an important component of the Renewable Fuel Standard – will also become a larger part of the U.S. move toward energy independence.

Corporations that are heavily invested in fossil fuels will not simply acquiesce to these proposed rules. We can expect high-powered, well paid lobbyists to exert all of their influence during the rulemaking process to discredit ethanol and reverse this decision.

Therefore, the Ohio Farmers Union urges all members to contact U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman and their respective members of Congress and tell them your story regarding E15 and its contribution to your farm business, the local economy and cleaner air.

Finally, the Ohio Farmers Union joins the National Farmers Union in strong condemnation of "hardship waivers" being widely used by refiners to shirk their responsibility under the Renewable Fuel Standard.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-04**  
**Increased Accountability for State & Federal Checkoff Funds**

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

Whereas the U.S. Supreme Court has determined 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; and

Whereas several commodity checkoff organizations have fallen under the influence of global processing and distribution corporations, such as Smithfield and JBS, who operate under the ownership and control of foreign corporations, therefore

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 to assure that the actions of checkoff groups comply with the intentions of the Congress, in support of the interests of domestic agricultural producers.

The Ohio Farmers Union urges that incoming Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's Administration in conjunction with incoming Ohio State Auditor Keith Faber to take seriously the governance of these multi-million dollar public-private entities and ensure that farmers' hard-earned, coerced contributions are being used according to state and federal laws and not directly for political lobbying activities.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-05**  
**Healthcare Reform for Rural America**

The Ohio Farmers Union supported the adoption of the Affordable Care Act by Congress in 2010, believing that if there were shortcomings, common-sense and an obligation to put people's basic healthcare needs first would lead to further refinements by Congress and the Executive Branch. Generally, for the first two years, the ACA health insurance exchanges offered more competition among insurers through choice among providers who supplied insurance to consumers that met the standards of the ACA including expanded coverage for adult children, a ban on discrimination against consumers with pre-existing conditions and other consumer benefits.

In rural Ohio, the system began to unwind in the exchanges when large providers began to abandon the exchanges leaving only one or no providers in several counties. Insurance costs began to return to a double-digit annual cost increase trajectory across the system due to inaction in Congress, abandonment of the individual mandate in the 2017 tax bill and administrative decisions by the Trump Administration.

One bright spot remains, the Medicaid Expansion offered to states by the ACA and accepted by former Ohio Gov. John Kasich. Nearly 700,000 low-income Ohioans have received coverage under the expansion and it has become the primary provider of addiction recovery services during Ohio's opioid crisis.

The Ohio Farmers Union believes that access to quality, affordable healthcare is a human necessity is especially important to the self-employed, including Ohio's farm families.

The Ohio Farmers Union urges Congress and President Donald J. Trump to address an American healthcare system and health insurance market that is not delivering affordability and quality for consumers and is holding back the economic fortunes of working people and the middle class.

We support:

1. The continuation of the Medicaid Expansion in Ohio and urge the Ohio General Assembly and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine to carry on where the Kasich Administration left off.
2. A national public option for health insurance for people aged 50 to 65, delivered by allowing consumers in that cohort to purchase Medicare as their primary health insurance policy. This would strengthen the Medicare pool by bringing in younger, healthier consumers as well as strengthen the ACA health insurance exchanges by taking the older, less healthy cohort from that pool. OFU supports U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown's work in the Senate to realize this policy.
3. Reforms in prescription drug pricing that bring down the cost of pharmaceuticals, through bulk federal or state purchasing programs through legislation or regulation.
4. The original ACA standards for health insurance policies including the ban on insurers discrimination of consumers with pre-existing conditions.
5. A federal commitment to ensure that rural healthcare, including rural hospitals and clinics remain viable parts of their communities.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-06**  
**Supporting Solar Energy in Rural Ohio**

In southern Ohio's Highland County, a historic solar energy project is in the works. This year, Columbus-based American Electric Power (AEP) is requesting regulatory approval through the Public Utilities Commission to build and operate 400 megawatts (MW) of solar electric generation in the Village of Mowrystown. The project, if approved by state regulators, would be the largest solar electric project east of the Mississippi. Spanning over 2500 acres, the land for the solar project was leased or purchased from local family farms in arm-length transactions. No eminent domain proceedings were filed or threatened.

AEP customers would pay an average of 28 cents a month on their bill to help construct the project but will collectively save over \$200 million over the life of the project, since, unlike fossil fuel plants, solar power has zero fuel costs.

The sizing of the AEP project was deliberate. Based on prior discussions with solar equipment manufacturers, the 400 MW solar array should bring supply chain businesses into the surrounding rural region, possibly creating up to 800 permanent solar jobs in areas previously hard hit by coal job losses. Local school districts in and around Mowrystown stand to benefit as well. Local property taxes paid to schools by the project owners should exceed \$2 million annually.

The Ohio Farmers Union recognizes that wind and solar development provides unique benefits to Ohio's rural economy. The transition from coal to wind and solar generation is also a necessary step in our response to global climate change. To this end, OFU urges the Ohio Public Utilities Commission to provide prompt regulatory approval for AEP's Highland County solar generation project in Southern Ohio.



**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-07**  
**Monopolistic Corporate Concentration in Ag Industry**

Ohio Farmers Union is appalled at the increasing consolidation in all sectors of the agricultural economy. We do not believe that the Department of Justice is doing its legally mandated work of preventing monopolies. Therefore, we support the reintroduction of Senator Cory Booker's "Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Anti-Trust Review Act" (2018 SB 3404).

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-08**  
**Tax Credits for Land Sales to Beginning Farmers**

The Ohio Farmers Union is extremely concerned about the barriers that beginning farmers face when entering into production agriculture. One of the biggest barriers is access to land. We ask the Ohio Legislature to consider adopting a law similar to the law passed in Minnesota (2017 HF 608) allowing tax credits to farmers who sell or rent agricultural assets to legally defined beginning farmers. These beginning farmers may also take a credit against their tax if they participate in a financial program approved by the taxing authority. In just two years in Minnesota, 200 farmers have used these tax credits, and 162 farms have been rented or sold to beginning farmers. While these numbers may not seem large, they are an important part of the many programs that should be available to encourage entry into Ohio's most important economy.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-09**  
**Support for the Buy American Agricultural Act**

Ohio Farmers Union supports the Buy American Agricultural Act, introduced by Rep Rosa DeLauro (CT-03). This legislation will expand the principles of Buy American to the USDA Food Purchasing and Distribution Program, a component of the USDA's \$12 billion trade relief program that is meant to assist American farmers and ranchers. It is completely unacceptable that JBS, a Brazilian owned company, has received more than \$22 million through this program. The Buy American Agricultural Act will require the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service to only purchase food products from American companies when such products are available in sufficient quantity and quality.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-10**  
**Woodlands Property Taxes in Ohio Remain Unrealistically High**

The Ohio Farmers Union has led the multi-year battle to achieve a reduced tax rate on agricultural property taxes. We are proud to have done so and appreciate the tax rate reductions farmers have received.

In an ongoing quest for fair and equitable taxation, we call upon the Ohio General Assembly and the incoming DeWine Administration to review and dramatically reduce the property taxes on woodlands.

This will help keep our woodlands healthy and slow the trend of cutting down woodlands which are then permanently lost to other land uses.

Woodland areas provide substantial environmental benefits by cleaning surface and ground water, by removing carbon dioxide and emitting oxygen. Also, forestlands and have the capacity to sequester many tons of carbon in soils and forest biomass.

We believe that Ohio taxation policy should reward these benefits, but current CAUV tax formulas actually penalize forestland owners, by applying tax rates that are based on soil types and normal agricultural cropping practices, with credits applied for the costs of conversion from forests to crop land.

It is notable that many U.S. states have a property tax rate of \$0/acre or a low fixed rate. We advocate for a low fixed rate in woodland CAUV property taxes, consistent with the ecosystem services provided by Ohio's forests.

Also, we advocate for additional incentives to enable farmers to plant more trees in critical areas of the Western Lake Erie watershed to help achieve 2019-1 policy objectives.

**Special Order of Business**  
**2019-11**  
**OFU Supports Agricultural Hemp Production in Ohio**

Whereas the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill lists the crop hemp (cannabis sativa having a THC concentration of not more than 0.3%) as an agricultural commodity and removes it from the Controlled Substance Act, and;

Whereas more than 40 U.S. states, including every state surrounding Ohio, currently have a hemp production program under the regulatory oversight of their respective state Departments of Agriculture.

Now, therefore be it resolved that the Ohio Farmers Union through its committees and membership herein supports and endorses a comprehensive hemp production program through Ohio's farmers, by Ohio's farmers and for Ohioans and the global marketplace, and;

Be it finally resolved that this Ohio agricultural hemp production program be given the highest priority among Ohio's state legislature and the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture so that Ohio's farmers can begin hemp production as soon as possible in light of overall state by state U.S. production and competition for hemp products.