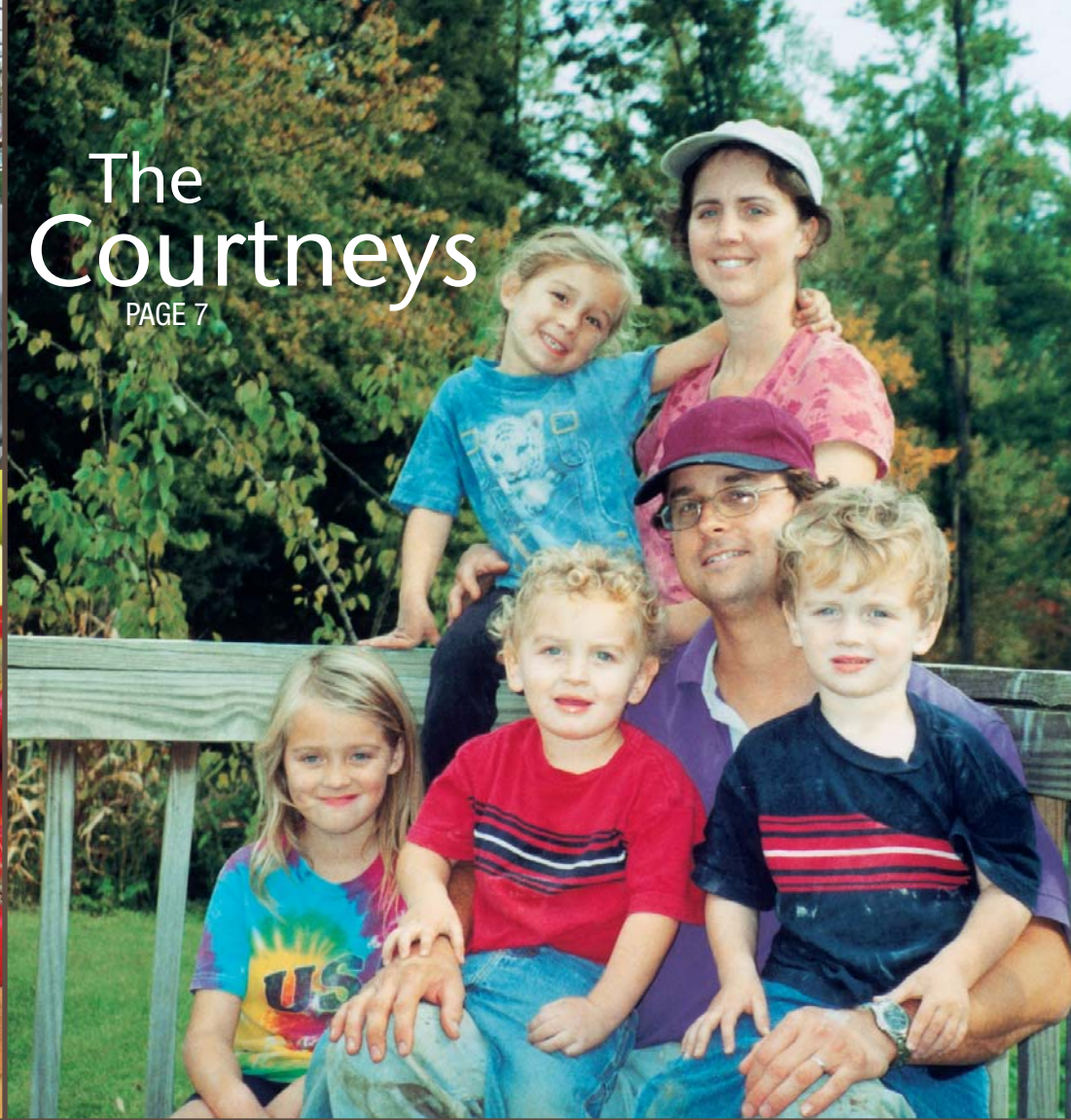


Entrepreneurial Farming

Part of the Plan for Prosperity in Northeast Ohio

A SPECIAL REPORT



The Courtneys

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Part of the Plan
for Prosperity
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By Mary K. Holmes Fall 2005

This report is sponsored by The Farmland Center, a project of the Western Reserve Resource, Conservation and Development Council. Therefore, the focus of the report is on the nine counties that comprise the Council constituents: Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Wayne.

Much of the statistical information in this report was taken from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) published reports. Some of these data are reported by county and have been summarized for the Western Reserve Region. However, economic data about the kind of entrepreneurial farming profiled in this report is not readily available. It is hoped that one of the outcomes of this report will be a new understanding of what should be measured to help us track the health and success of this important part of our economy.

The Farmland Center thanks the following organizations for making this report possible: The Ohio Environmental Education Fund, The Ohio Department of Agriculture, The Cyrus Eaton Foundation, The Nord Family Foundation, The Frohring Foundation, and The George Gund Foundation.

Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of two pioneers of the entrepreneurial farming movement in Northeast Ohio:

Professor Ben Stinner, former holder of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation-endowed chair in ecological management in Ohio State University's College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences and a professor of entomology at OARDC's Wooster campus.

Marion Rullo, farmer and goat cheese maker extraordinaire!

ENTREPRENEURIAL FARMING The Future is Here

A "Quiet Revolution" is occurring across the nation regarding food production and consumption and Northeast Ohio is on the leading edge of that movement. Consumers are gradually becoming aware of the flavor and quality of locally grown products, and learning about the nutritional value of foods like free-range eggs, grass-fed beef, and vine-ripened fruits. A new entrepreneurial spirit among farmers is creating a group of producers who are abandoning the "get big or get out" mantra of the last 60 years to follow a passion and create a new farming business. Together, these consumers and farmers are fueling the growth of farmers markets and other direct marketing methods that have the potential to transform our region.



Photo by Mary Holmes

Business and government leaders in Northeast Ohio are working hard to envision economic development in terms of biosciences and technologies, but the importance of making agriculture part of the vision is not fully recognized. The purpose of this report, then, is to argue that agriculture, and specifically small-scale, entrepreneurial farming and market gardening, has a vital and long-term role in the region's quest for economic prosperity. ■

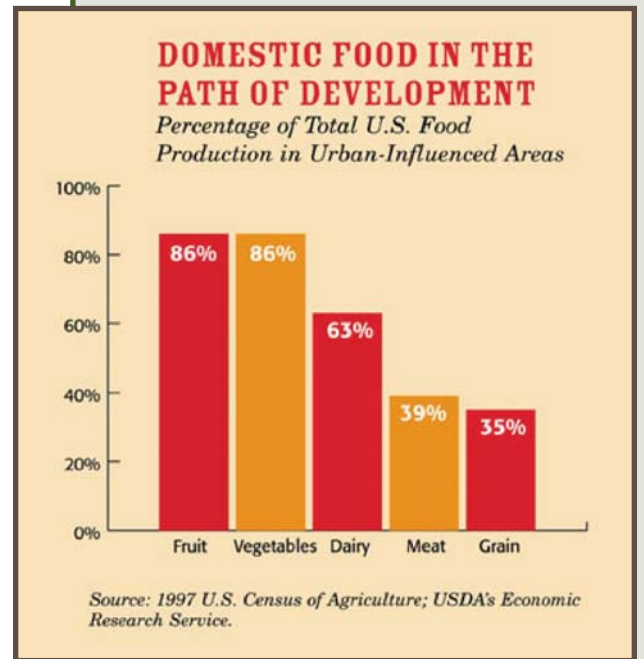
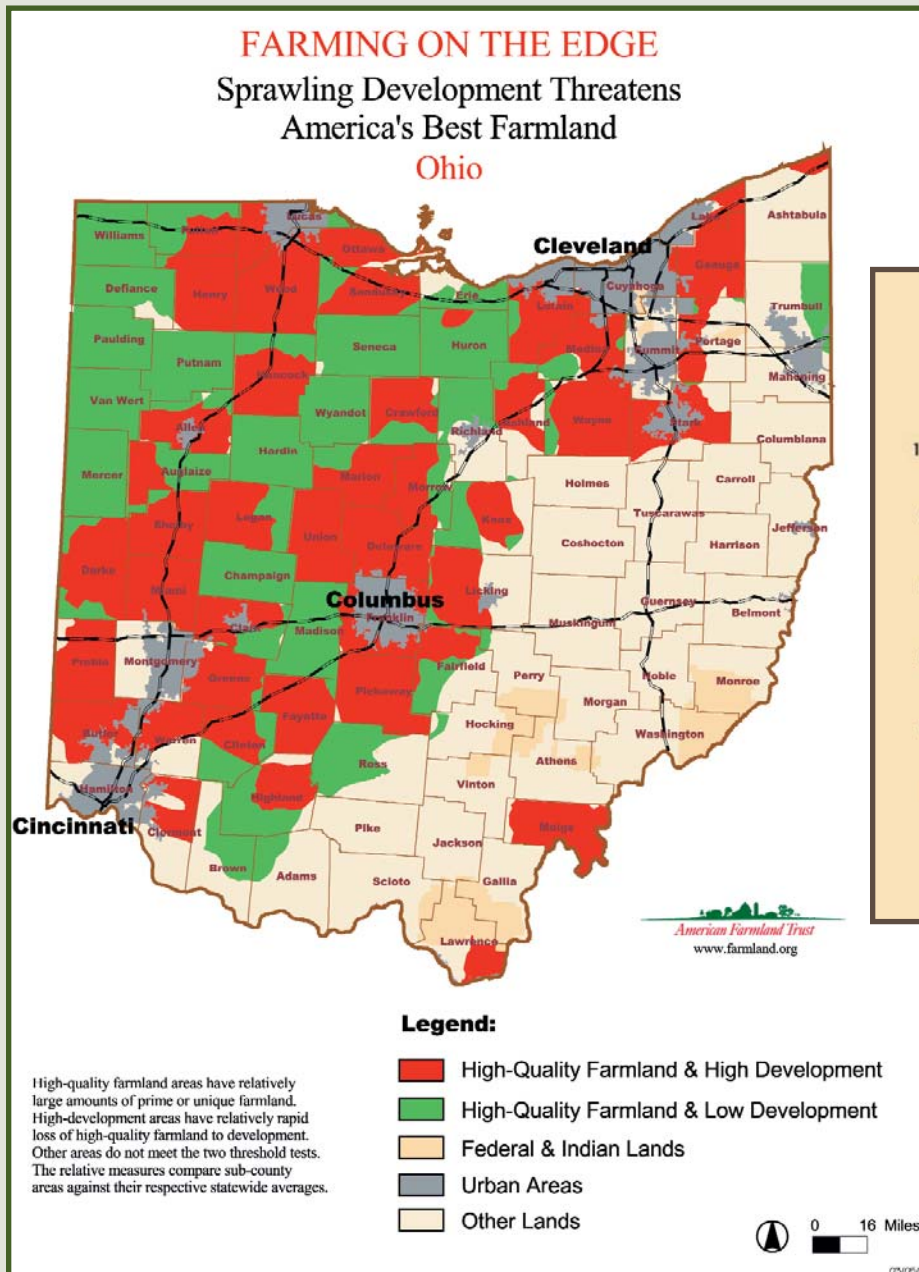
...the importance of making agriculture part of the vision is not fully recognized.

Urban Sprawl and Loss of Farmland — Two sides of the same coin

Since the 1980s there has been a growing awareness in Northeast Ohio that while the overall population growth is slow or stagnant, there have been rapid population shifts out of urban areas into suburban and rural areas. While these shifts have created a diversity of housing options and tremendous wealth for some, the costs to the community at large have been high in terms of environmental impact, inefficient distribution of public services, and loss of high-quality farmland. The movement of population out of urban centers into suburban and rural areas is not unique to Northeast Ohio. This outward migration has been a factor of American life since the end of World War II. But two aspects of our region's "sprawl" are troubling: first, the population is moving, but not growing, and second, the areas where development is most rapid are areas of prime farmlands.

Governor Voinovich's 1997 report of the Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force put it this way, "Between 1960 and 1990, Ohio's urban land increased almost five times as fast as the rate of population growth... Growth trend reports from the Ohio Housing Research Network indicate that between 1980 and 2010, the five-county region surrounding Cleveland is expected to lose three percent of its population while witnessing a 30% increase in residential land."

That same year, The American Farmland Trust published a report entitled, "Farming on the Edge: Farmland in the Path of Development" which used the USDA's *National Resources Inventory Data* to identify high-quality farmland threatened by development.



Above: An interesting analysis done by AFT reveals that a majority of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products are produced in the U.S. by farms located in urban-influenced areas.

Left: AFT used the USDA's designation of "prime farmland" along with a "unique farmland" definition based on lands used to grow fruits, vegetables, nuts and berries to identify "high-quality farmland." Development was defined as the change in urban build-up land occurring within each of 33,000 mapping units nationally between 1987 and 1997. The resulting map for Ohio shows that most of the rural counties in our region have high-quality farmland in the path of development.



Photo by Adrian Achtermann

In planning for the long-term health and prosperity of our region, small-scale family farming as an entrepreneurial business enterprise must be preserved and encouraged because:

- We have unique soils and micro-climates that are well suited to the production of many varieties of desired agricultural products, especially foods that are not available in supermarkets.
- Successful small-scale farming businesses slow urban sprawl and return prosperity to rural communities.
- Prosperous rural communities sustained by local food and fiber systems are a more efficient and sustainable way to use land and natural resources than either factory farming or urban sprawl.
- Small-scale, sustainable farming practices preserve soils, habitats, and food and plant diversity and are therefore good for our environment.
- Local food systems can improve nutrition and quality of food for consumers in the region.
- Methods of local food distribution such as farmers markets, roadside stands and Community Supported Agriculture enhance quality of life in the region and promote civic engagement.
- Local food systems dramatically improve the revenue and employment multiplier effects for agriculture.
- Working farmlands offer opportunities for developing value-added food businesses and travel-related industries.
- Working farms close to cities contribute to the quality of life.

Where does our food come from?

In a recent survey done by the Ohio State University Department of Human and Resource Development, Ohioans expressed preferences for local foods. At least half indicated a willingness to pay 10% more for locally grown food. What Ohioans may not realize is that over the last thirty years, Ohio's agriculture has dramatically changed from a local food system to a commodity production system with corn and soybeans accounting for roughly 60% of the agricultural production in the state. Food, meanwhile, is imported into Ohio from California, Florida, New Jersey, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and even China.

This transition has taken place within the context of a transformation of food production nationally. In *Fatal Harvest*, a beautifully illustrated book designed to demonstrate the "tragedy of industrial agriculture," Andrew Kimbrell describes this transition in this way, "Slowly over the last hundred years, and more quickly in the post-World War II period, an insidious change took place that has created the monstrosity known as Industrial Agriculture. Unfortunately, this industrial system has made it far more difficult to see the real nature and consequences of modern agriculture. Massive monocultures slowly replaced the mixed crops of small-scale farming in such a way that generations born into the newly created modified landscapes now know only that scale. Pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, though used heavily, could rarely be seen when viewing farms, and were never mentioned in the media. Decades of advertising brainwashed the public to see uniformity and cosmetic perfection as hallmarks of good, healthy food. The traditional acceptance of variation in textures, colors, and surfaces of fruit, vegetables, even grains were lost."

The consequence of this transformation for Ohio and especially for our region has been the wholesale conversion of diversified family farms to commodity, industrial farms or residential, commercial or industrial uses. Today, the chance that residents of Northeast Ohio can actually consume even 10% of their food from local farms is very low unless they buy those products directly from farmers. Eggs and dairy constitute the majority of foods supplied by Ohio farms, and most of those are from industrial farms, not small-scale family farms.

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As early as 1982, Jon Shafer described Ohio's embrace of industrial farming to produce commodities for export in a report entitled, "Toward a Sustainable Ohio in Food, Farmers and Land":

"Ohio is in the condition of a food colony, exporting raw materials at low prices and importing processed materials at high prices."

According to Shafer's analysis in 1982, Ohio imported most meats, fruits and vegetables which are high profit margin products and exported raw milk, soybeans, corn and soft wheat as commodities. The situation today is probably worse.

This shift to commodity farming has had a negative economic impact that gets little attention in our region, except to fuel the idea that farmers cannot make a living farming. But the new and growing demand for locally grown foods offers hope to entrepreneurial farmers who are ready to reinvent retail farming, stay on their farms, and keep prosperous farming part of our future. ■

Industrial Agriculture vs. Nonindustrial Agriculture



Industrial Agriculture

Industrial agriculture applies mass production manufacturing models and mechanical techniques to produce vast quantities of “cheap” food. For the most part, the product of the farm is an input, the first step in a long line of processes that include packaging, transportation, and marketing. The farmer, on average, gets only a small percentage of the total dollar paid for the product.

This technique depends on “perfecting” a single breed of a plant or animal commodity, growing it quickly in very large quantity. It also requires enormously expensive farm equipment for planting, cultivating, and harvesting the crop. Its success depends on petroleum (25% of oil used in North America is for agriculture) not only for farm equipment, but also for fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides as well as transport.

It is a low profit margin, high volume business where the keys to success are uniformity of product and push marketing, that is, persuading the consumer through advertising and promotion that he/she wants the product.

Read *The Fate of Family Farming* by Ronald Jager to understand the economics of industrial agriculture and why it leads to unprofitable farming.



Nonindustrial Agriculture

Nonindustrial agriculture is alternatively referred to as small-scale, retail or entrepreneurial farming. It is founded on the idea that the farm products are, for the most part, the *final* product of the process. This fact requires a focus on the health of the soil and a diversity of products.

Small-scale farming is more labor-intensive than capital intensive. Since the farm product is sold directly to the consumer (or nearly so), the keys to success are quality, freshness, flavor, ripeness, and season extension with product variety.

Rather than depend on a single variety, this kind of farming relies on developing many varieties with different features to suit the climate, soils, and tastes of the region.

Because farm products are sold directly to consumers, farmers are innovative in their approach to trying new products and new marketing methods. Rather than “yield” which is how much of a single crop can be harvested from an acre, the relevant measure is *total* agricultural output per acre. Small-scale farms by this measure greatly out-produce industrial farms and farmers earn a much higher percentage of the food dollar.

Entrepreneurial farming is a high profit margin business.

Rich Pirog of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University has published several studies using USDA data to estimate how far food travels to reach our kitchens from where it was grown. In 1998, he estimated that the average food molecule traveled 1,500 miles from farm to table. Given the rapid globalization of food production, that distance is probably growing.



Embracing the New Entrepreneurial Farming Model

Covered Bridge Gardens

Steve Prochko is a fourth-generation farmer in Ashtabula County. With a degree in dairy science from Delaware Valley College in Pennsylvania, he had planned to return to his family's farm to milk cows. But while he was in school, he met a friend who was growing vegetables for farmers markets. In 1993, his parents had entered into a partnership that included 1,000 acres and about 600 head of cattle. But the typical commodity business of selling milk and growing beans and corn was not working out. Steve suggested that they take a look at fruits and vegetables for direct sales.

Mick and Kay, Steve's parents, were soon selling their products at six different markets and to several restaurants. "I learned very quickly that I want nothing to do with commodity business," says Mick. Growing for markets is a very different business. "We are working with our land, putting in more tiling, adding a greenhouse to extend the season. Our biggest reward comes from our customers. They are really a hoot! They come out on the last day of the market and thank us for bringing them all this food."

"People have gotten so far away from producing food; they have no idea what it takes."

Covered Bridge Gardens now generates about 85% of its revenue from what the Prochkos call "retail farming." They welcome visitors to the farm and offer U-pick vegetables in season, but most of their business comes from markets. Mick would



Photo courtesy of Prochko family

like to see more high-quality markets in the region. They offer the opportunity, not only to sell, but also to educate the public and build relationships with consumers. "People have gotten so far away from producing food; they have no idea what it takes. They expect food to be nearly free."

The markets offer Steve an opportunity to experiment with uncommon breeds of vegetables and fruits and learn from customer reaction. More importantly, retail farming is a way to make a living as a farmer! And Kay is thrilled that her son has returned to the farm. ■



Kay and Steve Prochko

Photo by Adrian Achtermann



Carmel Hill Farm

When Michael and Amy Courtney arrived in Cleveland in 1995, they certainly could have been poster children for the new technology economy that many hope for in Northeast Ohio. Both have PhD's: Amy's in medical engineering from Harvard University landed her a job at the Cleveland Clinic in biomedical research; and Michael's in atomic physics from M.I.T. led him to Cisco Systems, Inc. But as their family grew (the couple now has four children ranging in age from four to eight years old) their dreams of a different life took hold.

The name of their neighboring farm sums it up, Free Indeed Farm. Amy and Michael have built a successful farming business over the past ten years and left their "high tech," "high pressure" jobs for a life that is closer to home. Free Indeed is a 100 acre farm owned by a not-for-profit Christian ministry in Twinsburg Township in Summit County, one of only 370 farms in the county. Amy and Michael own five acres nearby, Carmel Hill Farm. Much of the harvest from Free Indeed goes into Amy's kitchen where salsas, juices, jams, and sauces are bottled for sale at farmers markets. These "value-added" products not only increase profitability, but also provide year-round income.

The Courtneys carefully track margins on all their products and continuously add new ones, or eliminate products that do not do well. "One of our guiding principles was not to go into debt," says Amy. "So we try most things on a small scale, but half of what you try fails," adds Michael. With Amy's professional laboratory experience, they test new products all the time. And direct contact with customers at the farmers market helps them find new opportunities. But even if a product is popular, it might disappear if the margins aren't there, such as the lamb bratwurst. "Raising sheep didn't work as well for us because of the characteristics of the land and the yield from lambing."

Naturally fed beef, on the other hand, has been highly successful. "We are able to

average over \$2.00 a pound, hanging weight, which is fantastic!" In addition to the steaks, roasts, and ground beef they sell at the farmers market, they sell ½- and ¼-pound patties to restaurants. Unlike most beef sold in stores or restaurants, the Courtney's beef graze in pastures, are not fed growth hormones, and do not need antibiotics to fight disease. Since they raise only beef cattle, the Courtneys do not sell meat from aging dairy cattle.

Recent "mad cow" disease scares and revelations about large scale meat production, have increased public concerns over food safety. A survey of Ohioan's attitudes about

food, published in January by The Ohio State University Social Responsibility Initiative, revealed that over 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "food is not as safe as it was 10 years ago." These concerns, coupled with increasing awareness of the health benefits of grass-fed beef have led to an increasing demand for beef that has been raised without chemicals and allowed to graze.

Jo Robinson, author and expert on the nutritional and environmental benefits of grass-fed beef, explains both the dangerous practices of industrial beef production and the health benefits of small-scale, grass-fed



Amy Courtney with a customer

Photo by Adrian Achtermann

beef production in her book, *Pasture Perfect*. People who worried about mad cow disease, *E. coli* bacteria, and high levels of growth hormones and antibiotics in beef, have been astounded to learn that meat from pastured cattle is not only free of these dangers, but is also more nutritious and better tasting!

Michael Pollen's 2002 *New York Times Magazine* cover story, "This Steer's Life," made a startling assertion: cattle were not designed to eat corn! They certainly were not designed to be processed through enormous feedlots where antibiotics keep disease in check and hormone implants stimulate growth. They were designed to be highly efficient converters of grass and water to protein. Research now confirms that the protein from grass-fed beef has significantly more vitamin E, beta-carotene, omega-3 fatty acids, and other important nutrients than the protein from feedlot beef.



Ed and Cheri May Photo by Mary Holmes

Jo Robinson's Web site, <www.eatwild.com>, lists 25 farms in Ohio where consumers can purchase grass-fed beef. But this list may be only the tip of an iceberg as small-scale farmers find that they cannot meet demand from their existing customers. Ed and Cheri May built their dream home on 10 acres of rolling farmland in Medina about ten years ago. The Mays got into raising grass-fed Angus beef after they retired. They currently have 11 head of beef, and will soon add five more calves because they have their own bull and breed their own.

Most of the May's customers hear about their business from others and buy ¼, ½ or a whole animal. Most are repeat

customers, but every year the Mays pick up a few more. "There is definitely more demand than we can satisfy," says Cheri. Like the Courtneys, they are able to get \$2.00 to \$2.50 per pound hanging weight. Because they breed their own animals and grow their own hay on a neighbor's farmland, they can realize as much as an \$800 profit on each animal. Compared to Michael Pollen's \$27 return on his feedlot steer, this is an impressive return on investment. Compared with the average return on an animal coming out of a feedlot, which according to Cattle-Fax, a market research firm, has been \$3 per head over the past 20 years, it is incredible!

Concentration of U.S. Food Production

2% of farms produce 50% of all agricultural products

80% of beef processing is owned by four firms

60% of pork processing is owned by four firms

In 1990 there were 2,500 poultry producers, in 2005, there are fewer than 300.

Source: USDA's Economic Research Service and *Pasture Perfect*

Tea Hills Organic Farms

Pastured beef is not the only food that's better from the small-scale farm. Jo Robinson's description of her visit to a contract poultry producer makes it clear why eating chicken from factory farms may be hazardous to your health. Such production methods are certainly hazardous to the environment. Pastured chickens, on the other hand, like grass-fed beef, have less fat, more omega-3 fatty acids, richer flavor, and no arsenic residue in their bones. Doug Raubenolt of Tea Hills Organic Farms wouldn't raise them any other way.

Doug and his wife, Susan, successfully achieved organic certification on their 230-acre farm three years ago. But his family has farmed on land just south of Wayne County since the 1800s. They moved to pasture farming 10 years ago and built an ODA-approved processing plant for chickens. They sell to restaurants and at farmers markets. Says Doug, "I

love selling the final product directly to customers. The greatest reward for me has been getting me off the farm to meet people like Chef Michael Simon and the friends we have made at the markets." Tea Hills will process about 30,000 birds a year through its plant, 12-13,000 of its own fowl. Doug and Susan buy their chicks from a farmer in Oceola, Ohio. In 2005, they added ducks, turkeys, and a new breed of chicken, La Belle Rouge. "I don't want to raise more than that because I am a farmer, not a processor," says Doug.

Tea Hills can charge a premium price for their products because customers know they are getting an extremely fresh, tasty, premium quality product.

Tea Hills can charge a premium price for their products because customers know they are getting an extremely fresh, tasty, premium quality product. While the American food system is moving toward more concentration of mass production methods, Doug has as much demand for his pastured chickens as he can meet. And it all started with his decision to take care of his most precious resource, his soil. ■



Photo courtesy of Tea Hills Organic Farms



Photo by Mary Holmes

Saving the Soils & Saving Farming

Cormack's Market Garden

If you are lucky enough to catch Bruce Cormack during a lull in business at the North Union Farmers Market, you will quickly learn about his passion for soil. Bruce and his wife, Shelly, own just three acres of sandy loam in Mentor in Lake County, surrounded by housing developments, but when Bruce talks about his gardens, you'd think he had gold, instead of a sliver of prehistoric ocean bottom.

"These soils are so unique," he says, digging down between the rows of lettuces to show off the sandy, yet rich earth. "This soil drains so well, we work it early in the spring and have lettuce by the middle of April."

Bruce does not consider himself a farmer. He has a full-time job as a firefighter in another city. But he has a passion for growing and had just joined the Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association (OEFFA) in 1995 when he heard about the new farmers market in Shaker Square. He was there on the first day and has continued every summer since. With a 3,500-square-foot poly house, he starts his plants early and sells at the market through June. He produces about 5,000 heads of lettuce, 800 bunches of onions, and hundreds of other spring vegetables. He averages up to \$1,000 of sales on a good day at the farmers market.

At one time, the entire area along Lake Erie had highly successful farms including one of the largest celery growing areas of the country. Now, the coast is nearly completely developed. Bruce points to a new housing development right next door, "Sometimes people from over there will come and look over the fence at my gardens, but they have no idea what they are looking at or what their homes are built on. On the other side of the road, there is muck land, another unique soil. It can't be replaced, but maybe little patches can be saved." Bruce owns a book, *Gardening for Profit*, originally published in 1867 by Peter Henderson, a Scottish immigrant whose treatise was based on 20 years of experience as a market grower

in New Jersey. Bruce's ideas about successful market gardening are confirmed in this handbook, subtitled, "A Guide to the Successful Cultivation of the Market and Family Garden." The 1991 reprinted edition opens with stories of new market gardeners, some even in inner city locations who are making substantial profits from market gardens.

**"It's not
about farming
full-time, it's about
preserving farming."**

Casey Hoy, Professor in the Department of Entomology at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in

Wooster, heartily agrees with the market gardening approach. Professor Hoy reminds us that only for a short period in American history did most farmers work the land full-time. Farming can add extra income for a family and provide much desired local fruits and vegetables. "It's not about farming full-time, it's about preserving farming," he says. Bruce agrees, and would like to see more opportunities for folks to have access to land for gardening. He suggests that we look at The Intervale, a nonprofit 700-acre farm in Burlington, Vermont as a possible model for Northeast Ohio.

The Intervale Web site <www.intervale.org> offers this intriguing message, "At The Intervale...we are discovering that reconnecting people, food, and nature is an astounding way to preserve natural resources, strengthen community, and create a road map to a sustainable future."



Cormack's Market Garden

Photo by Mary Holmes

Several projects in our region include elements similar to The Intervale's efforts. One is the Green Corps, a youth gardening program sponsored by Cleveland Botanical Garden. This summer will be the 11th season for Green Corps students to learn how to raise fruits and vegetables for market at



Photo by Ian Adams. Courtesy of Cleveland Botanical Garden Green Corps.

two gardens in the City of Cleveland. From the 3-acre garden plots at Dunham Tavern and the Esperanza Gardens on the city's west side, Green Corps gardeners have harvested everything from sweet cherries to carrots, tomatoes, beets, peppers, herbs, eggplants and more for sale at farmers markets. They created a salsa product from tomatoes, peppers, and herbs one season and now buy extra ingredients from farmers to make over 7,000 jars of salsa to sell all year long in local grocery stores. In 2004, their salsa sales totaled nearly \$12,000!

Learning how to grow food, harvesting it for sale, and creating value-added products are the hallmarks of a successful "Gardening for Profit" program. In the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), another effort is underway with aspects similar to The Intervale. The Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy (CVCC) is a nonprofit cooperating partner of the CVNP established in 1999 to help conceptualize and manage a program to revitalize the Park's rural landscape. This program, called the Countryside Initiative, seeks to rehabilitate and revitalize approximately 20 to 25 of the picturesque old farms which operated in the Valley from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The farms will be leased to individuals, but sustainable farming practices required by the lease agreements will encourage contact with the public through participation in farmers markets, Pick Your Own operations, Community Supported Agriculture, and Restaurant Supported Agriculture. ■

Harold Hartzler

Taking Risks Since 1964

Harold Hartzler has been farming long enough in Wayne County to represent the old, the new, and the renewed face of farming. In 1954, he eagerly accepted the new chemicals that were being developed and promoted to "modernize" American farming. But it didn't take long for him to discover the way these chemicals damaged his land, crops, and livestock. The land was becoming hard, his calves were dying, and the earthworms nearly vanished.



The Hartzler family in 2005

After ten years, in 1964, Harold and his family took an enormous leap of faith. They decided to stop using petrochemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides on their dairy farm. Harold also realized, like so many other entrepreneurial farmers after him, that the health and economic success of his farm depended on the health of his soil.

"It only took me a few years to get my worms back," Harold says proudly. "Their castings (manure) have five times more nitrogen, seven times more phosphorous, and 11 times more potassium than the soil does before they process it. They are like having a fertilizer factory on your property for free. That lowly, little worm works day and night — while I'm sleeping," he laughs.

Then, on New Year's Day 1990, Harold brought the family together again to announce another heartfelt decision: going retail. Their chemical-free milk was unique in the region, why not bottle it and sell it themselves? The Hartzler Family Dairy was born.

Besides the usual logistics of starting a new business, there was a formidable health department rule

book whose guidelines had to be learned and implemented. Property was located and cleared by the family. Construction then began on a facility that would house a milk processing plant and an Ice Cream Shoppe. The Hartzlers also located and purchased used dairy equipment from farmers in Pennsylvania who had quit the business.

Today, all six Hartzler children and their families are involved with aspects of the dairy business. Nearly 75 stores in the region carry their products. And another young farmer, James Falb (see back cover), brings the Hartzler Family Dairy to the farmers market in Shaker Square. As with most entrepreneurial farmers, successful farming business begins with care for the soil. ■

*Portions of this profile were taken from the Hartzler Family Dairy
Web site: <www.hartzlerfamilydairy.com>*

Connecting People with the Land — Community Supported Agriculture

Crown Point

In 1998, the Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron who own the 130-acre Crown Point Ecology Center in Bath Township added a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) component to the 10-acre section they were using to grow food for the Akron/Canton Regional Foodbank. It is the only CSA in Summit County. The idea of Community Supported Agriculture started in Japan in the 1960s when a group of mothers who were concerned about loss of local food sources sought out farmers with whom they could partner to grow food for them in exchange for financial commitment. Today, the CSA movement in the U.S. has grown to over 1,000 farms according to Local Harvest, a Web site that tracks CSAs and farmers markets. <www.LocalHarvest.org>



The idea of the CSA is simple. A farm estimates how much food can be produced in a growing season. That food is divided into family "shares." Families then agree to pay for shares before the growing season and often agree to volunteer with the harvest as well. Then, each week of the summer, the family receives a box of farm produce either delivered to their home, a drop off location, or at the farm.

In 2005, 70 members of the Crown Point CSA paid \$475 to \$575 each for a share of the harvest and agreed to work at the farm for 3 to 30 hours depending on their financial commitment. In return, the families will pick up a weekly box of vegetables from May 1st to November 1st. About 20,000 pounds of food will be produced at the farm in 2005, half of which will be donated to the Foodbank. For the sisters, Crown Point is all about protecting and restoring the earth. For the members of the CSA, it is also about reconnecting to the land, the growing season, and the source of their food. A recent article in *USA Today*, about the growth in CSA farms described the deep relationships that develop between families and farmers. Crown Point is no different. Even though the number of shares has increased each year since starting the program, there are only about six to eight new shares available each year because most participants return. Tim Hite, Crown Point's Advancement Assistant said, "This year we had about 100 people on a waiting list for the eight open slots."

The Web site, <www.csacenter.org>, lists 33 CSA's in Ohio, 12 of which are in the Northeast Ohio region.

Is there room for more CSA farming in Northeast Ohio? The Countryside Conservancy Director, Darwin Kelsey, believes there is. "One of the four new farms we will be leasing this summer will be a CSA farm. We expect to pick up many members from the Crown Point waiting list and will probably soon have a waiting list of our own. We are committed to rebuilding sustainable farming and local food systems and we believe the CSA is one effective way to do that."

Running a successful CSA farm is not for everyone. Having a diversity of crops, dealing with members, harvesting enough produce on schedule are all serious challenges. But for those who succeed, the rewards are immeasurable, not only financially, but in the community that is built and nourished. ■



Photo courtesy of Crown Point

Farmers Markets

One good way for a farmer to make the transition to retail farming is to participate in a local farmers market. In 2001, a comprehensive food regulation bill was passed in Ohio that defined what a farmers market is: "a location where producers congregate to offer fruits, vegetables and other items for sale." In a world of confusion about food, this definition is important because it stipulates that it is the *producer* who is the *seller*.



Patty Saal Photo by Adrian Achtermann

This essential feature of a farmers market assures the consumer that the products are indeed from local farms. It also protects farmers from competition by people who buy produce at the Cleveland Food Terminal or a produce auction and resell it. In California, farmers who participate in farmers markets must certify that they grow what they sell. In the successful farmers markets in Northeast Ohio, farmers sign a contract and are subject to farm inspections to guarantee that they grow what they sell.

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FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers markets are hotbeds of innovation and community revitalization. This ancient institution of free exchange between producer and customer is being rediscovered and reinvented across the country. According to USDA statistics, the number of farmers markets nationwide has grown 15% in the last two years! And the number of farmers markets in Northeast Ohio has tripled in the last decade.



Photo by Adrian Achtermann

What do farmers markets do for the economy? The Northeast Ohio Foodshed Network estimates that for every dollar spent on local food purchases, \$1.94 to \$3.98 additional dollars flow into the local economy. Depending on the number of participants and length of the market season, even a relatively small farmers market can generate close to \$½ million in sales per year. The Greenmarkets in New York City are estimated to generate sales of \$40 million a year!

John Ellerman, executive director of the Ohio Farmers Union estimates that sales at farmers markets in Ohio were somewhere in the neighborhood of \$35 to \$40 million last year. As a percent of total food expenditures in the state, that figure is negligible. But it represents a significant addition to net cash farm income which averaged \$8,929

per farm in 2002. Depending on the season and the type of products they offer, farmers are able to sell \$500 to \$1,500 worth of product in a market day. Many successful market farmers are now able to attend several markets a week for 12 to 30 weeks. Participating in farmers markets, then, can add a significant amount to farm income. Unlike food purchased at the grocery store which returns on average about 10% to the farmer, all of this income goes to the farmer and circulates back into the local economy as farmers employ help and buy equipment and supplies.

Brad Masi, executive director of the Ecological Design Innovation Center in Oberlin estimates that the dollar value of food consumed in the home in our region is well over \$6 billion annually. Capturing even a small percentage of that spending would significantly increase local farm income.

But it is not only farmers who benefit from farmers markets. Project for Public Spaces, a New York City based nonprofit has studied the impact of public markets and farmers markets on communities for 35 years. Successful markets can stimulate neighborhood revitalization. The Pike Place Market in Seattle and the Greenmarkets in New York City are well-known examples of markets that have added a unique vibrancy to a once rundown part of a city. But the impact of smaller farmers markets is no less significant. The beauty of flowers and plants, the anticipation of what is in season and available this week, the fragrance of strawberries or peaches, and the conviviality all contribute to a sense of community connection between sellers and buyers.

According to several national surveys of customers at farmers markets, a majority of customers tend to be frequent or regular visitors to the market. While successful





Photo by Adrian Achtermann

...a relatively small farmers market can generate close to \$½ million in sales per year.

markets may appear to be a random collection of farmers, they are actually highly managed organizations that guarantee that the products are from local farms, that sellers are in the same location each week, that activities like chef demonstrations are organized, and that there is enough mix of product. These elements are designed to keep customers coming back each week. People often visit their local farmers market with friends and family. The weekly trip to the market can involve not only shopping at the market, but coffee or a meal nearby. It can include a trip to the grocery store for those items not available at the market. It's not uncommon for a bakery or coffee shop to open near a market. A successful market will draw pedestrians to an area where they feel safe, have fun, and want to return. For both the customer and the farmer the weekly visit to the market is an experience of connection and affection — a powerful way to fight urban sprawl!

In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam argues that communities with high social capital are better off in measurable ways than those with low social capital. And he defines social capital as a high degree of civic connectedness among unrelated people, not friendship or kinship. If this is true, then a farmers market is a powerful way to build social capital and it is no wonder it was around the marketplace that democracy was born. ■

“Farmers markets and public markets are bringing new vitality to thousands of communities and farms across the country. The number of farmers markets in the United States has increased dramatically from some 1,755 markets in 1994 to over 3,700 in 2004. Over three million consumers shop at these markets, where an estimated 30,000 small farmers and food entrepreneurs earn a partial or full living selling their local products. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has projected roughly \$1 billion in consumer spending in urban, suburban and rural farmers markets.”

— From Project for Public Spaces email invitation to a hearing on farmers markets in Washington, D.C.



Medina Farmers Market



Rosby's Greenhouse and Berry Farm

Photo by Mary Holmes

Before the advent of refrigerated trucks and centralized markets that distributed the country's food to grocery chains, the farmers market was the predominant method of distributing food from farm to household. Patty Saal, a fourth-generation farmer on 133-acres in Mogadore, just east of Akron in Portage County, has a black and white photo on her kitchen wall of the Beaver Street Market in Akron where her husband's grandfather took his peppers and cabbages for sale. The photo features over 100 farmers with their wagons and horses.

Walnut Drive Gardens was exclusively wholesale and pick your own (with a farm market) until 1996 when Patty discovered the North Union Farmers Market in Shaker Square. She was skeptical at first, but when customers started standing in line to buy her vine-ripened tomatoes, she knew she was onto something. After her first short season, Patty added strawberries, peppers, cantaloupes, sweet corn, and much more to her market table, extending her season and adding additional markets.

In January of 2004, Patty's son, Chris, officially bought the farm from his parents to become the fifth generation of Saals to own it. Patty and Chris sell at four of the five North Union markets. Revenue from the farmers markets accounts for a significant part of the business and has grown steadily each year. As a bonus, customers from the markets come out to the farm to

pick their own produce. By participating in the farmers markets the Saals have helped the "U-Pick" part of their business.

Before the advent of refrigerated trucks and centralized markets that distributed the country's food to grocery chains, the farmers market was the predominant method of distributing food from farm to household.

Other U-Pick farms have benefited from selling at farmers markets as well. Rosby's Greenhouse and Berry Farm is one of a handful of farms in Cuyahoga County. Nestled on 70 acres in an ethnic residential neighborhood in Brooklyn Heights that

was once filled with greenhouses, Rosby's has experienced many changes over the years. At one time, it was a cucumber farm for pickles. About 25 years ago, Bill Rosby planted raspberries. Now there are 16 acres devoted to raspberries and strawberries, a greenhouse with bedding plants and flowers, and a construction reclamation business in the back. Scott Gordon joined the company a few years ago to manage the retail side of the business. He decided to try the farmers market. "It's completely changing how I think about our products. Before, we were simply open for people to come and pick, and lots of berries were wasted. Now we pick like mad to get ready for market. We discovered that people will buy frozen raspberries. And that's a value-added business for us. We are also getting people who found out about us at the market, to come out and pick!"

Rosby's is not the only farm to experience a major change in business after selling at a farmers market. Ed and Betty Frank tried for years to persuade the City of Canton to start a farmers market where they could sell their exceptional sweet corn and potatoes. "Where we are in Tuscarawas County, people want to pay \$2.00 for a ten pound bag of potatoes. It's not worth the effort to grow it," said Betty. Donita Anderson, manager of the North Union Farmers Markets, told the Franks she could not take on another farmer with corn and potatoes, but if they wanted to research and grow the





Photo by Adrian Achtermann

fingerlings, blues, and other gourmet potatoes she would take them on. Not really knowing what they were getting into, the Franks invested in gourmet seed potatoes, which they discovered had to be hand-cultivated! The hard work paid off when they arrived at the market on Bastille Day with red, white, and blue potatoes. At the market, customers stand in line to pay \$3 a pint for potatoes and \$5 for a dozen ears of corn! ■

FARMERS MARKETS ARE FULL OF ENTREPRENEURS!

Farmers markets are full of entrepreneurs! Unlike producers who grow commodities to be shipped to distant customers, these farmers are face to face every week with the folks who buy what they labor to grow. Michael Hamper from Jefferson in Ashtabula County has had the experience since 1995 when he started selling in Shaker Square. "I wanted to be certified organic from the very beginning," says Michael. "It takes a mountain of work, but

pork to Cherry Valley to be butchered because I know I get my own meat back." In response to customers over the years, Michael has added bacon, sausages, grass-fed beef, and heirloom tomatoes to the host of vegetables he sells from his 5-acre farm.

According to the Organic Trade Association, the market for organic products is projected to grow at a five-year compound annual rate of 21.4% between 2002 and 2007.

When a fire destroyed their house in 1987, they had to sell the livestock and move to town while they rebuilt the house. They built a greenhouse and started raising starter plants for sale and vegetables that they took to the Homerville auction. "They treated us like organic was a disease. We were the only organic grower and we were cutting our beans with scissors," says Sharon. "We were getting \$7.00 a bushel while the nonorganic growers were getting \$14.00! We were getting \$2.00 a box for peppers and the box cost a \$1.00! It was crazy."



Michael Hamper and Sharon Patterson committed to organic farming. Photos by Mary Holmes



At farmers markets, the Pattersons get \$2.00 a quart for beans. They also sell beans, heirloom tomatoes, beets, peppers and many more vegetables at the farmers market. They also offer fresh rainbow trout and yellow perch harvested from their ponds. "We don't sell that much fish, but it draws people to our table and they buy other things." Jim's biggest problem is getting the proper licenses to sell his fish. "The folks in Reynoldsburg tell me I need a mobile food license from my county agency. My county board of health tells me I have what I need and they won't give me a mobile license. Different cities have different rules, depending on which markets I go to. It's ridiculous!"

it pays off in so many ways...rebuilding the soil, offering a high-quality product. When you are doing retail sales, your customer is looking right at you...I have earned their trust and now I am considering not recertifying. The process and the paperwork are overwhelming. But I will still produce my products in the same chemical-free way. I take my

This consumer demand represents a tremendous opportunity for Ohio farmers.

Jim and Sharon Patterson also made a commitment to organic methods from the start. They moved to their 43-acre farm in Sullivan, just south of Lorain County in 1983 and started raising hogs and sheep.

John Christoph, in the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Division has been working with regional health officials to explain the rules, but clearly more work needs to be done. ■

Turning Passion into Profits

Killbuck Valley Mushrooms

Drive slowly as you descend into Killbuck Valley, just south of Burbank, Ohio. You will want to savor the feeling of entering a magical glen. As you drive across the valley floor, the wooded hills that surround it close in around you, giving a feeling of safety and warmth.



Tom Wiandt grew up in this valley and even though he went to Cornell University for his mechanical engineering degree, he knew he wanted to return. He and his wife, Wendy, a medical technologist, met in high school and had conventional jobs when they were first married.

After Tom's parents built a new house, Tom and Wendy rented the family home and 46 acres from them. They hunted wild mushrooms for fun and dreamed about one day starting their own enterprise. In 1999, they took the plunge.

With Wendy's laboratory experience and Tom's ability to build anything, they set out to raise mushrooms to sell at the Wooster farmers market. By 2005 they were selling to about 20 restaurants, a half dozen grocery stores, and several farmers markets in Cleveland as well as Wooster. Wendy estimates that they sell about 200-300 pounds of mushrooms a week.

"I love going to the farmers markets," says Wendy, "because we can teach people how to use our mushrooms." They now offer

five different types of oyster mushrooms, shiitake mushrooms and lion's mane. All the mushrooms are grown in controlled environments in small barns on their farm. Tom constructed the machine to fill plastic tubing with sterilized rye grain and straw, the perfect medium for growing mushrooms. The bags are "seeded" with the oyster mushroom mycelium that Wendy has cultured in her lab and in about three weeks, beautiful grey, yellow, blue, and white oyster mushrooms are ready to pick and take to market.

"We have the freshest mushrooms you can buy, says Tom, "because we pick them just before the market or restaurant delivery." Customers appreciate the freshness and flavor. They gladly pay \$7.50 a pound for them. Keeping up with demand seems to be the biggest problem.

"And, of course, there is no day off!" sighs Wendy. "Still there is so much pride in knowing that we are doing this ourselves." Wendy and Tom have purchased the family home they were renting and are now looking to acquire more land. They even have a vacation in the works. Independence and the ability to turn passion into profits make all the work worthwhile. ■



Help for Entrepreneurial Farmers

If farmers markets help to revitalize communities and entrepreneurial farming is profitable farming, why is agriculture not generally part of our long-term economic development planning efforts? First, most farming in our region is still commodity farming. The single biggest challenge for farmers market organizers is finding enough farmers to participate. Second, entrepreneurial farming does not look like traditional farming to the institutions that support agriculture with research and subsidies. Finally, economic development agencies do not typically consider farming as part of economic development. More must be done to educate civic leaders and policy makers about the potential for new food enterprises that can emerge from small-scale farms.

One success story in southern Ohio is ACEnet, an economic development agency started in 1992 to foster new business in rural communities. The Food Ventures part of the enterprise offers courses, a certified kitchen, thermal-processing and other support to enable over 100 farmers near Columbus to make 70 to 80 different product lines.

Many entrepreneurial farmers interviewed for this report indicated that food handling regulations are a stumbling block to their business success. Last year, Anne Hauser, gave up her successful goat cheese making operation in New London, Ohio. Her customers were heartbroken, but the effort combined with the cost and complexity of EPA and State health regulations was just too much in spite of growing demand for her cheese from consumers and restaurants.

Dave Raubenolt, who has a federal exemption for his chicken processing plant, says that a major issue for him is continuing to fight to maintain his exemption and deal with inspectors.



David Miller, of Miller Orchards in Amherst, Ohio, was building a cider press when new Ohio health regulations were enacted, making it too expensive to proceed. David, his wife, Sandy, and his brother, Roger, are fourth-generation farmers on a 500-acre orchard in Amherst, in Lorain County. They raise 40 varieties of apples because variety is essential to cover the season from spring to fall as well as protect from disease and other kinds of failures to which monocultures are susceptible. They also raise plums, peaches, nectarines, pears, apricots and sweet and sour cherries. In addition to a roadside stand they offer U-Pick. In the fall, school children and families visit PumpkinLand. "Our customers wanted cider, but it became too difficult to meet the safety requirements," Dave said.

Testifying before the New York Assembly this spring, Billy Best, executive director of The Regional Food and Farm Project in upstate New York, described it this way, "Our food processing regulations discriminate against small farms in favor of large factories, as though large batch production were inherently safer than small batch production, which we know it is not."

Americans are encouraged to believe that the American food system is the best in the world because the percentage of personal income we spend on food is so low. In 2003, Americans spent on average more money on gambling than they did on food! Or, for another comparison, the average American earns enough money in 40 working days to pay for a year's worth of food. By contrast it takes the average American 124 days to earn enough to pay federal, state and local taxes for one year.

But there is a direct correlation between these two facts since the hidden costs of our "cheap" food include nearly \$20 billion of taxpayer dollars in annual farm subsidies (none of which goes to farmers growing fruits and vegetables), environmental clean-up costs from the pollution of water, soil and air from the massive uses of pesticides and fertilizers, and the costs of regulating and inspecting industrial food production. In addition, there have been the social costs of the dislocation of over 7 million farm families over the past 35 years. While some celebrate the modern efficiency that makes it possible for Americans to produce all the food we need, plus exports, with only 2 million farmers, we should look more closely at the skills of land stewardship, animal husbandry, horticulture, viticulture, and more, and mourn the loss of farmers with those skills.

Help for Entrepreneurial Farmers



Parker Bosley

Today, significant support for the "local food" movement is coming from chefs. Parker Bosley, owner of Parker's New American Bistro is the region's first and most committed advocate of local foods. He started a farmers market in Cleveland's warehouse district in the late 1980's and now works with the North Union Farmers Market to find and support new farmers as well as educate consumers about the benefits of local foods. He believes consumers deserve much more voice in the kinds of foods they want to buy. And as a celebrated chef, he is well aware of food safety techniques for small production.

Chefs like Karen Small of Flying Fig, Andy Strizak chef at Parker's, Joe Walzer of Black River Café in Oberlin and Michael Ollier chef at Wooster's South Market Bistro not only buy products from local farmers, but also identify the names of the farms on their menus. By exposing their customers to local farm products, chefs offer the forgotten flavors and textures of vine-ripened fruits, pastured meats and dairy, heirloom tomatoes and potatoes and much more. Consumers who eat at restaurants where local farm products are used, who shop at farmers markets and roadside stands, or who participate in CSAs provide the demand these farms need to be successful.



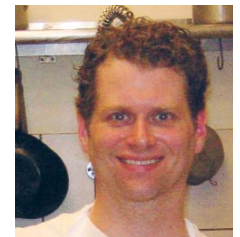
Karen Small



Andy Strizak



Joe Walzer



Michael Ollier

So far, it would seem that none of the discussions around regionalism in Northeast Ohio have looked at the potential savings and increased revenues available if there was a regional food policy that encouraged and supported entrepreneurial farming. For example more small meat and poultry processing plants would make it easier for more farmers to raise pastured animals. And such plants provide jobs in rural communities. The same is true for dairy products like artisan cheeses, for which there is a growing demand. Establishing a certified kitchen incubator in our region could have a similar positive effect in encouraging more farmers to develop value-added local foods, such as those being created at ACEnet.



Photo by Adrian Achtermann

Going Beyond Food

Entrepreneurial farmers are going beyond food to find creative ways to make their farms successful.

Middle Ridge Gardens

“My family starting farming for markets in 1936 when my grandparents moved out to Madison in Lake County and had 45 acres of concord grapes and 25 acres of asparagus that they took to the Central Market. They also grew 200 acres of sweet corn that they delivered to roadside stands.” Tom Woodworth’s father was one of the farmer/owners of the Coit Road Market in East Cleveland. “I started selling tomato plants at that market when I was a boy,” relates Tom. When he went to study horticulture at Ohio State University, Tom’s professor told him he should go home and do what he already knew how to do.

So on Thanksgiving Day in 1990, after enjoying their holiday dinner together, the Woodworth family helped Tom and Susan erect their first greenhouse. Now with five bays, they have an acre under cover where they grow 80 varieties of impatiens from seed, 60 varieties of petunias, 10,000 hanging baskets, 60,000 4½" pots, and 15,000 flats of flowers and vegetables! They try to introduce at least 100 new varieties each year and drop about 60, just to keep things exciting!

“We have an intense six-week selling season where we attend five farmers markets and welcome customers here. People will drive out all the way from Shaker after buying plants from us at the market there. Once a customer crammed 27 flats of impatiens into his Lexus!”

In 1999, Susan left her accounting job to join the business full-time. The Woodworths employ a number of

seasonal help and continue to grow their business. “It’s a wonderful life,” says Tom. It has had many challenges along the way, but so certain were Tom and Susan of their business model, they carved it into stone when they created the sign for their business — Middle Ridge Gardens — Retail! ■

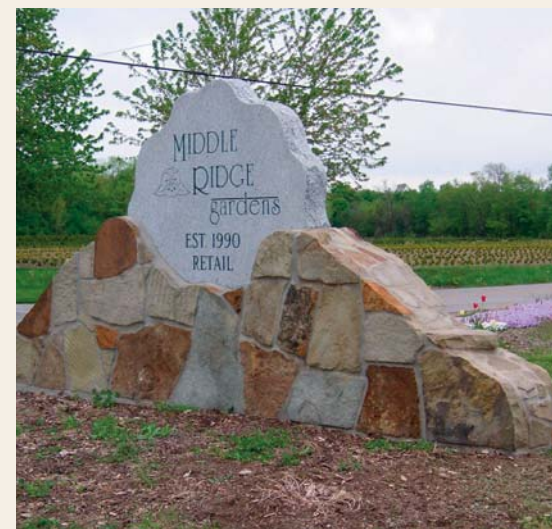


Photo by Mary Holmes

There are other promising new developments around the country that could also be successful in Northeast Ohio as well. Alice Waters, the famous chef of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, has received national attention for her “edible school-yard” program where students grow food for their cafeteria as well as buy it from local farmers. Alice recently took her idea for sourcing school food from local farmers to a national level. A new federal program, the Small Farms/School Meals Initiative, is charged with finding ways to connect local farmers with school and college cafeterias.

In the summer of 2005, the second annual National Farm to Cafeteria Conference was held at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. According to conference materials, 400 school districts in 23 states and 200 colleges and universities in the country are sourcing some of their food from local farmers. Many of these are also adding food and farming to their curriculum. A Google search on “farm to cafeteria” yields a long list of organizations, publications, and Web sites focused on this topic. The potential for farmers in our region is tremendous. ■

Ohio Prairie Nursery

When Bob Kehres was a boy, he would often take walks with a favorite aunt who would teach him about the wildflowers, birds, and butterflies that surrounded him on the trail.



These walks inspired a knowledge and love of native plants and animals as well as their seasons and life cycles. Much later in life when he became a bird watcher, Bob returned to the sites of his former walks, only to discover how many new, nonnative plants had replaced the native wildflowers he had enjoyed as a child.

After many years in industrial sales, Bob and his wife, Sandy, took the entrepreneurial plunge and started their business on 38 acres in Hiram, Ohio growing native prairie grass and wildflower seed for sale. *The Prairie Survey*

Project published in 1978 identified 300 species of grasses and wildflowers native to Ohio. Bob currently grows about 50 of those for seed. His dream is to be able to rent acres of his neighbors' farmland for seed production.

Bob speaks at many soil and water conservation district programs to explain the benefits of grass buffers and rain gardens to control storm water runoff. He meets with developers, and landscape architects to show how native grasses and wildflowers are more attractive to birds and butterflies and require lower maintenance than manicured lawns. He picked up the phone and cold called the National Wildlife Federation and has engaged them as a partner in offering Native Wildlife Habitat Gardens™ and regional seed packets to promote the creation of backyard habitats. In 2005, Bob and Sandy created a new product, a starter box of native seeds for birds and butterflies that they plan to sell to schools with an accompanying curriculum.

"I am very interested in future generations learning about native plants and animals," says Bob. "My hope is that this kind of school project will engage children in learning about and caring for plants. I would love to have programs on my farm for kids someday. At the end of the day, it's rewarding to think you're making a difference." When asked about small-scale farming, Bob is adamant, "We have to embrace it, not just here in Ohio. If we get enough farmers, we will be able to show people that it is in everybody's interest. People want to leave the world a better place." ■

Heritage Farms

Although Peninsula is less than a half hour's drive from Cleveland, it is worlds apart in terms of the peace and beauty of the rolling countryside, small town and graceful farmland of Heritage Farms.

Carol and George Haramis are the fifth generation to farm the land just south of the village on Riverview Road. A much larger farm was settled by Carol's ancestors in 1848 than the 115 acres that the family now owns. And many different types of farming have existed there over the years. "Farming has evolved over the years and we continue to evolve," says George, a self proclaimed marketer. "We are currently specializing in Christmas trees, pumpkins, and day lilies."

"I train all my help to understand that we are giving customers an experience, not just a tree or a pumpkin. People can spend a day with their family in the country and the Christmas tree is the souvenir. There are so many other things we want to do. Last year we helped to set up the Peninsula Farmers Market with Darwin Kelsey and the Countryside Conservancy in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park."

The Peninsula market sits on Riverview Road just in front of the Christmas tree fields at Heritage Farms. A wooden gazebo on one side makes a transition from market to fields and provides space for community-based groups to do fund raising or education during market hours. George makes a clear distinction between selling products directly to the end customer and the old style beans and corn farming that was the main business at Heritage Farms until the early 1960s. "I consider myself part of the entrepreneurial farming movement."



Winter at Heritage Farms

@HDA 2005

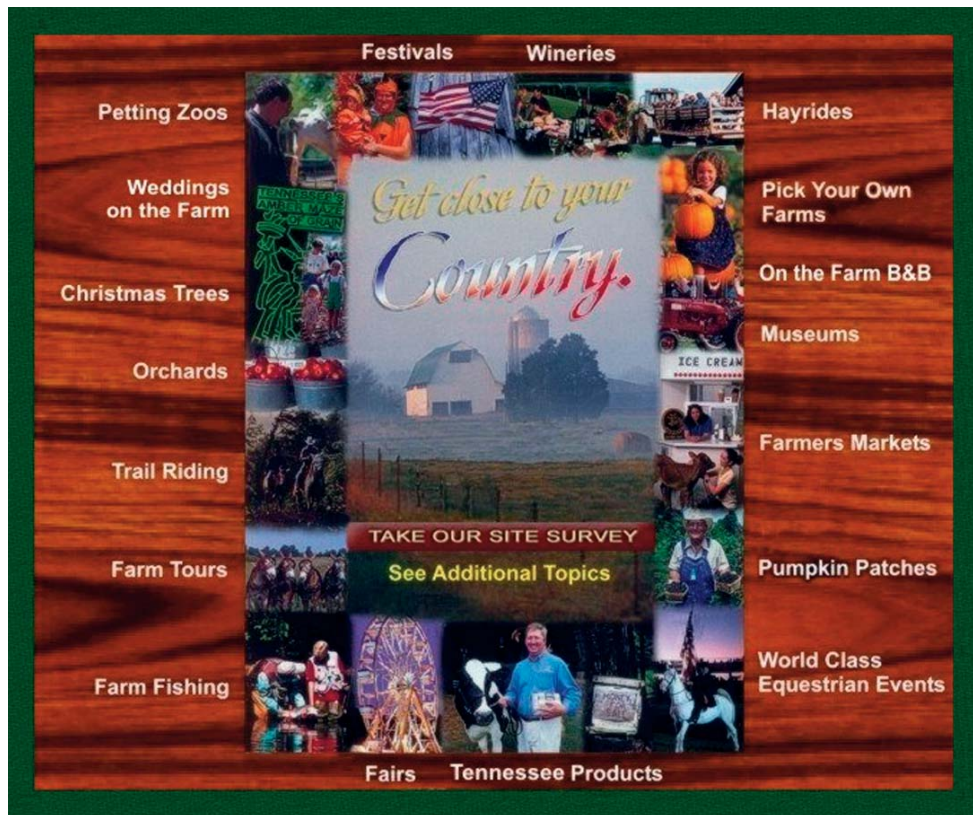
Both Carol and George agree that this entrepreneurial style farming is the way of the future for Northeast Ohio farmers. "People are looking for these kinds of experiences

and they are willing to pay for it. We generate over \$4,500 a worked acre and I can't think of a place I'd rather live — we couldn't live on this farm if we didn't farm it."

The evolution of Heritage Farms hints at another potential benefit of entrepreneurial farms in Northeast Ohio: agritourism. ■

What is agritourism?

As George Haramis points out, some Americans are beginning to seek ways to reconnect with farms. Whether it's taking the kids to cut a Christmas tree, take a hayride or pick apples, visits to farms have been part of our experience. Now some states are recognizing the economic value of their farmland for tourism. For example, log onto <www.picktnproducts.org/agritourism> to find these wonderful choices in Tennessee:



Northeast Ohio has tremendous potential to encourage agritourism. From the rolling hills of Amish country to the vineyards of Lake County to the beautiful vistas of Wayne County dairy farms, the potential for growing this activity is enormous. The Ohio Wine Producers Association Web site, <www.ohiowines.org/> describes wine regions in Ohio and lists wineries that offer tastings and restaurants that serve Ohio wines. There are 33 wineries in our region that are open to the public. It is estimated that they receive 600,000-750,000 visitors a year!

Tennessee created their agritourism Web site after completing a survey of farms that offer on-farm activities for visitors. When they added it all up, they discovered that agritourism was the 13th most important economic activity in the state with 3.5 million visitors in 2002 spending up to \$400 per visit! There are farms in Northeast Ohio that offer the same kinds of activities for visitors and families as the farms in Tennessee. It would be interesting to conduct the same kind of study to determine the important economic contribution of agritourism here. ■

Protecting Farmland

Still, at the rate farmland is being converted, much more needs to be done to keep entrepreneurial farming part of the region's future. Not all farmers want to make the transition to more profitable farming. Casey Hoy, professor of entomology at Ohio State University, says, "I know farmers here in Wayne County who grow 1,000 acres of white potatoes who are competing with farmers who have 10,000 acres in the Midwest and 50,000 acres in foreign counties. When they finally can't compete, they would rather sell their land for a golf course than try something new."

Brian Gwin, economic development director for Wayne County, explains that there are very few programs available to give retiring farmers options other than selling to developers. He hopes that the situation will change for the better soon.

Often the land conversion from farming to development is not so deliberate. Frank Ehrman, a dairy farmer in Medina County, has been a York Township trustee for 34 years. His family owns 300 acres and 50 head of milk cows. They are trying a new business making and selling compost. "Getting the permits from the state was the hardest part," says Frank. But now his most serious challenge is road rage as he tries to move his farm machinery from one farm property to another. Medina County has lost at least 11,000 acres of farmland in the past five years. And as Frank looks at his township map, marked with farms that have sold, he points to several farms around his that are owned by widows. "We are willing to try new things," he says, "but it is only a matter of time before it will become nearly impossible."

This report has focused on encouraging and sustaining profitable small-scale farming as part of the plan for prosperity in Northeast Ohio. By extension, successful farming preserves farmland. But will it be possible to preserve farmland by supporting profitable farms alone?

Kevin O'Reilly, former OSU extension agent in Portage County, clearly thinks not. The development pressures are too great, families lose interest in farming over generations, and new farmers often cannot afford to purchase land for farming. Kevin has successfully put his farm into the state

The Clean Ohio Fund

The Clean Ohio Fund was created by voter referendum in 2000. The Fund includes a \$25 million Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) for the preservation of Ohio's most valuable farmland through the purchase of development rights. During the first three years of the program (2002-2004), \$12.5 million in state funds and \$3.3 million in federal funds were allocated to purchase agricultural easements on 50 farms totaling 10,086 acres in 19 counties. To date, 1316 acres have been preserved in three Northeast Ohio counties (Geauga, Portage and Wayne counties) through the state AEPP.

In 2003 alone, U.S. taxpayers spent \$223 million in Ohio to subsidize corn and soybean production.

— The Environmental Working Group



Kevin O'Reilly

Photo by Mary Holmes

agricultural easement program, which means it will be protected from development forever. Kevin sold his development rights to the state which paid him roughly \$1,500 an acre in exchange for the promise that the land would remain in agriculture in perpetuity.

developed into 50 new homes. If we assume two school aged children per home, the cost to the local school system and the state would be \$700,000 per year at the current rate of \$7,000 per year spent by the school system for each student. This assumes that no new schools would need

Meanwhile, Kevin has taken a traditional commodity farm and created a new entrepreneurial retail business: chicken feed production. "I have four hundred customers. Most of them are Amish and my strategic advantage is that I deliver. Being in Parkman, I am close to Trumbull, Portage, and Ashtabula Counties. My biggest challenge at this point is having enough land to meet the demand — 130 acres is not enough because I need to rotate crops and grow corn, wheat, hay, oats, and soybeans."

Does it make sense to spend taxpayer dollars to keep land in farms? Kevin does a little calculation: "This land could have been

to be built. The 50 homes would probably pay on average about \$1,200 per year in property tax. That yields \$60,000 per year in property tax, then you have income tax, but you also have more demands on the local fire, police, emergency service, library, and social services. Not to mention that dirt roads would need to be paved, traffic lights installed, parks improved, and other amenities added that city folk expect.

"Even though my farm is protected, I continue to pay property taxes on my home at the full value rate. The school levy just lost for the third time, yet people keep moving here and bringing their kids." Kevin believes that taxpayers got a deal by protecting his farm and keeping it free from development forever, even though it cost the state about \$179,000 to buy the development rights. He figures that the net cost of community services for residential development would actually be greater over time.

Many Cost of Community Services studies over the past 20 years have attempted to measure the economic impact upon a community of converting farmland to residential development. While there are arguments about intangible impacts, these analyses consistently demonstrate that for every \$1.00 in increased tax revenue generated by residential development, there are associated public costs of \$1.15 to \$1.50 as compared with less than \$1.00 to keep land in agriculture. Go to www.farmland.org/ to learn more. ■

How To Grow More Entrepreneurial Farmers

Entrepreneurial farming should be an important part of our future. But it is endangered and will not survive if citizens and leaders do not act immediately.

First, we must recognize that not all farming is the same. Commodity farming can only exist with taxpayer subsidies and will become increasingly unprofitable with competition from China, Brazil, and other foreign countries. Second, Northeast Ohio has the diversity of soils and microclimates to produce on small farms an abundance of fruits, vegetables, flowers, meats, eggs, and dairy products that more and more people desire. Third, farmers who start with the stewardship of the land, are not only growing desired products, they are also conserving soils, habitats, and landscapes.

In 1979, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture published a report entitled, *A Time to Choose*, which forecast the loss of small family farms and the benefits to the community and country that they provide. In 1997, another Secretary of Agriculture published another report, *A Time to Act*, with an even more urgent plea to reverse the trends that had eliminated 300,000 small farmers in less than 20 years. There are many policies that have negatively impacted small family farms. But the single most crushing force has been the loss of local markets for their products.

If ever there were a regional issue where ordinary citizens and local civic leaders could make a difference, supporting and sustaining entrepreneurial farming is it!

A regional commitment to entrepreneurial farming benefits all segments of our society and supports prosperity in the region. Changes in state and federal policies could certainly encourage this kind of farming, but local citizens and officials can take many steps to support entrepreneurial farms.

Communities can work to establish more farmers markets, both to support farmers and revitalize their communities. This will not be easy. First, there are currently not enough entrepreneurial farmers. Second, markets require organization, promotion, and ongoing management. Organizers must restrict participants to farmers who actually grow the products they sell!



Harvesting garlic at Crown Point.

There is an opportunity for regional health officials to work together to support farmers markets and small-scale producers.

Regulations and licenses need to be clear and consistent throughout the region. Food safety should not be a matter of “home rule” decisions. Regulators could help farmers and producers provide the kinds of food like cider, artisan cheeses, meat and dairy products that consumers want in ways that are both safe and affordable. The Ohio Department of Agriculture’s John Christoph in the Food Safety Division has conducted meetings around the state to explain the various regulations and licenses that small-scale farmers and farmers market organizers need. “Our goal is to protect the consumer and protect the farmer,” he says.

Citizens who want farmland as part of the landscape of Northeast Ohio can ask all leaders running for elected office about their ideas for helping entrepreneurial farmers and conserving farmland.

There are many tools available and more to be explored by creative political leaders to give farmers a choice when it is time to retire. Most farmland in Ohio is zoned residential. Other parts of the country are looking at Agricultural Enterprise Districts. Along with Purchase of Development Rights, there are tools like Transfer of Development Rights to be considered. Even though there are many people interested in farming, the cost of land acquisition is often too high for the starting farmer. If we value this kind of farming in our region, citizens must get involved!

People who care about local, nutritious, delicious food can vote with their food dollars and shop at local farmers markets or roadside stands.

If even 1% of our regional food dollars were spent buying directly from farmers, hundreds of farm families could continue farming. Restaurants should be encouraged to buy local seasonal

produce. Institutions like local schools, hospitals, and colleges could make a significant impact on farms if they purchased local foods, flowers and other farm products.



While seven of the nine counties in our region with significant farmland include farmland preservation in their planning documents, there is little understanding of farming as economic development.

Farmland preservation tends to be treated as a conservation issue rather than an economic development issue. While many are hard at work in the region encouraging the development of new technologies to fuel our economy, it is important to recognize that farming is also becoming entrepreneurial. This new kind of farming can contribute to regional prosperity and community revitalization in many ways.

“These farms contribute to the economic viability, environmental integrity, and quality of life in Northeast Ohio...”

— Amalie Lipstreu, Program Coordinator,
The Farmland Center

Farmers who want to find more profitable farming activities can explore options for diversifying their offerings, selling direct, and adding value to their products.

The entrepreneurial farmer must be more than a good grower. Marketing, sales, new product development and business management are important aspects of the successful entrepreneurial farm.

It is crucial that we preserve the beauty and potential of our land forever. Imagine 500 farmers on an average of 50 acres producing sweet corn, tomatoes, potatoes, fruits of all kinds, root crops, greens, artisan cheeses, pastured meats, wine, syrup, honey, and flowers and selling directly to customers in the region. These dollars would stay in our region and support other businesses. Distinctive regional foods and a variety of agritourism activities could make Northeast Ohio a highly desirable place to live and visit. And 25,000 acres of prosperous farmland would enrich our landscape and feed our souls as well as our bodies. ■

The Farmland Center

To learn more about what is happening in Northeast Ohio in support of entrepreneurial farming, log on to <www.thefarmlandcenter.org>. Contact information for the entrepreneurial farmers featured in this report is available at the Web site along with resources from around the country.

Since 2000, The Farmland Center has worked to conserve farmland and foster sustainable economic and community development in Northeast Ohio through education, technical assistance and capacity building to local communities. There are a variety of alternatives that preserve farmland, protect and promote farm viability and encourage efficient use of environmental and economic resources. Contact The Farmland Center today at (330) 657-2355 to learn more.

The Farmland Center gratefully acknowledges the advisory committee for this report: Brian Gwin, Wayne County Economic Development Council; Rebecca Jones, Economic Development Director, Lorain County; Laura Ann Bergman, Innovative Farmers of Ohio; Greg Studen, Russell Township Trustee; Kevin O'Reilly, farmer; and Debbie Russell, Medina County Soil and Water District.

The Farmland Center is a project of the Western Reserve RC&D Council. The Western Reserve RC&D is a partnership of county commissioners, soil and water districts and at-large members in nine counties of Northeast Ohio. Through its programs, The Western Reserve RC&D works to promote a sustainable regional community with wild and open spaces, creeks and lakes, clean water and air, in balance with a viable mixed economy that includes agriculture, forestry, commerce, industry and tourism.

The author, Mary K. Holmes, co-founded the North Union Farmers Market in 1995 and served as its board president for eight years. She has participated in a national network of farmers market organizers and is a tireless advocate for local foods and entrepreneurial farmers.

A cautious excitement is growing in rural Northeast Ohio

as entrepreneurial farmers are finding new ways to make a living off their land. Some of their stories are told in this report. There are many more. These farmers are next-generation farmers who have come home to the farm because there is a new way to make a living there. They are highly educated young couples who have decided to use their technical skills for farm production and marketing; they are immigrants, retirees, and women. They have a passion for the land and pride in their products. You can read their stories and others at <www.thefarmlandcenter.org>.

James Falb loves cows. He proudly proclaims his Swiss and German farming parentage as a possible explanation. But it is clear in the way he talks about his herd that being a dairy farmer is what James loves to be. Growing up in Wayne county, James has worked on farms nearly all his life. Since 2002, he and his neighbors have offered Hartzler milk, chocolate milk and eggnog along with an array of seasonal vegetables, grains, eggs, and baby Swiss cheese from the Brewster Dairy at the North Union Farmers Market in Shaker Square. "I see now that things need to be consumer driven," James says.



While Leon and Annamae Wilson were living in Europe, they discovered the health benefits and market potential of currants. When they returned to their 33-acre farm in Newbury, Ohio, they set about growing currants and gooseberries. In spite of regulatory setbacks, they persisted. New York State has identified a \$20 million potential market for currants. Are the Wilsons onto something?



It was the mature asparagus patch in the back that attracted Monica Bongue to her farm in Wooster when she moved from Davis, California, with a PhD and her husband, a professor of agriculture at Ohio State University. Growing for markets, starting a CSA, raising her family on a farm, it's all part of Monica's plan. According to the latest Ohio Department of Agriculture statistics, 25% of Ohio farmers are women! ■

Entrepreneurial Farming

Part of the Plan for Prosperity in Northeast Ohio

A SPECIAL REPORT

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