

As Introduced

**135th General Assembly
Regular Session
2023-2024**

H. B. No. 568

Representatives Brent, Dean



A BILL

To create the Healthy Soils Task Force.

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BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF OHIO:

Section 1. (A) The General Assembly finds that healthy soils are a limited natural resource and fundamental for healthy and sustainable food production. Improving soil health means increasing soil's organic matter and diversifying its microbial activity to enhance agricultural productivity and environmental resilience.

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(B) As Ohio is a leading agricultural state with productive soils and abundant water supplies, a commitment to healthy and productive soils and clean water is critical as population and food production demands rise. However, the state's soil has been depleted of organic matter and trace minerals, making the soil less fertile, requiring more inputs, and resulting in a degradation of the soil structure that builds resilience and helps to maintain clean water.

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(C) There is a real and pressing opportunity for the state's farmers to capitalize on the economic and production benefits of improved soil health, while simultaneously improving surface and ground water quality. Improving the health of the

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state's soil is the most effective way for agricultural 20
producers to increase crop and forage productivity and 21
profitability while also protecting the environment. 22

(D) The General Assembly finds that appropriate planning 23
and coordination is needed to accelerate and coordinate the 24
adoption of conservation practices that: 25

(1) Rebuild and protect soil carbon to increase water 26
holding capacity and enhance the vitality of the subsurface 27
microbiome for landowners to capitalize on the economic and 28
production benefits of soil health; 29

(2) Enhance water quality; 30

(3) Capture carbon; 31

(4) Build resilience to drought and pests; 32

(5) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions; 33

(6) Expand pollinator and other wildlife habitats; 34

(7) Protect fragile ecosystems for a more sustainable 35
future. 36

Section 2. (A) (1) There is hereby created the Healthy 37
Soils Task Force. The Task Force shall consist of the Director 38
of Agriculture or the Director's designee, who shall be a voting 39
member of the Task Force, and the following voting members 40
appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the 41
Senate: 42

(a) Two representatives of soil and water conservation 43
districts; 44

(b) One academic expert in agriculture and soil health 45
from each of the following: 46

(i) The Ohio State University;	47
(ii) Central State University.	48
(c) Three representatives who are farmers who do not grow commodity crops, including at least two farmers who are using healthy soil practices;	49 50 51
(d) Two representatives who are farmers who grow commodity crops;	52 53
(e) One representative of an Ohio-based environmental organization;	54 55
(f) Two representatives of national farm or conservation organizations. Each such representative shall be from a different organization.	56 57 58
(g) One representative of a sustainable agriculture organization;	59 60
(h) Two representatives of Ohio farm organizations.	61
(2) The Task Force shall consist of the following nonvoting members:	62 63
(a) The chairperson of the committee of the House of Representatives responsible for agricultural issues or the chairperson's designee;	64 65 66
(b) The chairperson of the committee of the Senate responsible for agricultural issues or the chairperson's designee.	67 68 69
(3) In selecting membership for appointment to the Task Force, the Governor shall seek to appoint members with expertise in methods for incorporating systems of healthy soil stewardship into working agricultural operations and for optimizing	70 71 72 73

environmental services provided through such practices. 74

The Governor shall make appointments to the Task Force not 75
later than sixty days after the effective date of this section, 76
and appointed members shall begin serving immediately following 77
the Senate's consent of such appointments. Members shall be 78
reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses incurred in 79
carrying out their duties as members. The Task Force shall hold 80
its first meeting not later than ninety days after the effective 81
date of this section. 82

(B) At its first meeting, the members shall elect a 83
chairperson. After the initial meeting, the Task Force shall 84
meet as necessary at the call of the chairperson. 85

(C) The Ohio Department of Agriculture shall provide 86
administrative and fiscal assistance to the Task Force. The Task 87
Force may request additional assistance from appropriate federal 88
and state agencies. 89

(D) The Task Force shall do all of the following: 90

(1) Develop a comprehensive healthy soils initiative for 91
the state; 92

(2) Develop a comprehensive action plan to coordinate 93
efforts to carry out the healthy soils initiative using 94
standards for organic matter, biological activity, biological 95
diversity, and soil structure as measures to assess improved 96
soil health. The action plan shall establish goals, formulate 97
timelines for task completion, and determine resources required 98
and resource availability. 99

In developing the action plan, the Task Force shall 100
examine: 101

(a) Issues related to providing farmers and ranchers with research, education, technical assistance, and demonstration projects;	102 103 104
(b) Options for financial incentives to improve soil health;	105 106
(c) The contribution of livestock to soil health.	107
(3) Develop recommendations for testing for chemicals such as dioxin in the soil;	108 109
(4) Develop recommendations for the use of plants for soil remediation, including alfalfa, sunflower, date palms, and mustards.	110 111 112
(5) Identify realistic and achievable goals and timelines for improvement of soil health in the state through voluntary partnerships among agricultural producers and relevant state and local agencies and other public and private entities;	113 114 115 116
(6) Review provisions of the federal "Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018," Pub. L. No. 115-334, and any implementing rules, regulations, and guidelines of the United States Department of Agriculture and identify opportunities to leverage state, local, or private funds under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program of the United States Department of Agriculture and other conservation programs for the purposes of the healthy soils initiative. The Task Force shall include information obtained from the review in the report issued under division (F) of this section.	117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126
(E) To carry out its duties, the Task Force may consult with other agencies or organizations, including all of the following:	127 128 129

(1) The College of Engineering, Science, Technology and	130
Agriculture at Central State University and the College of Food,	131
Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State	132
University;	133
(2) The Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm	134
Service Agency, and the Agricultural Research Service of the	135
United States Department of Agriculture;	136
(3) The Soil Health Institute;	137
(4) The Soil Health Partnership;	138
(5) Any other state and federal agencies or public or	139
private entities with responsibility or expertise in research,	140
demonstration, education, advising, funding, or promotion	141
relating to agronomic and other agricultural land management	142
practices consistent with the purpose of the Task Force.	143
(F) On or before December 31, 2023, the Task Force shall	144
submit the comprehensive action plan and report its findings and	145
recommendations to the Governor and the committees of the House	146
of Representatives and Senate responsible for agricultural	147
issues. The Task Force shall cease to exist on January 1, 2024.	148