

The Daily Record

**Fingerhut tours OARDC;
hopes to minimize impact of
budget reductions**

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WOOSTER -- Though considered a top priority with a fundamental relationship to economic development and growth, higher education in the county is not outside the possibility of funding reductions.

Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center campus was under the magnifying glass Thursday as Eric Fingerhut, chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, toured the facility, stopping to hear about some of its signature programs.

Fingerhut said as chancellor, he makes it his business to visit campuses across the state to see firsthand what each has to offer. He said he considers the institutions a vehicle for economic prosperity, calling OARDC a model of the relationship between higher education and business, partnering businesses with researchers to improve products and develop new ideas.

However, with the difficult economic climate and decline of the state's revenue comes a "very close scrutiny of all budgets," Fingerhut said.

There are areas of reduction impossible to avoid, he said, and part of the purpose of the visits are to work with each facility to minimize the impact of potential reductions and distribute them accordingly.

To accomplish this, Fingerhut said he will report his findings to state legislators who will use the information to make a determination on the state budget through discussions going on now through June.

"The chancellor is the quarterback of an attempt to transform a very diverse education community into a single system," state Rep. Ron Amstutz, R-Wooster, said.



Photo By Ken Chamberlain

Bill Ravlin (front left), Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center associate director, shows Chancellor Eric Fingerhut natural rubber made from Russian dandelions OARDC researchers are domesticating to help develop a domestic rubber-production industry in collaboration with companies such as Bridgestone and Cooper Tire. Also shown are state Sen. Bob Gibbs (back left) and state Rep. Ron Amstutz.

Amstutz said Fingerhut's understanding of what is going on is very important to the state's future and emphasized the significance of higher education to Ohio's economic outlook.

Federal funding might dry up, which is a significant portion of the state's budget, Amstutz said, meaning crucial questions will have to be asked as to what will be sustainable in the future as legislators work on a plan to improve the economy.

The visit is something the OARDC has been trying to set up for some time, Director Steven Slack said. The tour was set up to look at selected areas where there has been investment from the state and, in turn, impact on the state from the investment, allowing Fingerhut to ask questions on how the two fit together, he added.

The OARDC and Ohio State University Extension Office are slated to take a decrease in their budget of 5.5 percent by July and

and 5.5 percent next year, equating to a \$7 million adjustment to their budget, which Slack said will impact a lot of programs.

"(From) our standpoint we have programs that add value to the state," Slack said, adding it's important to make the case for the programs to show what impact budget constraints might have and how that affects the state.

Fingerhut said he is excited to see OARDC partnering with new and existing businesses, such as **Schmack BioEnergy**, a company that has already built facilities in Ohio that convert biomass waste into energy. It's a relationship that will create jobs, he said.

Even with the struggles in the automotive industry and subsequent layoffs, Fingerhut said he hopes people can get excited about new opportunities coming from research and development in renewable energy.

Rod Crider, president of the

Wayne Economic Development Council, said the OARDC has the potential to become a regional asset along the lines of the Cleveland Clinic or the NASA Glenn Research Center and could lead the state in technology-driven economic development.

The OARDC and the BioOhio Research Park project has the potential, especially as people become more adept at using natural resources and agbiosciences to respond to many of the needs in our society, he said.

"I only see that industry growing, and the OARDC could be at the leading edge of that," he said.

Fingerhut toured Ohio State University's Agricultural Technical Institute Thursday afternoon.

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