



OHIO ECOLOGICAL FOOD AND FARM ASSOCIATION 2023 FARM BILL PLATFORM

ADDRESSING CONSOLIDATION IN THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEM

OEFFA members believe that agricultural consolidation puts family farmers at a disadvantage and weakens the diverse regional food systems essential for a resilient future. We want to change that.

Federal policy can help to level the playing field—currently heavily tilted toward large-scale, commodity agriculture—by empowering local farmers and food leaders to preserve our local food heritage and create strong regional food systems that can serve diverse communities.



Consolidation Weakens Our Food System

Four large conglomerates overwhelmingly control the U.S. meat supply, driving down opportunities and earnings for farmers while driving up prices for consumers. This consolidation creates a bottleneck in the meat supply chain, which can have disastrous results, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic.



In Ohio, few independent meat processors remain.

Farmers may have to travel hours and book years in advance, making it difficult for them to start or expand their business. There are no certified organic processing plants left in the entire state, preventing livestock producers from transitioning into higher value organic markets.

“I had one buyer increase our contract for my chicken, but I only have two options for getting my birds processed,” said Henry Jochem of Primaterra Farm in Perry County, Ohio. “Pleasant Valley is 1 hour 45 minutes away and King and Sons is 3 hours. It’s a huge cost in time and fuel. And, while I was able to schedule enough appointments to cover my usual production, they are so busy that **it’s hard to get additional appointments now so I can grow.**”

A decades long policy failure to invest in regional food systems has also left Ohio with a shortage of mills and other food processing facilities, including those that would allow farmers to cost-effectively can, freeze, pickle, and dry their products.



Michelle Ajamian has owned Shagbark Seed & Mill in Athens County, Ohio since 2010.



Community-Based Solutions

“Every town in the United States has a Mill Road or a Mill Creek Road, and that’s because every town had a mill. But, starting in the late 1960’s or 70’s, those mills started disappearing,” said Michelle Ajamian of Shagbark Seed & Mill.

Michelle decided to focus her business on milled products and dried beans because “those are the primary sources of nutrition and calories on a plate worldwide and have been since agriculture began. And yet, the local food system is focusing on fruits and vegetables, which are really important, but you can’t really live on those things.”



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Although her business and farm partners face extremely high start-up and operation costs, “the government is not supporting us at all. We don’t get any support for what we’re doing. But Big Ag is.”

“What really needs to happen is businesses like mine, these mills around the country, need to get more support so they can, in fact, have a sustainable operation. Other parts of this sector of agriculture are highly subsidized because they’re focusing on these two crops: GMO corn and GMO soybeans. **Help us make our community better, that’s what needs to happen,**” Ajamian said.



Replacing Concentration with Diversity

Consolidation is the enemy of diversity and it harms community economic or environmental health. **Just as diverse farms support thriving ecosystems, food system diversity fosters resilience.** Addressing consolidation makes local production, processing, aggregation, and distribution investments viable.

The next farm bill should support an agriculture system that includes farms and businesses with diverse operations and scales that make it possible to care for —instead of exploit—the land.

OEFFA supports common sense payment limits and changes to crop insurance subsidies to ensure that government assistance reaches the farmers who need it most and who use farming practices that foster diversity, thereby reducing risk. We also support fair and transparent contracts that protect livestock farmers from predatory corporate practices.



THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS

The farm bill shapes virtually every aspect of the U.S. food and agricultural system. The 2023 Farm Bill is our single greatest opportunity to realize our vision for a future where sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment.

Democracy belongs to all of us, and it’s up to us to advocate for strong policies that benefit our whole community and the Earth. Your voice is needed to make sure government and public institutions are accountable and exercise their responsibility to protect our health and well-being and support natural ecosystems.

To join us in calling for farmer-focused solutions in the 2023 Farm Bill, including crop insurance and subsidy reforms that prioritize diverse family farmers, go to action.oeffa.com/farm-bill.

