

SCALE 1/2" = 1 FT.

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# HOST A LEGISLATOR



### Planning the Event

When planning a site visit, be creative. Brainstorm ideas but remain flexible and work with your legislator and his/her staff to create an event that fits everyone's needs. Keep in mind that your legislator may not have more than an hour or two for the event. Initial introductory meetings can take place in coffee shops, restaurants, the legislator's office, etc. As the year goes on, set up different types of site visits for the legislator and his/her staff to visit and discuss priority issues and learn about agriculture and Ohio Farm Bureau throughout the district.

In choosing a site, consider what agricultural priority issues you want to highlight. For example:

- **Agritourism.** Take the legislator to an agritourism location and talk about the benefits of opening up farm operations to the public.
- **Water resource protection.** Explain how the property protects the community's water supply for residents and businesses. A visit to one of OFBF's demonstration farms might be outside of the legislator's district, but a worthwhile effort to understand water quality efforts throughout the state.
- **Farmland preservation.** Invite the legislator to try some of the food grown on the farm, such as freshly picked fruit, value added products from a dairy farm, or something made from farm products, such as jam or cheese.
- **Energy.** Invite the legislator to tour pipeline projects throughout the district, or other alternative energy projects that might be taking place in the area.
- **An Ohio Farm Bureau event.** Invite the legislator to a policy development session, to sit in on a county board meeting, attend a Young Ag Professionals event or AgriPOWER session, etc.

The visit could involve a simple walk or something more substantial, depending on the legislator's interests and the opportunities available. For example:

- A hike or bicycle tour;
- Hunting or fishing;
- A tour of a farming operation;
- Participation in an activity with your organization's volunteers, such as a tree planting or trail maintenance;
- Family friendly activities that the legislator can bring his/her children or grandchildren.

When creating your event, remember to choose a site that provides the opportunity to tell a good story, is easily accessible, and will provide a good visual backdrop for the event. It is best that the site is in the legislator's district.

## Inviting Your Legislator

If you already have a relationship with your legislator, contact him/her directly to discuss the event and what he/she would like to see.

If you do not yet have a working relationship with your legislator, call their district office and ask who handles scheduling in the district. You will likely work with the legislator's staff at first, and may or may not end up talking with the legislator directly during the planning process.

You may be asked to put your request in writing. In the request, include highlights of the planned event but emphasize your willingness to adapt the event content, duration and timing to the legislator's needs. Include pictures and maps; they are great motivational tools. You may still need to follow up with a phone call.

When choosing possible dates for the event, visit the website [www.legislature.ohio.gov/schedules/calendar](http://www.legislature.ohio.gov/schedules/calendar) to see when the legislature will be in session in Columbus and when they could possibly be in district. Be sure to invite and cultivate relationships with legislative staff. They can be important allies.

If you are planning the event with other organizations, it is helpful to identify one point of contact for the legislator's staff.

## Who Else to Invite?

In addition to your legislator and his/her staff, you'll want to think strategically about whom to invite. You want your legislator to see the breadth of support for conservation but you don't want so many voices that the messages you wish to convey become muddled. Here are some participants to consider:

- **Farmers and landowners in the district.** Concentrate on farmers with compelling stories who can clearly articulate what agriculture means to them and how it is importance to their community.
- **Members of your board or staff who have a personal relationship with the legislator.** Mention them in your scheduling request.
- **Key partners.** This can be a great way to demonstrate the breadth of your support while thanking a partner for their engagement.
- **Local business owners that benefit from agriculture.** Invite members of the business community who can talk about the direct economic benefits of agriculture.

### The Day of the Event

#### Keepsakes

Providing a keepsake (of less than a \$25 value), like a framed print from the event can be used to thank your legislator for their support and encourage future support. Tell them a story about the property and use the presentation as a photo-op.

#### Maps

Maps of the property and surrounding area can be a helpful way to start a tour. If possible, use a map of the area to show other farmland so the legislator gets a sense of context. Keep maps simple. Legislators and their staff may not be as accustomed to looking at maps as you are and it can take time to acclimate to complex maps.

#### Details

Think through the event from the guests' point of view from beginning to end. Do they have clear directions, know what time to be there, and understand what kind of physical demands and clothing are required? (Remember that legislators are often coming from and going to other events/meetings so they won't always be dressed for the outdoors.) Is parking clearly marked? Are there handouts you want the legislator and their staff to have? How about water, snacks, bug repellent, sunscreen, etc.? Always know where the closest restroom facilities can be found.

#### Capturing the Event

Designate someone to take lots of pictures and take notes on the legislator's remarks and items that will require follow-up. These events can make great material for your newsletter or website.

## After the Event

### Thank You

Send thank-you notes to your legislator and his/her staff members for making time for the event and any help they provided in the planning process. Make sure everyone you've worked with receives a thank you. You may use an electronic thank you, but, as with a paper note, make sure it is personal.

### Follow Up with Staff

Call the legislator's staff to fill them in on what was said and begin to pursue any needed follow up, such as requests for further information. Send them pictures, too.

## Media Coverage

### Bringing Your Event to the Next Level

Media coverage can provide an incentive for the legislator to agree to the site visit, raise the profile of your organization, and draw attention to the importance of a strong agriculture policy. Before you start planning for media coverage, talk to the staff member responsible for the legislator's public relations. Ask how you can work together to bring media to the event and best meet everyone's needs.

### Media Alert

Media alerts are used to publicize events to the media ahead of time and serve as an invitation, encouraging reporters to attend and giving them sufficient notice to schedule their attendance.

The media alert should be brief, no more than 300-400 words. Use an attention-grabbing first paragraph that summarizes your event. Clearly identify all of the event details (what the event is, who will be participating, why it is important, and where and when it will take place).

### After the Event

#### News Release

Send out a news release as soon as possible after the event. A news release is more comprehensive than a media alert. Reporters often take directly from news releases for their articles, making them extremely important. The news release should review highlights of the event and contain information about the event and your county Farm Bureau. It should include quotations from the legislator and the head of your organization, (organization director or board president), as well as authority figures (such as someone directly impacted by CAUV) to add authenticity and legitimacy to the release.

The recommendations for appropriate length of a news release vary. Generally speaking, it should be between 400-800 words. Your local news outlets may have their own length requirements. Ohio Farm Bureau staff is available to help with any new releases.

#### Media Follow Through

Call or email reporters who attended to see if they need more information. Make sure they received a copy of the news release. Reporters may have had to miss the conference at the last minute. This is the way it goes; you are competing with all the other news of the day. Don't worry. Send a press packet to these reporters soon after the conference and make yourself available for an interview. Include a photo or two from the event if you can.

If a journalist picks up your story, thank them. Tell them why it was important to your organization.

#### Organizational Communications

Post the release and photos on your website and highlight the event on your social media outlets. Share these with the organizational director in your county.





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