

Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association



2019 Policy Priorities

About OEFFA

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2019. We are a grassroots coalition of farmers, gardeners, retailers, educators, researchers, and others who share a desire to build a healthy food system that brings prosperity to family farmers, meets the growing demand for local food, creates economic opportunities for our rural communities, and safeguards the environment.

Ohio Agriculture

Ohio is home to 14 million acres of farmland, more than 75,000 farms, and a market value of agricultural products estimated at \$10 billion. Despite a rich agricultural history, the future of farming in Ohio faces serious challenges, and the agricultural outlook for the next year indicates a continued downturn in the agricultural economy. The dairy industry has been hit particularly hard, as the state lost more than 170 dairy operations in the past year.

Not only is the average age of farmers close to 60, a high percentage of leased land is owned by non-farm landowners with an average age of 67.¹ While the rate of farmland loss is slowing, we continue to lose the prime and unique land that is more productive and requires fewer inputs.

In the years ahead, we must make important investments in farm viability and land protection and ensure the next generation of farmers can access the land and credit they need, while also incentivizing sustainable agriculture.

We invest heavily in new business location and development in Ohio, but we often neglect the food and agriculture sector, a perennial industry that is ripe to deliver locally grown economic benefits. It is drawing the attention of Community Development Finance and the Federal Reserve Bank, as local agriculture provides 40 cents of additional output for every dollar spent.² Ohio is well-positioned to be a national leader in developing a strong local and regional food sector.

Our state is challenged with unintended growth of another kind (blue-green algae) and it is critically important that we incentivize agricultural practices that promote positive ecosystem services for our communities. A recent study by the USDA found that organic and regenerative agriculture demonstrated more than \$21 million of ecosystem benefit on 6,011 acres in as little as five years.³

Despite the challenges we face, investments in sustainable food and agriculture policy provide Ohio options for a brighter future.

1. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2012/Online_Resources/TOTAL/index.php
2. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/ILAMSToolkit.pdf>
3. http://www.farmlandlp.com/wp-content/uploads/cwichner/Farmland%20LP%20Impact%20Report%20_%20Valuing%20the%20Ecosystem%20Service%20Benefits%20from%20Regenerative%20Agriculture%20Practices.pdf

2019 Sustainable Agriculture Policy Highlights

1) Invest in the Regional Food Economy

- a) Support the Ohio Food Policy Network
- b) Prioritize agency staff focused on farm-to-institution procurement
- c) Invest in Ohio Produce Perks

2) Support Agricultural Practices that Pay Ecosystem Dividends

- a) Provide resources for farmers interested in transitioning to organic
- b) Invest in research, education, and Extension services for organic production
- c) Coordinate inter-agency information sharing and cooperation to better serve organic producers

3) Facilitate Agriculture for the Next Generation

- a) Increase Extension resources for farm succession planning
- b) Provide tax incentives for landowners who transition their land to beginning farmers
- c) Continue funding the Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP)
- d) Increase the state allocation to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to ensure local staff can facilitate participation in AEPP



Policy Recommendations

Invest in the Regional Food Economy

The [Ohio Food Policy Network](#) (OFPN) began work in 2011. This group of interested people, local coalitions, educational institutions, and organizations provides the mechanism for people working on food issues across sectors to connect and act. The OFPN is foundational to develop the capacity of people and institutions working toward a food system that supports and serves all Ohioans. The network conducted listening sessions across the state to hear from local communities. That input identified the core values and vision for local and regional food systems in Ohio and provides the foundation for a detailed food agenda.

We urge Ohio leaders to support and invest in the OFPN.

- ***OEFFA supports the creation of a detailed food systems agenda for the state developed by the collaborative leadership of the OFPN.***



The Ohio Farm to School Advisory group has advanced institutional procurement in state school districts. Progress has been made and yet roadblocks to furthering an increase in local and regional food served in Ohio schools and increased farm viability has been hampered by a lack of investment. Furthering this agenda will require agency staff with a sole focus on this issue.

- ***OEFFA supports a full-time staff position at both the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio Department of Education focused exclusively on farm-to-school advancement in Ohio.***

The federal Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives (FINI) program increases the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income people participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing purchasing incentives. The Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network administers Produce Perks Midwest, which generated more than \$600,000 in produce sales in the first three-quarters of 2018, benefitting approximately 20,000 Ohio residents. The program will serve more than 30 counties in 2019.

- ***OEFFA supports dedicated resources in the state biennium budget for Ohio FINI Produce Perks and free equipment for farmers' markets to process SNAP benefits.***

Support Agricultural Practices that Pay Ecosystem Dividends

Algal blooms have plagued the state of Ohio for decades. While issues in the Western Lake Erie Basin have grabbed headlines and research dollars, we have many other water bodies that are impaired due, in large part, to agricultural practices. Debate on solutions to this problem is intense and, at times, unproductive. While we need to provide education, consultation, and assistance on nutrient management to farmers, we can also employ incentives for farmers to transition to organic management systems that employ multiple best-practices, and for which there is more market demand than supply. This solution offers conservation, environmental, and economic benefits.

Organic production standards respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, mechanical, and biological practices that foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. In other words, organic farming is an integrated production system based on ecological principles that foster harmony with nature and promote ecosystem balance. Organic growers are held to the highest agriculture standards. We can and should foster the growth of agriculture that has ecological priorities at its core.

- ***OEFFA supports state cost-share assistance to Ohio farmers transitioning to certified organic production.***

Ohio-based state and federal agencies, institutions of higher learning, and non-profits are individually offering programs and activities that enhance the productivity, profitability, and environmental benefits of organic farming, but lack a formalized means of sharing information and collaborating to amplify impact. Effective cooperation can aid significantly in advancing shared goals, better serve Ohio's growing organic industry, enhance conservation of natural resources, expand economic opportunities, and increase consumer choice.

- ***OEFFA supports the creation of an Ohio Organic Team for cooperation among organizations and agencies on programs and activities related to organic production and processing in Ohio.***



Quite often, when farmers are looking to adopt organic and regenerative agricultural management, they are at a loss for the resources and assistance they need. This is, in large part, due to the fact that Ohio does not have Extension staff that specializes in and is dedicated to organic production systems.

- ***OEFFA supports the dedication of at least one organic Extension specialist for the state of Ohio.***

The average age of farmers continues to climb. Whether it is a farm operator or a non-farm landowner, few people have farm succession plans in place securing farmland for the next generation. If we want to protect our national security by having land available for agriculture and a new generation of farmers interested and able to take on the mantle of a farming career, we will need to take proactive steps in the near term.

Currently there are two Ohio State University Extension specialists that assist farmers with succession planning. While they do a tremendous job, more boots on the ground are needed to meet this growing need.

- ***OEFFA supports an increase in Extension resources for farm succession planning.***

Facilitate Agriculture for the Next Generation

A 2017 National Young Farmers Coalition survey found land access to be the top challenge for current farmers, aspiring farmers, and those who have stopped farming. While there is no one solution to large, complex problems such as these, no action is not an alternative. Ohio can join the state of Minnesota in leading on this issue by providing incentives for landowners to transition their land to next generation farmers.

- ***OEFFA supports the creation of tax incentives for landowners who transition their land to beginning farmers.***

The Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) purchases agricultural easements from landowners who volunteer to keep their land in agricultural production in perpetuity. To date, more than 40 family farms in 58 counties have collectively preserved more than 67,000 acres in agricultural production. Considering the overwhelming demand for this program and the critical role that local partners play:

- ***OEFFA supports continued funding for the AEPP, and***
- ***OEFFA supports increased state allocation to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to ensure local staff can facilitate the conservation of agricultural land in Ohio.***

For more information or to get involved with OEFFA's work, go to www.oeffa.org or contact us at (614) 421-2022 or amalie@oeffa.org.