

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: Jerrad Christian

District or office you are running for: US Congress OH12

Federal Candidate Questions:

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?

The environment is the reason I am running. I was a meteorologist in the US Navy, which means I spent years reading atmospheric data and telling people what was coming so they could plan around it. Farmers are living with climate change right now. The rain comes at the wrong time or all at once, the planting window shifts, the last frost stops being a date you can count on. When a farmer tells me the weather is not behaving the way it did twenty years ago, I do not need to be convinced.

I buy local as often as I can. That makes me a customer, not an expert.

What I do not have is a farm or a career in agriculture. I do have is a working understanding of the climate risk that is coming at Ohio agriculture, as well as the economic one.

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

Funding. There is nowhere to wash and pack a crop, nowhere to store it cold, and no truck going the right direction on the right day. We fund farms and we fund food assistance and we skip the part in the middle where food actually moves. That is where I would put money, and keep it there long enough that someone can build a business on it.

Getting food to people is a separate problem. A food hub in the county seat does nothing for someone without a car, so delivery and mobile markets have to be part of it.

The rules have to fit the operation too. Safety requirements written for a national supplier will push a small farm out of selling to a school or a grocery.

3. Following cancelled investments in local food procurement, like the [LFPA](#), farmers have felt the impacts on their businesses. How would you shape permanent policy initiatives to support local and regional farms with the economic opportunities that come from procurement for schools, hospitals, and food banks?

Ohio farmers bought coolers and planted for a program that got cancelled with the crop in the ground. Whatever we build next has to be harder to kill than that.

Put it in the Farm Bill so it does not depend on who is running the agency, and writing contracts that run longer than a year. A farmer decides what to plant nine months before delivery, so a one year award cannot change what goes in the field. Schools need a reason to buy Ohio product when it costs a little more, and money for the equipment and labor that cooking from scratch takes. A lot of school kitchens cannot cook anymore, only reheat.

And it should not stop at schools. Hospitals, state facilities, and VA sites buy food every day with public money. That is a steady customer a farmer can plan around.

4. How will you help ensure that nutrition and food assistance funding, like the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), are invested in local communities and support direct-to-consumer sales with local farmers?

First, defend SNAP itself. SNAP is farm income.

We have to expand and permanently fund produce incentives, fix EBT at markets and make online SNAP work for farms.

Online SNAP purchasing was built around large retailers, and the certification burden is written for companies with compliance departments. A CSA or a farm with a web store should be able to accept SNAP without hiring a lawyer. Right now the convenience of online benefits flows almost entirely to national chains, and that is a design choice.

5. 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?

I support single payer health care and universal child care.

Tying coverage to employment pulls labor straight out of farming, and it hits the self-employed hardest.

Child care in rural Ohio is a supply problem. There is often no provider to pay. Build capacity, support home-based providers, and keep rural delivery rooms open.

6. While the [median age of farmers is 58](#) and rising, only a small amount (\$50 million) of federal funding is invested in the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#) (BFRDP) each year. What policy implementations would you propose to lower barriers for farmers entering the sector and support the long-term viability of their careers?

I ' m just reading all of this for the first time so excuse any misinterpretations. Fund BFRDP at a level that matches demand. The groups doing this training, OEFFA among them, are good at it and they are rationed. Make FOTO mandatory money so it stops being renegotiated every cycle.

Then fix what training cannot reach. FSA down payment loans cap below what farmland now costs, so the loan that is supposed to get someone started cannot. Raise the caps and staff the county offices so decisions take weeks, not months. Take Ohio's Beginning Farmer Tax Credit national.

Careers are the harder half. Health care, workable crop insurance for diversified farms, and steady markets are what keep them farming at year fifteen.

7. [Federal farm payments continue to grow](#), and large-scale conventional farms receive the lion's share of government spending through [farm safety net](#), disaster, and crop insurance programs. How will you support *all* producers, including small and midsize farms (approximately under 2,000 acres) and those growing diversified or [specialty crops](#), in accessing a farm safety net to support their businesses?

Most of the money goes to the biggest operations. Cap what any single operation can collect, and require that whoever collects it actually farms.

There is a second problem that gets less attention. A farm growing twelve different things cannot buy coverage that fits, because the products are built for a farm growing one thing across a lot of acres. Coverage for diversified farms technically exists. I ' m reading that almost nobody sells it, because a small complicated policy is not worth an agent's time.

Make it worth their time, and cut down what a farmer has to document to qualify. A safety net nobody can reach is not a safety net.

8. Four corporations control [80-85 percent of the U.S. beef market](#), with similar levels of consolidation across other sectors of the food industry (inputs, retail, equipment, etc.). How would you prioritize policy initiatives (like the [Packers and Stockyards Act](#)) 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?

The law for this has been on the books since 1921. We must enforce anti-trust laws and destroy monopolies.

But enforcement only helps if farmers have somewhere else to sell. Right now a lot of them do not. The nearest inspected plant is hours away and booked out a year, so they take whatever price the big buyer offers. That is not a free market, it is the absence of one.

So build the capacity back. Most of the money so far has gone into buildings, and the shortage now is people. Plants sit half used because they cannot find inspectors or trained butchers. Fund the training, at community colleges and career centers, and fund the inspectors.

9. 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](#) and [across the country](#), 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?

Farmland should be owned by the people who farm it. I would stop corporate and foreign buyers from taking Ohio ground. An investment fund in New York does the same damage as one overseas.

But a ban by itself does not put a farmer on the land. When ground comes up for sale, the investor pays cash and closes in two weeks. The farmer needs a loan, an appraisal, and a contingency, and loses every time. That is a financing gap, not a preference for corporations. Speed up farm lending, and give working farmers first crack at ground coming up for sale.

10. Our food system depends on the health of our environment and soil. What would you do to support and expand programs and practices that build on-farm resilience, such as improving access to [USDA conservation programs](#)?

Keeping our water safe and healthy is number one.

I would work to increase access to renewable practices, safe chemicals and seeds the farmer can replant.

Most farmers who apply to conservation programs get turned away. Fund them to match how many apply, and staff the local offices, because people wait months for a plan a short-handed office cannot write. Put diversified and regenerative operations at the front of the line.

And crop insurance and commodity payments go out with almost no expectation that anyone take care of the land. If public money goes to a farm, care of the soil should come with it.

11. On-farm research facilitated by farmers in coordination with organizations and education professionals has been vital for producers as they adapt to extreme weather events and economic obstacles. Agricultural research funding continues to be in demand. Do you see this as a priority for federal funding? If so, how do you plan to make this more of a priority for Congress?

Yes. I was a meteorologist in the Navy. Forecasting works because of a public observation network no company would ever have built, since there is no way to sell the atmosphere (yet). Agricultural research has the same shape. Nobody is going to fund a cover crop trial for southeast Ohio soils, because there is no product at the end of it. So it stays a public job, and it keeps losing budget fights because nobody lobbies for it.

Research lives in annual appropriations, so it gets renegotiated every year against everything louder. Put the core of it in the Farm Bill where it will survive. Then argue it on return in rural districts, because the economics persuade members who will not vote for anything with climate in the title.

12. The USDA Organic label [continues to be the most recognized and trusted label](#) amongst consumers. What policy initiatives would you advance or introduce to help organic producers meet growing consumer demand for organic goods?

Imported product that sometimes cheats sits on the shelf beside honest Ohio product at the same price. Start with country of origin labeling. If a shopper can see where something came from, the Ohio farmer gets credit for being here, and imported product that cheats has a harder time hiding behind an American looking package.

The three years is a burden also. Most transitions that fail end because the money ran out. Bridge lending, buyers lined up before the conversion starts, and insurance that accounts for the yield dip would carry people across.