



## NEWS RELEASE

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# Union goes to court to halt prison farm closures

*Westerville* – The largest state employees’ union was back in court today to try to stop the sale of Ohio’s prison farms. The Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, representing the farm workers and most other employees in Ohio’s prisons, filed for a Preliminary Injunction Hearing in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas last month. That hearing took place today in Magistrate Elizabeth Watters’ courtroom.

The union was unsure the injunction hearing would move forward today, since the state’s attorney represented by the Ohio Attorney General’s office filed a Motion to Dismiss the case and a motion to cancel today’s hearing. The state has also refused all document and “discovery” requests by the union.

However, the motion to vacate today’s hearing was denied and the Preliminary Injunction Hearing moved forward. But because the state had refused to provide any information to the union about farm operations as the union had requested, that put OCSEA in the awkward position of having to present its case today with little or no evidence regarding farm operations.

“We just want the process to be fair and transparent and for the union to be able to present its case before a court of law,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “The state’s move to try to sidestep the legal process by refusing to provide any information whatsoever regarding prison farm operations is not only unfortunate, it’s dishonest.”

The court had already admonished the state to cooperate with such discovery requests in a prior hearing. But the state used the Motion to Dismiss filing as a way to refuse the union’s request for interrogatories, documents, financial reports, analysis, data and other information the union had requested weeks ago.

“We are appreciative that Judge Holbrook allowed our hearing, but the state put us between a rock and a hard place,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “While we believe our case has merit, we also know that the state is playing games with the process.

It is unclear how soon a decision will be reached.

The Ohio Civil Service Employees Association is seeking an injunction from the court in an effort to protect the rights of the affected employees the union represents. Under the OCSEA collective bargaining agreement with the state, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction is required to give appropriate notice and to bargain with the union when a closure is announced. In addition, it must provide the union with a rationale explaining the reasons for the closure, all of which DR&C failed to do.

The union and numerous stakeholders were blindsided this spring when the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction announced it would be phasing out its farm operations at all 10 prisons and selling most of the land.

Aside from dates to sell livestock and intention to sell land, DR&C has provided little to no explanation, plan or timeline for the closings, except that they’re moving fast. “Not only do we have rights under our contract that require management to talk to us, the secrecy

and speed with which this is being rushed through is raising alarm bells,” said Shawn Gruber, OCSEA Corrections Assembly President.

The closure of the ten prison farms would affect 56 members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association who work at the farms as Farm Coordinators and Dairy Operators as well as countless inmates who are employed on the farms.

OCSEA has also filed a grievance with the state’s Office of Collective Bargaining against the move.

*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. OCSEA represents 8,600 employees in DR&C. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).*