

## **ROLES OF GOVERNMENT: EDUCATING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ABOUT AGRICULTURAL ISSUES**

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### **Abstract**

As fewer of our government officials have personal connections to agriculture, the need to educate them on the different production practices, industry issues, and innovative solutions continues to increase. As part of a statewide U.S. Congressional Aide event, local OSU Extension Area Leaders jointly developed a tour for US Congress agricultural aides serving their area. The goal was to showcase as many facets of OSU Extension programming happening in the congressional district. The OSU Educators started by asking the congressional aides both in Washington DC and in the local field offices to see what they were interested in learning while visiting the congressional district. Having a voice in the tour provided buy in from the aides as well as added value to them.

Extension clientele were contacted to make arrangements for the tour stops. They were instructed that the tour would be a low key, informal event that provides an opportunity for them to discuss issues affecting agriculture and OSU Extension's response while showcasing their agricultural business. Clientele were also instructed on the Smith Lever Act and Hatch Act and encouraged to mention the importance of funding these at the federal level. Clientele stated they benefited through the discussion of critical issues while showcasing their home or business.

Since extension funding comes from county, state and federal levels in Ohio, we also took advantage to use these tours as a chance to connect local political leaders and our congressional aides during an invitation only luncheon. This networking lunch allowed a meaningful dialogue to occur among the congressional aides, local political leaders, farmers and 4-H members.

Feedback from the congressional aides indicated the tour was very beneficial in helping them understand the scope of agriculture and the policy need as well as the reach of OSU Extension in the local community. Feedback received included:

- "On my tour, I came to realize just how technologically-advanced the modern farm has become, and how farmers have evolved to meet changing times, in an increasingly global and interconnected landscape."
- "I was grateful to have productive discussions on agricultural trade with both affected farmers and Ohio State's academic experts. I learned that international markets for America's crop exports take time to establish, but can be shut off far more quickly, and we should take pause to consider potential negative downstream impacts on farmers as we conduct trade policy."
- "I learned more on the critical services that Ohio State Extension provides to the community. The role of helping farmers be more productively, educating the next generation of farmers, and facilitating programs that help the average person, like the short-term food pantry program I was able to tour in Pike County."

Local clientele and political leaders were also grateful to build a relationship with congressional aides and have continued to communicate with them following the tour. This successful program has occurred in for the past four years and plans are being made for 2019.