



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
April 12, 2016

Union calls foul on closing of Ohio prison farms

Westerville – Without much explanation, rationale or plan, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction today announced it would be phasing out its farm operations at eight of Ohio’s state prisons. The move would affect 56 members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association who work at the farms as “farm coordinators.”

DR&C management told leaders of OCSEA they would be phasing out most farm production by the end of 2016, including raising cattle and crops, as well as beverage and milk processing.

The farms have been in existence for over a hundred years and have been, for the most part, self-sustaining. Farm programs have also been centerpieces for inmate programming and skill-building. Inmates are taught how to operate heavy machinery, weld, drive large vehicles, repair equipment and use a variety of farm tools. Additionally, crops are grown to help supply food to local food banks.

The move is disappointing but not surprising to OCSEA leadership. For years, powerful private food lobbyists, like the meat industry, have been lobbying the Ohio Statehouse in an effort to shut down the prison farms and take over the business.

Additionally, Aramark, Ohio’s private prison food vendor, has said it wants to ditch real milk for powdered milk that won’t spoil. The company has been cited for food spoilage. Aramark has also complained of a contract provision that requires them to purchase milk and beef from Ohio Prison Industries.

“Unfortunately, we believe the impetus for this change is purely political. It has nothing to do with DR&C’s core mission of recidivism or safety. This is about dollars and cents for corporate interests,” said Mabe.

“This is clearly a give-away to powerful corporations that will hurt not only DR&C’s mission of meaningful inmate programming but will further destabilize our operations,” said Mabe.

“I guess we shouldn’t be surprised that it’s taking place during an election year,” he said.

OCSEA represents approximately 30,000 state and local government employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).