

Ohio Farmers Union Special Orders of Business for 2020

As Adopted by the Delegates to the 86th Annual Convention
Lima, Ohio
January 24-25, 2020



Special Order of Business
2020-01
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.

The Ohio Farmers Union has also advocated for further regulation of confined/concentrated animal feeding facilities/CAFOs and that nutrients only be applied at the agronomic rate.

These ideas, for the most part, have fallen on deaf ears. Lake Erie continues to exhibit problems related to nutrient overload.

The Ohio Farmers Union now calls on the state of Ohio to impose a moratorium on the issuance of new permits for livestock CAFOs in the Maumee watershed. We would rescind our call for a moratorium if there were to be a census of livestock in the Maumee watershed coupled with state policy to regulate the number of animal units to be limited to the watershed's carrying capacity.

The Ohio Farmers Union reiterates from our Special Order of Business in 2019 that we believe the spreading of fertilizer – including manure – be limited to the agronomic rate, especially in any watershed designated as impaired by the U.S. or state of Ohio EPA.

Special Order of Business
2020-02

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.

The current Administration has enacted 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 the President and USDA Secretary to abandon additional SNAP work requirements that are not in line with the will of Congress. Furthermore, OFU urges Congress to act to protect the existing flexibility in state-level SNAP administration.

Special Order of Business
2020-03
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 the Ohio Governor in conjunction with the Ohio State Auditor 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
2020-04
Healthcare Reform for Rural America

The Ohio Farmers Union has long supported reform of the U.S. healthcare system. Our Special Order of Business on healthcare in 2019 outlined several commonsense reforms that could be made in the healthcare, health insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

With the passing of every year, healthcare costs continue to rise and political leaders in Washington, D.C. refuse to enact any meaningful reforms that would guarantee every American access to quality, affordable healthcare.

Rural Americans are especially vulnerable to the ills of the nation's healthcare system on many fronts. There are far fewer service providers and in many rural counties in Ohio there is only a single insurance provider available in the ACA Healthcare Marketplace.

The Ohio Farmers Union believes that at the least, there needs to be a public health insurance option available to all Americans who are not covered by health insurance through their workplace. The Ohio Farmers Union urges its members to strongly consider any 2020 U.S. presidential candidate's healthcare policy a primary decision point in whether or not they will support a candidate. We believe any candidate's public policy should be based on making access to quality healthcare universal and affordable.

Special Order of Business
2020-05
Supporting Renewable Energy in Rural Ohio

According to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the Earth's atmosphere peaked at 414 parts per million level in May 2019—the highest level in the past 800,000 years of Earth history (1). The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere now increases every year and the rate of increase is accelerating (2). These sharp increases in CO₂ have triggered an era of global climate change which will have profound effects on agriculture in the present and on the basic ability of future generations to survive on this planet.

The Ohio Farmers Union recognizes that climate change is based on sound science and has been caused by human activity since the dawn of the industrial revolution. We believe that the transition from coal and (eventually) petroleum-based fuels to wind and solar energy generation – as well as renewable biofuels and geothermal energy - is a necessary first step in our response to CO₂-induced climate change. We also believe that wind and solar development provides unique economic opportunities for Ohio's rural economy, providing leasing fees to landowners, tax benefits for rural school districts, and high-tech jobs for young Ohioans.

To this end, OFU urges the Ohio General Assembly to remove existing obstacles like unreasonable wind turbine setback requirements and preferential ratepayer incentives for fossil fuels. We also urge the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to provide guidance and prompt regulatory approval for solar and wind projects, both for investor owned utilities and for local community owned projects.

Special Order of Business
2020-06
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 continue to support the Senator Cory Booker's "Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Anti-Trust Review Act" (2019 S 1596).

**Special Order of Business
2020-07**

Ohio Needs Regulation on Foreign Ownership of Agricultural Lands

According to USDA data reported by the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting and the Associated Press, more than 28 million farmland acres valued at around \$52 billion are owned or long-term leased by foreign investors. These lands if put together would roughly equal the size of our state of Ohio.

Ohio is one of several states with lax or non-existent regulation of foreign ownership of agricultural land or agricultural infrastructure. The Ohio Farmers Union would support legislation in the Ohio General Assembly enacting a moratorium on the foreign ownership agricultural land or infrastructure in Ohio.

While food security is one important reason for a ban on foreign ownership of agricultural land and infrastructure, foreign corporate concentration of ownership of key parts of the U.S. food supply is growing. The Ohio Farmers Union believes that American farms, farmland and food supply infrastructure should be owned U.S. citizens, or that non-U.S. citizens or U.S.-based companies should be severely limited in ownership of agricultural lands and infrastructure critical to our system of food.

Ohio currently calls for some registration of foreigners who own property within the state, but our state is one of several states in the union that do not have prohibitions or limits on foreign ownership agricultural lands or economic interests.

The Ohio Farmers Union calls upon the Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio Governor to seriously investigate this issue and propose and enact legislation regarding foreign ownership of agricultural land and/or agricultural businesses or infrastructure in our state.

Special Order of Business
2020-08
Renewable Fuel Standard Decisions in Washington Continue to
Reward Fossil Fuel Companies at the Expense of Farmers

The Ohio and National Farmers Union organizations have long supported the Renewable Fuel Standard. The RFS was passed by Congress in 2005 as part of the Energy Security Act and signed by the President.

The main provision of the RFS simply states that annually a prescribed number of gallons of transportation fuel in the United States shall contain renewable fuels. While corn-based ethanol has been a major focus of the annual renewable fuel blending targets, the law also calls for advanced bio-fuels research and usage over time.

Blending ethanol into the nation's gasoline supply has reduced the nation's dependence on foreign oil imports and created a dynamic ethanol industry. RFS-driven ethanol production has also had the additional benefit of providing a market opportunity for Ohio and U.S. corn growers.

The problem in recent years with RFS is twofold. The U.S. EPA is supposed to annually set ever-growing targets for the amount of ethanol blended into the nation's fuel stocks. Problem number one is that U.S. EPA, under successive administrations, has been derelict in its duty to set these targets on time and ensure certainty in fuel and agricultural markets. The second problem is the granting of so-called 'hardship waivers' to the fossil-fuel industry-owned gasoline refineries. These waivers were meant to ensure ethanol blending did not add to profitability concerns at individual facilities that may be less suited to handle the blending of ethanol into their product. The current Administration has granted an historic number of these waivers. Media and agricultural interest groups have noted that many of these waivers are being granted to profitable refineries, subverting the intent of the Energy Security Act – and harming the stability of U.S. ethanol producers like POET and U.S. corn markets.

The Ohio Farmers Union calls upon the Administration to stick to the letter of the law as defined by the Energy Act of 2005 and subsequent legislation passed by Congress outlining how the Renewable Fuel Standard should be administered. Further, OFU asks the Administration to review hardship waivers granted to refiners and rescind those that do not serve the purpose and intent of RFS legislation. Finally, OFU asks the Ohio General Assembly to pass a resolution of support for the Renewable Fuel Standard, acknowledging the benefits to Ohio farmers and the overall economy of Ohio's ethanol industry – from pump to field.

Special Order of Business
2020-09

Industrial Agricultural Integrators and Indemnity for Environmental Cleanup Related to Confined Animal Feeding Facilities and Operations

As corporate concentration has taken over the U.S. livestock industry, more and more farmers have found themselves in the position to stay in business by ceding to the equipment, facility and contractual demands of so-called integrators – or large ag businesses that contract for animal production and supply the stock and feed to farmers and demand certain infrastructure by farmers.

Integrators in the ag economy have changed the landscape from many family-sized farms, to fewer family farms and more confined animal feeding facilities and confined animal feeding operations.

In this changing economic landscape, many farmers are left with the choice to either abandon farming or to grow larger – succumbing to the demands of the integrators to make investments on their land for specialized buildings and equipment that are needed to safely and effectively raise larger numbers of livestock. These investments are often made by the farmer, not the integrator, although the integrator, being a large corporation, sets the terms of engagement between themselves and the farmer.

When these farms fail, it's the belief of the Ohio Farmers Union that the environmental cleanup and final safe and environmentally benign disposition of agricultural waste such as manure should be the responsibility of the integrator.

Given Ohio's severe water quality issues, especially in the Maumee Watershed, OFU is calling on the Ohio General Assembly to investigate the feasibility of establishing an Ohio Agricultural Integrator Environmental Indemnity fund. While we would leave it to the normal legislative process to establish how such a system would work, we believe that through some regular fee or levy on the integrators, this fund should grow and be administered by the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture in the event that a CAFF or CAFO enters bankruptcy or otherwise fails.

**Special Order of Business
2020-10**

**Prohibit Brine from Oil & Gas Operations from Being Used as Dust
Suppression and De-icing Treatments**

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has been testing “brine” from conventional and horizontal oil and gas for radioactivity. These results show high levels of Radium-226 and radium-228, both of which induce cancer. Therefore, the Ohio Farmers Union asks the state of Ohio to prohibit the use of all brine for both dust suppression and de-icing.