Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association

2018 Policy Priorities

About OEFFA

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association was founded in 1979 as a grassroots coalition of farmers, gardeners, retailers, educators, researchers, and others who share a desire to build a healthy food system that brings prosperity to family farmers, meets the growing public demand for local food, creates economic opportunities for our rural communities, and safeguards the environment.

For 40 years, OEFFA has used education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing to promote local and organic food systems, helping farmers and consumers reconnect and together build a sustainable food system, one meal at a time.

Ohio Agriculture

With about 14 million acres of farmland, more than 75,000 farms (of which over 75 percent are 179 acres or less) in production, and agricultural sales estimated at $10 billion, Ohio, accurately, has been described as a “farm state.” But, the agricultural industry is facing serious challenges: the average age of farmers has crept toward 60, the number of beginning farmers (those farming for 10 years or less) decreased 20 percent in the last agricultural census, and almost 100 million acres of farmland is expected to change hands in the next five years in the U.S.¹

Agricultural production is increasingly dictated by consumer attitudes and tastes. Whether the motivations are personal or environmental health, consumers in Ohio and nationally are demanding products grown close to home and free from synthetic inputs. That has created new opportunities for farmers that also benefit Ohio’s rural and urban communities. With 16 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), we are uniquely positioned to develop and benefit from local and regional food systems. The public is engaged and supports this development through 24 local food councils across Ohio and the work of the Ohio Food Policy Network.²

The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service 2016 certified organic survey illustrates the strength of Ohio when it comes to this growing trend in sustainable agriculture. Ohio moved from eighth to seventh in the nation in the number of organic farms, sales of organic products increased by more than 30 percent from 2015 to 2016, and organic cropland acreage grew by 11 percent.

The recommendations that follow represent opportunities to support and invest in a sustainable agriculture for Ohio, contributing to community economic development, and environmental and personal health.

² www.ohiofpn.org
Goals at a Glance

1) Make Local and Regional Food Economy Investments
   a) Marketing, infrastructure, farm to institution
   b) Healthy food access
   c) Support food policy planning at the state and local level

2) Increase Support for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture
   a) Recognize the importance of organic agriculture through executive and administrative actions
   b) Invest in research, education, and Extension services for organic production
   c) Support transition to organic production
   d) Practices that align with water quality goals

3) Build the Next Generation of Farmers and Protect the Agricultural Land Base
   a) Support beginning farmer programming and resources
   b) Develop policies that incentivize land transfer to next generation farmers
   c) Prioritize agricultural conservation easement programs
   d) Support practices that promote land stewardship
   e) Protect agriculture from the impact of industrial development
   f) Minimize ecological impacts and maximize public good
Policy Recommendations

Make Local and Regional Food Economy Investments

- Recognize and support the Ohio Food Policy Network as a citizen-led initiative to improve the functioning of the food system in Ohio and provide resources to the network, regional, and local food policy councils. S

- Make state and federal investments in regional meat processing infrastructure which has severely restricted the growth of local food systems for more than 10 years. S, F

- Provide resources to our land grant universities to create a full-time Farm to School coordinator position. S, F

- Increase investments in nutrition incentives (FINI) Produce Perks, produce prescription pilots, and free equipment for farmers markets to process SNAP. S, F

Increase Support for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture

- Establish organic transition mentorship programs to provide the necessary support for new organic farmers and those farmers that are transitioning to organic. S, F

- Ensure Ohio State University and Central State University have the resources necessary to establish a minimum of one organic extension specialist position in Ohio. S, F

- Reinstate the Office of Sustainable Agriculture at the Ohio Department of Agriculture and officially institutionalize the state Organic Advisory Team. S

- Incorporate organic agriculture fully into state marketing and promotion efforts, including prioritization in the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. S

- Staff the organic policy coordinator position at the USDA. F

- Fund the Organic Research and Extension Initiative at $50 million/year. F

- Study the relationship between organic production methods and water quality. S, F

S– state policy
F– federal policy
Build the Next Generation of Farmers and Protect the Land Base

• Provide tax incentives for landowners that transition land to next generation farmers. $S, F$

• Continue to support and fully fund agricultural easement purchase programs and advance land affordability provisions in easements. $S, F$

• Increase outreach on the CRP-TIP program. $F$

• Fully fund conservation working lands programs. $F$

• Promote best agricultural management practices. $S, F$

• Remove mandatory pooling. $S$

• Adopt organic agriculture impact mitigation planning. $S, F$

• Incentivize farmer adoption of best management practices and support farmers that facilitate the transfer of that knowledge. $S, F$

These are not discrete and disconnected recommendations. These policy solutions will work synergistically to increase agricultural economic development, public health, and environmental sustainability.

For more information, contact OEFFA’s policy office at (614) 421-2022 or policy@oeffa.org.

$S$– state policy $F$– federal policy