

Ohio Farmers Union Special Orders of Business for 2021

As Approved by the Delegates to the 87th Annual Convention
Teleconference
January 29, 2021



Special Order of Business
2021-01
Rural Ohio Absolutely Needs Broadband Capability

The COVID-19 pandemic has graphically exposed the human cost of the lack of high-speed internet access in rural Ohio. Rural students and their teachers were frequently forced to conduct in-person classes or delay homework assignments during the quarantine, while their urban counterparts took advantage of online learning made possible by high-speed broadband service. Small town brick and mortar stores were similarly impaired.

OFU supports mandated efforts to ensure competitively priced, high-speed broadband and wireless access to the internet throughout rural Ohio, regulated as a utility, at download speeds upgradable to 100 megabits per second (Mbps) or higher.

In addition to existing internet service providers, small town community governments and Rural Electric and Telecom Cooperatives should collaborate to ensure broadband availability throughout rural Ohio. In addition to line-of sight wireless and fiberoptic cable to 'last mile' homes, providers should also consider emerging technologies such as SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet service.

If existing for-profit business models are unwilling or incapable of filling this gap, creation of "Rural Broadband Cooperatives" should be encouraged. To ensure success in this effort, funding should be broadened to include USDA's Rural Utilities Service and the Farm Credit Administration's Bank for Cooperatives (CoBank).

Special Order of Business
2021-02
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 concentrated animal feeding facilities and the prescription in impaired watersheds 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 regulated to the watershed's carrying capacity.

The Ohio Farmers Union reiterates from our Special Orders of Business in 2019 and 2020 that we believe the spreading of fertilizer – including manure – be limited to the agronomic rate in any watershed designated as impaired by the U.S. or state of Ohio EPA

Special Order of Business
2021-03
Monopolistic Corporate Concentration in Ag Industry

The Ohio Farmers Union remains appalled at the increasing consolidation and corporate concentration in all sectors of the agricultural economy. We do not believe that the U.S. Dept. of Justice is doing its legally mandated work of preventing monopolies and monopolistic corporate behavior in agriculture.

Furthermore, the USDA-sanctioned commodity checkoff programs have come increasingly under the control of processors, packers and other large agribusiness entities and moved away from the interests of Ohio's family farmers.

Ohio Farmers Union advocates:

1. The re-introduction by U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Jon Tester (D-MT) of the Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review in the 117th Congress and that Ohio's U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman support the legislation.
2. The re-introduction by Sen. Booker of the Farm System Reform Act of 2019, which was proposed but not considered by the U.S. Senate. This bill would reform GIPSA, crack down on monopolistic practices by multi-national meat packers and corporate integrators, restore mandatory Country of Origin Labeling in the U.S. and place a moratorium on huge, industrial feeding operations.
3. Reform of the national and state commodity checkoff programs that includes federal and state audits of the national and state programs as required by law; the immediate change in programs so that they are truly voluntary on the part of producers at the point of original sale; and, that the actions of checkoff organizations conform with the original intent of Congress and support the interests of domestic agricultural producers.

Special Order of Business
2021-04
USDA Can Do Better on Nutrition Outcomes

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and related economic woes have worsened the problem of hunger in Ohio and the nation. Adding to the problem has been questionable decisions made by the nation's chief governmental force in fighting hunger, the USDA, in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program rule making and the ceding of hunger policy and authority for programs like the "food box initiative" to the Agricultural Marketing Service, rather than the Food and Nutrition Service.

The Ohio Farmers Union advocates for an expansion of SNAP to meet urgent nutritional needs exacerbated by the increase in hunger due to the pandemic.

Further, we urge an assessment by the USDA of programs like the food box initiative for their efficacy in terms of feeding people over money spent with large packers and producers. Finally, we urge a renewed commitment at USDA to marry the interests of agricultural producers with food and nutrition outcomes among the food insecure.

Special Order of Business

2021-05

Ending Special Tax Treatment for Advertising & Lobbying in Healthcare

Americans spend far more on healthcare than any other nation, with poorer health outcomes than other developed nations. One reason for this discrepancy is that healthcare corporations take millions of dollars in profits from the proceeds of healthcare premiums.

It is important to appreciate that these profits are above and beyond the generous salaries of their executives and are net of corporate “costs” including employing lobbyists and advertising. In recent years, advertising for healthcare plans and pharmaceuticals have dominated the airwaves, adding to the total costs of healthcare, while assuring continued high profits for private healthcare providers. It is also important to know that “Medicare Advantage” plans, which are heavily advertised, are actually private sector plans, which compete with Medicare and will actually degrade the ability of Medicare to remain solvent in the future.

The Farmers Union has consistently advocated to make healthcare available and affordable to all. As a step toward that goal, we propose that U.S. tax laws be amended to prevent the deductibility of lobbying and advertising costs by private sector healthcare corporations.

Special Order of Business
2021-06
Renewable Energy and Rural Ohio

The Ohio Farmers Union recognizes that wind and solar development provide unique benefits to farmers and to Ohio's rural economy. Utility-scale wind and solar projects require the voluntary leasing or sale of real estate, usually farmland, which provides cash income for the farmer and provides much-needed funding for local schools. These projects also provide hundreds of local jobs in construction and maintenance. Adoption of modern "integrated farming" methods also ensures that wind and solar projects will leave the underlying soils, drainage, and watercourses improved and not depleted.

The transition from coal to wind and solar electric 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 properly sited wind and solar generation projects in rural Ohio. In addition, Ohio's Rural Electric Cooperatives, should show leadership by transitioning their electric generation from coal to renewable energy sources.

Special Order of Business
2021-07
Climate Change

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. The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere now increases every year and the rate of increase is accelerating. 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 fossil fuel-based fuels to wind and solar energy generation is a necessary first step in our response to CO₂-induced climate change. We also believe that farmers and rural communities must and will play an outsized role in leading the transition from a carbon -intense economy to a cleaner, more sustainable one.

Agriculture actually stands to gain by its ability to sequester carbon in soils while improving soil quality and advancing the productivity of healthy soil.

While forestalling climate change is ultimately a global problem, OFU believes that it is a challenge that needs to be partially addressed by the next federal Farm Bill. Moving the focus from agricultural overproduction toward supply management, resiliency and regenerative agriculture would go a long way toward solving the climate crisis and create new economic opportunity for farmers. OFU also believes there should be a price put on carbon generation that would penalize carbon emissions and favor economic activities that sequester or reduce carbon emissions.

**Special Order of Business
2021-08**

**Ohio Needs Regulation on Foreign Ownership of Agricultural Lands and
Food and Agricultural Infrastructure**

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 of 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 such as packers and processors should be owned by U.S. citizens, or that non-U.S. citizens or non-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 of agricultural lands or agricultural infrastructure.

The Ohio Farmers Union believes in the concept of “food sovereignty,” meaning, the means of agricultural production, food processing and packing are of primary public interest. Therefore, we support limits on the foreign ownership of farmland, agricultural production, associated food processing and packing in the United States.

The Ohio Farmers Union calls upon the Ohio General Assembly and Gov. Mike DeWine to 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
2021-09
Enact Cupp-Patterson and Begin to Truly Reform Public Education
Funding in Ohio

For decades successive Ohio Governors and Legislatures have failed to live up to the Ohio Supreme Court's DeRolph ruling which held that Ohio's public education funding system is unconstitutional.

After more than two years of bipartisan deliberation, now Ohio House Speaker Robert Cupp and then-Ohio State Representative John Patterson lead a bipartisan effort in the Ohio House to formulate a more equitable public education plan. While that plan passed the House, the Ohio Senate did not take a final vote before adjournment in December 2020.

The Ohio Farmers Union supports enactment of the Cupp-Patterson plan as part of the Ohio's next biennial budget, to be considered in the first half of 2021.

The Ohio Farmers Union supports equitable and adequate public education for all students in Ohio. Our position is fashioned from the Ohio Constitution which clearly states that the State of Ohio is responsible for equitably and adequately educating and funding Ohio students and the districts in which they live.

Acknowledging that wealthy public-school districts will always have the ability to fully fund their public schools, Ohio Farmers Union is focused on equality.

This could be achieved by each of the 612 districts in the state paying the same income tax, the same millage and any district's shortfall would be made up by the state. The Ohio legislature can and should decide the mechanism by which this would be accomplished.

Special Order of Business
2021-10

**There is a Need in Ohio for More Numerous and Geographically Spread
Small to Medium-Sized Slaughter & Meatpacking Facilities**

Ohio Farmers Union is alarmed at how the pandemic has disrupted the meatpacking industry.

The concentration of this critical part of our food supply into a few relatively large facilities owned by a handful of corporations does not benefit the farmers and ranchers who produce the animals, nor the consumers who want safe, quality meats. Therefore, OFU urges the state and federal governments to enact legislation and dedicate economic development funds to encourage establishment of small and mid-size meatpacking facilities. We particularly urge the state of Ohio to encourage numerous facilities with additional slaughter capacity; specifically, larger numbers of facilities spread throughout the state.

Special Order of Business
2021-11
Ohio PUCO Commissioner Selection Needs to be Reformed

In 1982, Ohio voters successfully petitioned for a statewide ballot issue to require the election of Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) members and public financing of their campaigns. The measure failed because, prior to the election, the General Assembly rushed to pass a bill to establish a “PUCO Nominating Council” which, they claim had “reformed” the way Ohio’s governors picked PUCO members.

Four decades later, the passage of Ohio House Bill 6 (Nuclear Bailout Bill) under the cloud of an on-going FBI bribery investigation, demonstrates that the ‘Nominating Council’ system of appointments is an outright failure.

Today, voters in 11 states, including Georgia and Arizona, directly elect their state Public Utility Commissions. In response to the H.B 6 bribery scandal, the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel Governing Board passed a resolution on August 25, 2020, supporting public election of Ohio Public Utility Commissioners accompanied by restrictions on direct or indirect campaign contributions from regulated utilities.

OFU concurs with the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel Governing Board. We support an immediate reform of the process of selection of Ohio PUCO Commissioners by requiring direct public elections. We also support accompanying legal restrictions against PUCO campaign spending by regulated utilities.

Special Order of Business
2021-12
The Need for Representative, Competitive State and Federal
Legislative Districts in Ohio

Ohio has new processes for redistricting both state legislative and congressional districts.

Federal and State legislative districts should be redrawn, as required by law, in 2021 to produce a more balanced and rational set of maps that reduce the extreme gerrymandering that has plagued Ohio for many years.

The 2020 census files are expected to be available by March 31, 2021, when the mapping process will begin in earnest. September 1, 2021, is the deadline for finalization and approval of state districts and November 30, 2021, is the deadline for the U.S. Congressional districts.

We urge the Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio Redistricting Commission to maintain a high level of transparency and to value citizen concerns and input as provided by law. The Ohio Farmers Union holds that these maps must become more representative of the demographic and political makeup of the state's electorate and that gerrymandering – or anti-competitive – maps must be avoided for the good of our democratic ideals.

As this will be the first reapportionment since reforms were enacted in the 132nd Ohio General Assembly, the Ohio Farmers Union asks all members to understand the new processes, as outlined below, and hold accountable Ohio's elected officials who comprise the Ohio General Assembly and Ohio Redistricting Commission.

2021 Redistricting Process

For Congressional Districts:

1. The state legislature will adopt a 10-year congressional redistricting plan with 60 percent of members in each chamber voting in favor, including at least 50 percent support from members of each of the two major political parties.
2. If that fails, a seven-member commission of statewide elected officials and representatives from the legislature now has the job of adopting a 10-year map. However, this Ohio Redistricting Commission cannot approve a map without at least two votes from each party.
3. If the Ohio Redistricting Commission fails to agree, the process moves back to the Ohio Statehouse, where the legislature will have a second chance at passing a 10-year map. This time around there would be a lesser requirement of one-third of the members from the two major parties supporting the proposal.
4. Failure at this stage would result in the legislature adopting a plan through a simple majority vote, with no bipartisan vote requirement. However, a map approved in this manner would be good for only four years instead of 10. It would

also have to adhere to stricter requirements protecting against drawing district lines to favor or disfavor political parties, candidate and incumbents.

According to Common Cause Ohio, “Ohio’s new Congressional redistricting process focuses on reining in the worst excesses of gerrymandering through bipartisan mapmaking, greater transparency and giving Ohioans tools so that they can make their own maps and participate more fully in mapmaking. Congressional redistricting emphasizes counties as political building blocks. Of the eighty-eight counties, sixty-five counties shall be contained entirely within a district, eighteen counties may be split not more than once, and five counties may be split not more than twice.”

For State Legislative Districts:

The new Ohio Redistricting Commission is comprised of the Governor, Auditor, Secretary of State, and two representatives each from the Senate and the House, one from each major political party in that chamber. Criteria focus on keeping communities together and increasing transparency. The Ohio Constitution strictly limits splits in county, municipal and township boundaries and there is a prohibition on drawing district lines to favor or disfavor one political party over others.

1. Four votes, including at least two from the minority party, would be needed to approve a redistricting map that would be valid for the full 10 years until the next census.
2. If the new district lines fail to receive support from at least two members of the minority party, it will only be valid for four years, and will have to be redrawn by the Commission in order to create a second interim map that would be valid for the remaining six years until the next census. Uncertainty concerning these new district boundaries, as well as uncertainty as to which party would hold a majority of seats on the Commission following new statewide elections, should provide a strong incentive for the two parties to reach consensus.
3. If a proposed state legislative map fails to receive support from at least two members of the minority party, and if a House proposed map includes more than 6 splits (or 2 splits for Senate districts) of county, municipal or township boundaries that are not strictly in keeping with the aforementioned criteria, the court shall declare the proposal invalid and shall order the Ohio Redistricting Commission back to work.
4. If a proposed map fails to receive support from at least two members of the minority party, and if the new district lines are judged to favor one particular party or if it does not “correspond closely to the statewide political preferences of the voters of Ohio” as manifested in the average of the districts’ votes over the previous ten years, the court shall declare the map invalid and shall order the commission to adopt a new general assembly district map.