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A New Beginning for Farmland Preservation in Ohio

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Economic analysts theorize Ohio, like many other states, is facing some of the toughest economic times since the great depression. The ripple effects of a sluggish national economy have created significant obstacles in our own economy that state government is working hard to overcome.

With a difficult year behind us and solid plans in place to move our state forward, it is important to remember all the good things we have going for us along with new beginnings and opportunities. One such opportunity is the Clean Ohio bond issue, passed for the people by the people last November.

The bond, an extension of the \$400 million program originally proposed and passed in 2000, will mean many things for Ohioans. It will mean continuing to protect our green areas and improving outdoor recreation areas. It will mean continuing to revitalize our urban areas and cleaning up vacant industrial sites. It will also mean maintaining Ohio's strong agricultural presence, and the many social, environmental, and economic benefits it creates.

The passage of this initiative represents a formidable hurdle we have together overcome as we move beyond the initial pilot phase of preserving farmland. Many people do not know or understand the impact farmland has on Ohio, its citizens, and our economic prosperity. Farmland preservation efforts are imperative to each of us – urban or rural – because of the immense influence the agriculture industry has on our state. Not only does our food and agriculture industry provide us with food, clothing, and shelter, it also continues to be a bright spot at a time when our economy is suffering from inflation, high fuel costs, and a collapsed housing market. This industry annually contributes \$98 billion to the state's economy and provides one in seven Ohioans with good jobs, on and off the farm. That is more than any other sector.

Ohio's temperate climate and unique topography enable agricultural producers to grow or raise more than 200 diverse agricultural crops ranging from traditional corn, soybeans, and livestock to the production of less-traditional items including nursery products, maple syrup, and wine. Our landscape is also home to more than 1,000 food processing facilities that provide local people with good jobs and benefits. With the rise of biofuels and other green-energy initiatives, agriculture is destined to play an even more important role in our lives.



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The Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program administered through the Ohio Department of Agriculture with Clean Ohio funds has been – and now will continue to be – the most influential tool to preserving agriculture’s strong beneficial presence in our state.

During the initial phase of the program, which spanned from 2001-2008, the state was able to purchase easements on more than 26,814 acres, which includes current pending offers. Federal partnerships have also helped enhance Ohio’s preservation efforts through grants that total approximately \$9 million, which have permitted the state to preserve another 8,265 acres. Accounting for both programs, Ohio has successfully preserved 35,079 agricultural acres.

However, this is just the beginning when it comes to interest in the program. In 2008 alone, the program received nearly 200 applications but was only able to purchase easements on 18 farms, or roughly 11 percent.

Although Ohio has had some success in preserving traditional farmland acres, such as corn and soybean fields, the advent of new agricultural trends gives us a whole new arena to explore. By focusing on microclimates, smaller farms that serve niche markets, and more unique types of agriculture that go far beyond traditional row crops, the program will preserve the state’s diverse agricultural base and allow Ohio to play a strong role in feeding hungry people and supporting local food systems. It will also help set the stage that will provide agricultural growth, economic success, and food and energy security for every Ohioan today and for years to come.

There is a need to continue the traditional program, while at the same time develop a program and additional funding sources to protect and preserve smaller farms and those that are so important to our local food systems.

Having grown up in a rural area, Governor Ted Strickland recognizes the unique geographic and economic advantages for local food systems in Ohio, the importance of protecting Ohio farmland and providing access to healthful foods for all Ohioans. By proactively planning for the development of local food systems in Ohio, we are working to create and retain jobs, economic vitality, health, and greater sustainability in our communities.

As we distribute final funding from the original Clean Ohio bonds, we can give thanks to Ohio’s voters for providing the state a new round of Clean Ohio funds and creating a new beginning for farmland preservation efforts in Ohio.

