

Ohio News Watch

Think local to save land

By GAIL C. KECK

THE growing demand for bioenergy added to the need for food points toward a future of opportunities for agriculture in Ohio, according to Robert Boggs, Ohio Department of Agriculture. Speaking at the recent Ohio Farmland Preservation Summit, he pledged: "We are not going to miss the future; we are going to create the future here in Ohio."

To do so, he encouraged local efforts to preserve farmland.

"We will never have a strong farmland preservation program until we build it up at the local level," he explained. The state's purchase of development rights program can't meet the needs of all the farmers who apply; many others don't bother applying because they know their chances to participate are slim.

In addition to purchasing development rights, Ohio needs more land in Agricultural Security Areas, he added. He also called for an expansion of the Current Agricultural Use Valuation program.

Farmers in every generation will need to win their own future, Boggs noted. "The

Key Points

- Local research helps direct efforts to preserve land.
- Center for Farmland Policy Innovation supports projects.
- Boggs encourages local farmland preservation efforts.

future of agriculture has never been brighter, but it might not be the agriculture our parents and grandparents practiced."

Local food Knox County

Innovative, local approaches to

protecting and promoting agriculture were reviewed during several sessions at the summit. In Knox County, for instance, researchers from Ohio State and Kenyon College have assessed the opportunities for developing the local food system.

"We're interested in the ag economic development angle," explained Jeff Sharp, associate professor, Human and Community Resource Development at Ohio State.

Using computer-modeling software, researchers looked at how changes in local food sales and processing could impact

the county's economy, Sharp explained. They concluded that Knox County is well-positioned to grow its local food system.

Not only is there existing demand from local retail outlets and institutions that buy food, but there is also an opportunity to serve regional markets and attract consumers from neighboring counties. "There's more bang for the buck focusing on both retail and production," he added.

Ag and development Clark County

Another local effort in Clark County is examining agricultural resources and finding ways to leverage those resources to develop the economy. For example, Shane Farnsworth, planning director for Clark County, explained that the 8,000 acres of farmland in the county protected by easements could be used as a marketing tool to attract businesses that rely on a stable supply of corn.

The Clark County Economic Development Team has also identified opportunities for developing aquaculture in the county, building on existing aquaculture businesses and



ROBERT BOGGS

taking advantage of the area's abundant water resources, noted Farnsworth.

Policy concerns Wayne County

In Wayne County, a team of agricultural community leaders is conducting a policy audit of area agencies. "We're looking at the policies and how they help or hinder agriculture," explained Brian Gwin, project manager for agribusiness development with the Wayne Economic Development Council.

The audit includes agencies that deal directly with farmers as well as those that have less direct interaction with agriculture. The goals are to help agricultural businesses use services that are already offered more effectively, as well as to identify policies that have become burdensome for ag businesses.

Keck writes from Marysville.



INNOVATORS: New approaches to farmland preservation were presented by Brian Gwin (left), Shane Farnsworth and Jeff Sharp.

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