

2026 OEFFA Candidate Questionnaire

The [Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association](#) (OEFFA), founded in 1979, cultivates a future in which sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment. Annually, we host a conference, in addition to farm tours, workshops, and webinars, to facilitate learning and connection. We also offer organic certification and organic production transition support, and advocate with farmers to address their needs in food and farm policy. Over the past 10 years, OEFFA's Policy Program has been a leader in advocating for organic and sustainable agriculture.

We invite the candidate to complete this questionnaire based on priorities from the OEFFA community. The following questions have been cultivated with various food and farm advocates and organizations across Ohio. We will share the responses on our [website](#) for members and partners to reference. **Please reach out to policy@oeffa.org with any questions.**

Prior to the survey, we encourage the candidate to review the priorities and definitions section below for context on issues we care about. The questions also include links to the relevant definitions.

OEFFA's member-driven priorities (underlined> and related programs and definitions:

Local and Regional Food Systems: Policy changes that support local and regional food system infrastructure, processing systems, and investments that boost local economies, promote sustainability, and secure a resilient food system

- **Local food infrastructure:** The foundational elements (physical, organizational, and financial) required to produce, process, store, distribute, and sell food within a specific locality or region
- **Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program:** The federal program that funded Ohio CAN (Community + Agriculture + Nutrition)
 - o Ohio CAN enabled over [191 local producers](#) to partner with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to distribute products to more than 2 million Ohioans in all 88 counties, allowing producers to expand into new markets while providing communities with access to healthy local foods. The program was cancelled in 2025.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** A nutrition program providing food benefits to low-income individuals and families to support their grocery budgets
- **Produce Perks Midwest Family Fruit & Vegetable Coupon Program:** Supports access to healthy produce for low-income families and is funded through a state allocation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding

Farm and Farmer Viability: Breaking down barriers in farming to ensure accessibility for all, promote farmer resilience, and make certain that agricultural government programs work for everyone by creating a system that is fair, functional, and informed

- **Farm safety net:** A group of federal programs and policies regularly administered by the [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA), like federal crop insurance, commodity programs, and disaster assistance, that are designed to protect farmers and ranchers from financial crises
 - o From 1995-2025, more than [\\$292 billion](#) in taxpayer dollars went to commodity subsidies, with much of the money flowing to the [largest, wealthiest farms](#).
- **Beginning farmers:** [Defined by the USDA](#) as “an individual or entity who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years”
 - o Signed into law in 2022, the [Ohio Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Program](#) offers tax credits to beginning farmers who attend a financial management program and to individuals or businesses that sell or rent farmland to beginning farmers.
- **[Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program \(FOTO\)](#):** A program established in the 2018 Farm Bill that includes the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), which provides training, technical assistance, and resources for a new generation of farmers, and the 2501 program, which provides outreach and assistance to historically underserved and veteran farmers and ranchers
- **Specialty crops:** [Defined by the USDA](#) as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)”

Marketplace Fairness: Policies that support market inclusion and success of small and medium farming operations, not just the largest operations

- **Corporate consolidation:** A process by which fewer, larger companies obtain more control over an industry, reduce competition, and reshape supply chains
- **The Packers and Stockyards Act:** A bill enacted in 1921 in response to concerns about meat processing consolidation and anticompetitive practices that had negatively impacted both producers and consumers
 - o Recent rule updates to the Act were introduced to ensure farmers have fair systems and that there are guardrails for large meat companies but have since been delayed.

Climate Change and Environmental Health: Advance climate resiliency and uplift organic and sustainable agriculture as a solution to the climate crisis

- **Healthy soil:** Soil that functions as a vital living ecosystem that regulates water, sustains plant and animal life, filters and buffers pollutants, cycles nutrients, and provides physical stability and support for plants

- [Ohio Soil Health Week](#): Officially signed into law in 2025, this weeklong celebration includes outreach, education opportunities, and events to raise awareness around Ohio's most valuable natural resource: our soil.
- [H2Ohio Program](#): A statewide water quality initiative involving collaboration with Ohio agencies aiming to reduce nutrient runoff, create wetlands, and improve clean water access while supporting sustainable farming practices.
- **[Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#)**: A USDA primary lands conservation agency born out of the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s that now offers one-on-one, personalized advice to producers and communities to find the best solutions to meet their unique conservation and business goals
- **Conservation programs**: The [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) and [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) are popular, proven, voluntary programs that incentivize farmers and landowners for their conservation practices offered through NRCS.
 - These programs are regularly oversubscribed, and in fiscal year 2025, just 24 percent of EQIP applicants and 37 percent of CSP applicants were [awarded contracts](#).
 - Several other conservation programs are administered by NRCS, such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), easement programs, and Conservation Innovation Grants.
- **[National Institute for Food and Agriculture](#)**: A branch of the USDA that advances funding for initiatives that support the long-term viability of agriculture such as the [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\)](#) and the [Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative \(OREI\) Program](#), among others
 - After [35 years of demonstrated success](#) in the SARE program, it has yet to receive its fully authorized funding amount of \$60 billion.
 - For every dollar invested in agricultural research, [\\$20 in economic activity is generated](#).

Organic: Safeguard organic integrity through policies grounded in farmer experience and input that support organic market infrastructure, access to technical assistance, and the successful transition to organic production

- **[National Organic Program \(NOP\)](#)**: A federal regulatory program that sets and enforces national standards around growing, handling, and labeling organic products and works to protect the integrity of the USDA Organic seal
 - In 2025, U.S. sales of organic products reached [\\$76.6 billion](#) with an annual growth rate of 6.8 percent—double that of the comparable marketplace, which grew at 3.4 percent. The U.S. remains a net importer of organic goods.
- In 1981, [OEFFA became one of the first organic certification agencies](#) in the country. Today, we certify 1,120 operations, keeping 185,995 acres of land certified organic.

Please provide your name:

District or office you are running for:

Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire:

1. Do you personally support local farmers and/or contribute to your local food economy? If so, how? Do you have experience working on health, food, farm, and environmental issues?

Yes. We believe strong local farms and small businesses are foundational to strong Ohio communities. Our campaign has consistently emphasized building local economic ecosystems rather than using taxpayer dollars to pick winners and losers or favor the largest corporations.

Our agricultural policy follows that same philosophy. We want independent farmers to have access to competitive markets, affordable land, local processing and distribution, and the freedom to operate without unnecessary regulatory barriers. We have also made farmland preservation, property-tax reform, water quality, environmental accountability, and greater transparency in government central parts of our broader platform.

We don't claim to be farmers or agricultural experts. Our approach would be to bring farmers, researchers, conservation organizations, local communities, and agricultural businesses directly into the policymaking process rather than assuming Columbus always knows best.

2. For a truly resilient food system, connecting local producers with local consumers is vital. How would you implement policy initiatives (such as the previously cancelled [Ohio CAN](#) program) to increase local food access for Ohio communities while acknowledging the unique challenges each community faces (transportation, zoning policies, food processing infrastructure, accessibility)?

We support rebuilding stronger connections between Ohio producers and Ohio consumers. OEFFA notes that Ohio CAN connected more than 191 producers with food banks serving communities throughout all 88 counties before the program was cancelled. We believe programs like this deserve serious consideration because they can accomplish two goals simultaneously: increasing access to food while creating markets for Ohio farmers.

But the solution shouldn't look identical everywhere. A rural county may need processing or transportation infrastructure while an urban neighborhood may need better distribution points, farmers markets, or partnerships with community organizations.

We would favor flexible, locally administered approaches with transparent performance measures. The state should help remove barriers and connect resources while allowing communities and producers to determine what actually works locally.

3. How will you help ensure that nutrition and food assistance dollars, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the [Family Fruit & Vegetable Coupon Program](#), are invested in local agricultural communities and support direct-to-consumer sales with local farmers?

Where state and federal rules permit it, we support making it easier for SNAP and other nutrition assistance dollars to be spent with Ohio producers, farmers markets, and locally owned food businesses.

Programs such as Produce Perks can stretch a family's purchasing power while simultaneously creating customers for farmers. That is a much better economic cycle than treating food assistance and agricultural policy as completely separate issues.

We would work to reduce administrative barriers that discourage smaller producers and farmers markets from participating and explore ways Ohio can incentivize local purchasing without limiting a recipient's ability to choose where they purchase food.

4. Farmers and rural families often face challenges when accessing childcare and quality healthcare. How would you prioritize solutions to these issues so that farmers have a viable personal safety net for themselves and their families?

A farm cannot be economically sustainable if the family operating it cannot afford healthcare, childcare, or basic necessities.

Rather than assuming every rural community needs the same state program, we favor removing barriers that prevent local and private solutions from developing. That includes expanding healthcare price transparency, encouraging competition among providers, supporting telehealth and rural healthcare access, and eliminating unnecessary restrictions that make healthcare more expensive or difficult to deliver.

Childcare deserves the same flexibility. Home-based providers, cooperatives, churches, nonprofits, employers, and community organizations can all be part of the solution. State policy should establish appropriate health and safety standards without creating regulatory costs that make small childcare operations impossible to sustain.

5. The [median age of farmers is 58](#) and rising and there are limited programs supporting beginning farmers in Ohio (such as the [Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Program](#)). What policy implementations would you propose to lower barriers for farmers entering the sector and support the long-term viability of their careers?

Ohio cannot preserve family farming if the next generation cannot afford to enter it.

We support continuing and evaluating Ohio's Beginning Farmer Tax Credit and exploring ways to strengthen incentives for landowners who sell or lease agricultural assets to beginning farmers. We would also examine unnecessary licensing, zoning, financing, and regulatory barriers that disproportionately affect smaller and newer operations.

Most importantly, our property-tax proposal would prioritize relief for owner-occupied homes and family farms. Continually increasing land values should not force a family to sell productive farmland simply because the surrounding area is being developed.

We would also expand connections between beginning farmers, experienced producers, agricultural education programs, lenders, and voluntary business and financial-management resources. Government doesn't need to teach someone how to farm, but it can stop making it unnecessarily difficult to start one.

6. How would you prioritize policy initiatives and investments in local food infrastructure (i.e., meat processing and vegetable packaging facilities) in a way that optimizes local food system resilience and job creation?

A resilient agricultural economy requires more than farms. It requires processors, storage, transportation, distributors, markets, and skilled workers.

Ohio should identify areas where a lack of processing or distribution creates bottlenecks for independent producers and then determine whether the problem is infrastructure, regulation, workforce availability, financing, or another barrier.

We particularly support reducing unnecessary barriers to smaller and regional processing operations while maintaining legitimate food-safety standards. Increasing the number of processors gives farmers more choices, creates local jobs, shortens supply chains, and makes Ohio's food system less dependent on a small number of large companies.

Public investment, when warranted, should be transparent, competitive, locally informed, and judged by measurable economic benefit rather than political connections.

7. Corporate consolidation continues to control our food system by [raising prices for consumers and decreasing farmers' incomes](#). Meanwhile, [farmland acres continue to decrease in Ohio](#), which has led to higher land prices and the loss of independent farms. What would you champion in office to combat the increasing corporate control of our food systems and ensure that farmers feeding their communities have fair access to markets and land?

Competition is essential to a free market. A market dominated by a handful of corporations—particularly when those corporations benefit from government subsidies, regulatory advantages, or preferential treatment—is not the competitive capitalism we support.

We would review Ohio policies to identify subsidies and regulations that disproportionately advantage large agricultural or food corporations over independent producers. We would also support aggressive enforcement against fraud, collusion, and genuinely anticompetitive conduct within the authority of the state.

Farmland preservation is equally important. We support voluntary agricultural easements and stronger scrutiny when large developments threaten productive farmland, particularly when those projects are receiving taxpayer subsidies or attempting to use eminent domain.

Our broader economic philosophy is simple: Ohio government should create a fair playing field, not choose which corporation gets to dominate it.

8. Our food system depends on the health of our environment and soil. We celebrate that during the annual [Ohio Soil Health Week](#) and through the implementation of the [H2Ohio Program](#). What would you do to scale up programs and practices that build on-farm resilience to support farmers in caring for their land to grow healthy, local food?

Healthy soil and clean water are not partisan issues. They are agricultural and economic assets.

We support continuing programs such as H2Ohio while emphasizing voluntary participation, measurable outcomes, transparency, and direct collaboration with farmers. Conservation programs work best when farmers have flexibility to implement practices appropriate for their own land rather than receiving one-size-fits-all mandates from Columbus.

We would support voluntary incentives for practices that demonstrably improve soil health, reduce nutrient runoff, protect waterways, and improve long-term farm productivity. We also want better public reporting about which programs produce measurable environmental improvements so successful approaches can be expanded and ineffective spending can be redirected.

Farmers have an enormous incentive to preserve the land that provides their livelihood. Government should treat them as partners in conservation rather than adversaries.

9. On-farm research facilitated by farmers in coordination with organizations and education professionals has been vital to farmers as they adapt to extreme weather events and economic obstacles. Agriculture research funding continues to be in demand. Do you plan to make this more of a priority for Ohio? Why or why not?

Yes, particularly when research is practical, transparent, and accessible to farmers.

Ohio has tremendous agricultural research capacity through our universities, agricultural organizations, extension networks, and farmers themselves. We support stronger collaboration among those groups, particularly around soil health, water quality, extreme weather, crop resilience, new technologies, specialty crops, and improving productivity.

We especially value farmer-led and on-farm research because conditions that work in a laboratory or on one farm may not translate perfectly to another.

Publicly funded research should also be publicly accessible whenever possible. If Ohio taxpayers finance agricultural research, independent farmers—not only large corporations with research departments—should be able to benefit from the results.

10. Organic operations in Ohio continue to be a major part of local agriculture, [with 1,016 operations](#) currently certified in the state. How do you envision the Ohio government playing a role in supporting these producers to meet the growing consumer demand for organic goods?

Ohio should allow organic agriculture to succeed because consumers want it, not because government dictates what farmers should grow.

We support maintaining the integrity of organic certification, ensuring producers have access to technical information and transition assistance, and identifying unnecessary state-level barriers that make certification or market entry more difficult for small producers.

At the same time, we would not use government to favor organic farmers over conventional farmers or vice versa. Farmers should decide how they farm, and consumers should decide what they purchase.

Where Ohio can play a constructive role is ensuring honest labeling, competitive markets, access to research and technical assistance, and infrastructure that allows Ohio producers to meet growing consumer demand. If Ohio consumers are purchasing more organic products, we would rather see Ohio farmers have a fair opportunity to meet that demand than see those dollars unnecessarily leave the state.