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Kasich shift disappoints Ohio agricultural organizations

COLUMBUS, Ohio (OFBF) – Gov. John Kasich appears ready to abandon his common sense approach to governance while ignoring the voluntary conservation efforts, scientific research and mandatory compliance efforts Ohio farm families are implementing to improve water quality.

A group of leading Ohio agricultural organizations is calling on Kasich to engage the industry in his administration's approach to protecting Lake Erie.

The governor and his representatives have been quoted in the media saying they plan to place restrictions on farming practices through executive order.

Farmers and agribusiness leaders, who supported Kasich's "Common Sense Initiative," are unhappy that the governor appears ready to disregard the promises made on his first day in office.

His executive order that created the Common Sense Initiative states "agencies should develop regulations in the full light of public scrutiny, and the public should have an opportunity to help shape those regulations."

"From what we understand, the governor has not talked to lawmakers or anyone who will have to deal with the consequences of an executive order. I can tell you for a fact, any decision is being made without input from the ag community," said Tadd Nicholson, executive director of Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association.

Leaders of the Ohio AgriBusiness Association, Ohio Cattlemen's Association, Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, Ohio Dairy Producers Association, Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Pork Council, Ohio Poultry Association, Ohio Sheep Improvement Association and Ohio Soybean Association are frustrated that the Kasich administration has not engaged the industry in such a consequential matter. The groups believe the executive action will create broad controls over farmers who are working to reduce nutrient runoff that contributes to algae formation in Lake Erie. It likely will closely mirror legislation the administration previously attempted to introduce but failed when it was unable to secure a sponsor.

Separate legislation, called Clean Lake 2020, has gained the support of lawmakers, farmers and members of the environmental community. It unanimously passed in the Ohio Senate and Ohio House and is headed to the governor. The farm groups would like to see the Kasich administration embrace the legislation, which reflects the Common Sense Initiative's stated priority of "compliance, not punishment."

Adam Sharp, executive vice president of Ohio Farm Bureau, said the agriculture groups have an open door to policymakers who want to take a collaborative approach to dealing with an extremely complex challenge.

"The importance of fixing the lake's problems cannot be overstated. Going about it the right way is equally important," Sharp said. He added, "We can help the lake without hurting our ability to produce food and create jobs."

