

Ohio Farmers Union Special Orders of Business for 2025

As Proposed to the Delegates to the 91st Annual Convention
Lima, Ohio
January 25, 2025



Special Order of Business
2025-01
Fair and Adequate Public School Funding in Ohio

Following decades of inadequate school funding, in 2021, the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan was passed and signed into law with bipartisan support. The bill looked at districts individually to discern the cost of educating the students, figuring the fair share of local support with the state funding the rest. The legislation was to be fully implemented and funded (\$333 million a year during three, two-year budget cycles culminating with the 25-26 biennium budget).

Ohio Farmers Union supported this long overdue legislation that finally created fair and adequate school funding to assure a through and efficient education system as outlined in Article 6 of the Ohio Constitution.

However, the new legislative session began with newly elected House Speaker Matt Huffman proclaiming funding the Fair School Funding Plan in its final biennium budget was not affordable because he wants to expand vouchers in place of public-school funding.

Ohio Farmers Union strongly disagrees with this funding shift. The constitution states “no religious sect or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state.”

Furthermore, the just ended legislative lame duck session passed legislation mandating schools discharge students for religious instruction in the middle of the school day. This law upends the concept of church- state separation and is unconstitutional.

OFU calls on Speaker Huffman and the legislature to fully fund the FSFP in this biennium budget and adhere to Ohio’s constitution declaring the separation of church and state.

Special Order of Business
2025-02
Gerrymandering in Ohio Remains a Problem

The Ohio Farmers Union supported the ‘Citizens not Politicians’ initiative in 2024. This proposed Ohio Constitutional Amendment would have taken then decennial reapportionment of Ohio legislative districts out of the hands of those in power in Columbus and created a citizens’ commission held to strict standards to ensure compactness, fairness and non-partisan final maps.

Unfortunately, partisan politics won out and ballot language was adopted in 2024 that misrepresented the Citizens not Politicians initiative. OFU believes that this unfair ballot language led to the defeat of the anti-gerrymandering measure and serves as an example of how partisanship trumps common sense under the current system.

OFU continues to support non-partisan, common sense efforts to change how the state draws legislative districts. We will support organizations like the Ohio League of Women Voters and Common Cause Ohio and continue to fight against gerrymandering.

OFU supports new efforts like Citizens not Politicians or resembling our past Special Orders of Business.

Special Order of Business
2025-03
Protecting Ohio's Natural Resources While Supporting American
Manufacturing and Data Center Growth

Position Overview

The Ohio Farmers Union recognizes the vital importance of re-shoring American manufacturing, including the growing demand for data centers, as key drivers of economic growth and job creation in Ohio. As corporations increasingly flock to our state to take advantage of its abundant natural resources—including fertile farmland, access to fresh water, and stable climate—we must balance economic development with environmental sustainability. OFU supports policies that promote the growth of American manufacturing, but we call for greater leadership the federal and state levels to ensure that Ohio's groundwater, air quality, agricultural lands, and environment are protected for future generations.

Support for American Manufacturing and Data Centers

The revitalization of American manufacturing is essential for reducing our reliance on foreign goods and strengthening local economies. Ohio has seen significant investment from corporations to build manufacturing plants and data centers in the state. These projects have brought much-needed jobs and infrastructure improvements to rural and urban communities alike. OFU supports efforts to re-shore manufacturing and expand the technology sector through the development of data centers. We recognize that these industries are critical to maintaining economic resilience and competitiveness in global markets.

The Need for Stronger Environmental Protections

However, as Ohio welcomes more corporate investment, we must be mindful of the environmental costs associated with these industries—particularly the strain they may place on our natural resources. Ohio's groundwater, agricultural land, air quality, and overall ecosystem are being increasingly threatened by industrial activity, including the high energy consumption and water usage associated with data centers and manufacturing plants. These developments, while beneficial in the short term, could have significant, long-term consequences if not properly regulated.

Ohio's agricultural economy and the livelihoods of farmers depend on the health of our natural resources. Groundwater provides not only drinking water for communities but also irrigation for crops and livestock. Unchecked industrial expansion, particularly from data centers that require vast amounts of water and energy, poses risks to our water supplies, air quality, and soil health.

Call for Action: Protecting Ohio's Future

The Ohio Farmers Union calls on the Ohio Legislature to enact stronger laws to regulate groundwater usage, ensuring that industrial developments—including data centers and manufacturing plants—are subject to strict limits on water consumption.

Special Order of Business
2025-04
Water Quality in Ohio

Clean water is essential to all Ohioans. Our lives are dependent on it and many segments of our economy require it as well. Ohio's problems with water quality have been well documented, especially since the infamous Toledo water crisis of 2014.

Over the last decade, various interest groups have argued about how to address the problem. Environmental groups and businesses located along Lake Erie have supported stronger regulations for agriculture, especially large livestock facilities, while farmers have pointed toward golf courses, municipal sewage systems and home septic tanks. It should come as no surprise that these arguments have made their way into litigation.

Scientists did the math and made the determination that agriculture was the primary source of key nutrients flowing into Ohio's lakes and rivers -- and that a specific type of nutrient, known as dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP) was the key nutrient causing the growth of toxic algal blooms.

Over the course of the past several years, this argument has made its way through the courts, with one side advocating for more voluntary programs, such as the H2Ohio, while others advocate for more active regulatory measures by EPA. Eventually, the courts decided that EPA should implement a program called "Total Maximum Daily Load" (TMDL) for the watershed. This program is often referred to as a nutrient "diet" for the watershed, establishing a maximum quantity of nutrients that should be allowed to discharge into the ditches, streams and rivers.

Controversy continues. Each side wrangles about how the load should be measured and how it will be implemented.

The Ohio Farmers Union will align with the science. We support the Maximum Load be based on DRP, rather than total phosphorus and have proposed a unique mechanism for implementation. We propose that local watershed groups be appointed or elected in each sub watershed, with farmers prominently represented in each group. These watershed groups should be supplied with data from EPA that will assess their water quality. If quality is good, they must do nothing. If water quality is poor, they are charged with developing a strategy to improve it.

We believe that empowering local folks to solve local problems is the best way to make meaningful progress without the heavy hand of government.

Special Order of Business
2024-05

Advocating for a Public Option for Health Insurance in the U.S.

The United States faces a persistent challenge in ensuring affordable and comprehensive healthcare access for all its citizens. While the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has expanded coverage, millions remain uninsured or underinsured due to high costs, limited plan options, or restrictive networks. This proposal advocates for the implementation of a public health insurance option to provide Americans with a high-quality, affordable alternative to private insurance, fostering competition, reducing costs, and improving overall health outcomes.

There are major shortcomings in the current system including affordability, coverage gaps, limited insurer competition and health outcomes.

OFU advocates for a public option in health insurance that is open to all U.S. residents regardless of income, employment status, or pre-existing conditions. The plan should provide comprehensive benefits including prescription drug and mental health coverage. Premiums would be paid by the insured on a sliding scale according to income. The public option should leverage the success of Medicare and be managed by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Private insurance companies should be encouraged to participate.

Putting aside the legitimate moral arguments for 'healthcare for all,' an expansion of health coverage in the U.S. would provide long-term savings from preventive care, reduced emergency room visits, and lower administrative costs to offset initial investments. A public option would also enhance consumer choice without eliminating private insurance, allowing competition to drive improvements and efficiency across the healthcare system.

**Special Order of Business
2025-06**

**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.

**Special Order of Business
2025-06
In Support of Rapid Implementation of
Social Security Fairness Act**

The Ohio Farmers Union urges the rapid implementation of the Social Security Fairness Act.