



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
May 5, 2016

Union requests injunction to keep prison farms open

Westerville – The largest state employees union today filed a Temporary Restraining Order in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas to stop the closure of ten state prison farm operations.

The union and numerous stakeholders were blindsided three weeks ago 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. The move 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.

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 agency 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.

“This is clearly an end run around the union’s collective bargaining agreement,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “But it also goes against common human decency,” he said.

The union is also puzzled as to why such a well-run and valuable operation that was on the verge of expansion, would suddenly be shut down. A \$9 million Controlling Board request last year to build new barns at London and Marion Correctional Institutions would have increased both meat and dairy production to three times the current amount. These projects are near complete.

“Even Director Mohr praised the farm operations a year ago when he went to the Controlling Board for additional funds,” said Mabe. “Something is not adding up here.”

Not only were the employees caught off guard by the sudden announcement but hundreds of stakeholders were left in the lurch. Ohio food banks, the OSU School of Veterinary Medicine that sends dozens of students to prison farms each year, and farm supply and equipment companies such as John Deere Equipment were blindsided by the announcement.

The farms have been in existence for more than a hundred years and each year hundreds of inmates are taught how to operate heavy machinery, weld, repair equipment, construct and repair buildings and use a variety of power tools. Inmates help run the dairy milking operation and bottling plant. Additionally, they drive tractors, loaders and other heavy equipment in growing and harvesting crops to help supply food to local food banks and to sustain the beef and dairy cattle.

The dairy plant supplies milk to more than 50,000 Ohio inmates. Farm and dairy jobs are some of the highest paid positions inmates can hold.

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. Cattle are already being moved around the system and will begin to be auctioned off as early as May 16, 2016.

OCSEA has already 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).