

Dear friend,

The seriousness of the water quality issue as it pertains to Ohio agriculture has never been greater than it is right now.

With the recent passage of the Lake Erie Bill of Rights (LEBOR), Lake Erie has now been granted the same legal rights normally reserved for a person. That means that any Toledoan who believes a business in the watershed is doing something they deem as detrimental to the lake could sue on the lake's behalf.

It was no secret that if LEBOR passed, agriculture would have the biggest target on its back. Farmers statewide need to be aware of its possible implications.

Wood County farmer Mark Drewes has taken the lead in challenging LEBOR in court. And this letter from every major agriculture group in the state is to let you know we fully support him.

Drewes acted quickly and took a strong approach when he bravely stood up for his family farm and all farms in Ohio by taking legal action to prevent senseless lawsuits stemming from LEBOR.

We wholeheartedly agree with Drewes' strategy, especially with the threat of legal actions against our members. But many of our family, friends and neighbors may see this as a message that Ohio agriculture doesn't care about water quality and farmers do not want to fix what we acknowledge is a major problem in our state. We all know this is simply not true, but as the saying goes, "If you don't tell your story, someone else will."

It's time to step out of our comfort zone to better share our best practices with those outside of agriculture and reach out to those who don't know or understand just how committed we are to healthy water in Ohio.

Our members are making many management changes in the name of clean water. From planting cover crops, to installing buffers and waterways, to using variable rate fertilizer application equipment, to improved manure management, farmers are taking on the responsibility of doing the right things to improve water quality for all Ohioans.

As we evaluate our operations and what measures we are taking for cleaner water, we have to ask if we can do more. Is what we do enough to make our community feel good about our nutrient management efforts? Do those who question our methods fully understand the extent of what we do to protect our shared water?

This is an urgent time to talk to your neighbors. Share how the vast majority of farmers in Ohio are being proactive in finding a balance between producing food and protecting water. These are tough conversations but they are necessary conversations. We need to make our case to those who need to hear it.

Work continues with the new administration and state legislators, who understand that agriculture needs to be a part of the water quality solution. Ohio agriculture is also working cooperatively with the conservation and environmental communities to discuss the resources needed to address and remedy Ohio's water quality problems.

Our message can reach far beyond our fence rows by sharing it online, too. Take pictures of the practices you use on the farm and share why taking the initiative for clean water is so important for you, your family and your farm. Use the hashtag #farmers4oh2o on your social media platforms and let's use this opportunity to show the public our good work on the water quality front.

We stand beside Drewes Farms and their efforts to protect every one of us and our way of life by defending Ohio agriculture against the legal fallout from LEBOR. Now let's step up to reach even more people about agriculture's positive role in protecting the environment.

Sincerely,

Ohio's agriculture community

