



Senate Finance Committee  
FY 2012-2013 Budget Testimony  
Ohio Department of Agriculture Director James Zehringer  
May 6, 2011

Chairman Widener, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Skindell, members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present testimony on the FY2012-2013 Ohio Department of Agriculture budget.

The \$14 million GRF allocation for the Department of Agriculture is only one-half of one percent of the FY2012-2013 total state GRF expenditure, but those dollars will provide Ohioans a safe, wholesome, and affordable food supply.

In fact, food safety is the primary mission of the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Through the work of our state veterinary medical officers we assure the health of Ohio's livestock, and in doing so also keep animal diseases from spreading to humans. ODA food safety inspectors work directly with farmers, slaughter facilities, milk haulers and processors in safeguarding the food that 11.5 million consumers enjoy every day.

The Governor's proposed budget also allows the Department to re-build our Weights & Measures Program so that we can once again meet our statutorily required consumer protection responsibilities.

The Department will address the proposed nine percent cut in General Revenue Fund support by no longer participating in numerous international trade missions each year, or in travelling across Ohio to fairs and festivals with the Ohio Proud display.

Additionally, by making operational changes in scheduling and staff travel, we can meet limited cuts to our divisions of Meat Inspection and Dairy, while continuing to assure a quality program that maintains important certifications.

We will continue to manage the popular Ohio Proud program, and we'll continue to promote it in support of Ohio agribusinesses; just as we will still help agribusinesses engage in international trade by providing information and support as needed in cooperation with the Department of Development.

The Governor's proposed budget allows the department to boost funding to our Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, and re-build the consumer protection functions of the Division of Weights & Measures, which are critical for maintaining a level playing field for Ohio businesses.

Why are we increasing the Division of Weights & Measures budget by 200% for both years of the biennium? Over the past three years GRF support for this nationally respected program has dropped by more than \$1 million, forcing the layoff of 70% of the Division's inspectors. The loss of these inspectors is now creating problems for Ohio businesses, regardless of their size and volume of sales; for Ohio's thriving scale industry; for city and county auditors; and for consumers who want to make sure that when they pay for a gallon of gas that it is a gallon, and that a pound of potatoes at the store actually weighs a pound.

Here are a few examples of the impact caused by these reductions:

Traditionally, ODA's Weights & Measures inspectors would conduct tests with special devices known as "provers" to assure the accuracy of fuel delivery truck meters, bulk fuel plant meters, and terminal meters.

- In 2008, ODA inspectors tested 2,261 such meters. In 2010, only 21 such tests were completed.



In addition, ODA Division of Weights & Measures inspectors are responsible for inspecting prepackaged commodities which range in content from fertilizer, seed, mulch, meat, milk to even ice cream. ODA Weights & Measures inspectors are the only regulatory agency in Ohio with these inspection responsibilities.

- In 2008, and in previous years, more than 8,000 packages were checked for accuracy. In 2010, no such inspections were conducted.

We've attached to your handouts a set of support letters from both private companies and local governments who are in support of this budget proposal.

Senators, this proposed budget will allow ODA to perform our statutory requirements of serving farmers and protecting consumers.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present this budget proposal. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.

