

Proposed Op-Ed Piece Submitted for Publication  
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**Moving Toward Sustainability**  
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“The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.” When it comes to examining how far we’ve come in Ohio, there is great truth in Oliver Wendell Holmes’ words that is still applicable today.

In 1969, we were a carefree, throw-away society infamous for Cleveland’s Cuyahoga River fire that sparked national attention to our environmental problems. In 2009, we are a society cognizant of our actions, moving toward self-sufficiency and sustainability. We use canvas shopping bags, we repair and re-use, and we are connected to the needs of our local communities. We have re-discovered one of the undeniable benefits of reducing waste: what is best for the environment is often best for our wallets. Agriculture, one of the state’s top industries, is following that movement of sustainability.

Sustainable agriculture means many different things to many different people, but the most simple and encompassing explanation is that it is a process agricultural producers use to grow and manufacture food for an increasing population that maximizes benefits to the economy, the environment, and the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole. In Ohio, it is a three-pronged effort among our producers, the State of Ohio, and citizens.

Sustainability has long been part of the consciousness of the agricultural community. With each passing day, the state’s nearly 76,000 farmers are adapting with the times to work smarter, increase efficiencies, and produce superior products that are good for the producer, good for the people, and good for the environment. Advances in conservation practices and production technologies allow farmers to preserve the integrity of the land, and apply fewer fertilizers and pesticides while producing higher quality products often at higher yields. Methane digesters and wind turbines are also making their way onto Ohio farms, turning wind and animal waste into a renewable power source to run their operations. At the end of the day, all of these efforts will lead to healthier communities, more profitable farms, greater protection of our natural resources, and an improved climate.

On the state level, Governor Ted Strickland recognizes the importance of sustainability to the state and ordered the creation of the Ohio Food Policy Council, which is chaired by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The council is charged with maximizing the benefits of the food and agricultural sector to the state’s economy and environment while ensuring all Ohioans have access to fresh and healthy foods. Ohioans spend around \$35 billion each year on food. By meeting only 10 percent of this demand with Ohio-grown and Ohio-raised products, we could keep \$7 billion in the state.



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The Food Policy Council, a public-private partnership, is examining ways to do just that and working to achieve its other goals, including connecting Ohio producers and consumers; supporting local growers; and reducing environmental effects of long-distance transportation. In addition, the council is maximizing the benefits of local food systems, protecting state soil and water resources, and assuring all Ohioans have access to fresh and healthy foods from preschools to senior centers.

For the first time ever, the state is offering grants to assist farmers' markets in costs associated with installing the infrastructure necessary to accept food assistance benefits. The Farmers' Market Access Project is increasing healthy food choices for all Ohioans and promoting the sale of Ohio foods, which benefits Ohio farmers and the state's economy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has found that for every \$5 spent in food assistance benefits, \$9.20 is generated in total community spending.

Farmers are doing their part. The state is doing its part. Beginning April 27, citizens can also do their part to help support sustainable agricultural initiatives in Ohio by purchasing a sustainable agriculture license plate for their vehicles. Sales generated from the plate will help maximize the environmental, economic, and social benefits sustainable agriculture provides us, through grant projects made available to producers seeking to improve the sustainability of their farms.

Agriculture and food production has an immense impact on Ohio, its citizens, and our quality of life. Not only does our food and agriculture industry provide us with food, clothing, and shelter, but it also continues to be a bright spot in a suffering economy. Annually, this industry contributes \$98 billion to the state's economy and provides one in seven Ohioans with good jobs, on and off the farm. With the current economic challenges and the rise of biofuels and other green-energy initiatives, producers recognize this as an opportune time to focus on sustainable agriculture.

Ohio agriculture is already preserving our rural heritage, supporting the state's economy, and helping us meet our green energy needs. Supporting and promoting sustainable agricultural practices ensures Ohioans will be able to enjoy these benefits and live off the land for many years to come.

In the midst of a new planting season and in celebration of Earth Day, let us remember to celebrate how far we have come, and how the agriculture industry is leading us into a new age of sustainability.

