

# >>> THE WAYNE COUNTY <<< AG SUCCESS TEAM

Securing farms and farmland for future generations

## WHERE TO START?

### AG SUCCESS TEAM MEET TO DISSCUSS PRIORITIES

The Ag Success Team meeting was busy in February with a series of meetings featuring special guest Julia Freedgood, Senior Fellow and Senior Program Advisor from the American Farmland Trust.

Julia is a prominent national expert in farmland protection, land tenure and access, agricultural viability, and food system planning. She has been working with Wayne County for several years as a member of OSU's 'Pathways to Prosperity' Project, a group working on examining how rural communities use public-private collaborations to create rural wealth through food and agriculture and features some information about Wayne County in her new book "Planning Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems: From Soil to Soil."

The Pathways Team last brought Julia to town in October of 2022 when she shared her insights about the outsized role agriculture plays in our community as only an "outsider", an expert, can. The figures that Julia shined light on – such as 81% of our soils being "prime" and agriculture making up 21% of the county's economy – were new to many and highlighted the importance of supporting and protecting our farms.

This time, Julia returned to Wayne to help us envision next steps.

Her time was broken into 2 sections. At the first session with the Ag Success Team, Julia and OSU Professor and Pathways Team Member, Shoshanah Inwood led an activity to identify land use and economic development priorities in the County.

Julia's work with other communities Across the country gives her insight into what works, and what doesn't. She has seen other communities find successful ways to protect farmland through a mix of land use tools and economic policies.

AST members were asked to prepare for the meeting by reading plans from other counties - one from Ohio and one from Lancaster, PA - and bring examples of things they would like to see in Wayne. Julia will use this information to develop recommendations for implementation projects over the coming months.



Julia Freedgood from American Farmland Trust presents on 2/29

# WHERE TO START (CONT.)

The next session was a special “Lunch and Learn” for Township Trustees. At this meeting, Julia explained how zoning, and other land use tools, can be used to support agriculture and protect farmland, not hinder them.

As many of these actions need to take place at the township level, it is important for Trustees to know what is possible, and that they are not alone in the process. Wayne County Planning Director, Jennifer Kiper offered support to the trustees as they develop goals for their township. “In many cases, townships could work together to share information and resources. Making these connections is important,” said Kiper.

“Development is really important and necessary, but, so is farmland, and both have to be balanced. Looking at the past is a good guide, but we must look at what is coming in the future,” Julia said.



**Planning Director, Jennifer Kiper addresses the Township Trustees**

## NOW ACCEPTING 2024 LAEPP APPLICATIONS

The Wayne County Board of Commissioners supports Farmland Preservation by participating in the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, or LAEPP. LAEPP is a program where landowners can receive up to \$2000 per acre (not to exceed our annual allocation) from the ODA in exchange for placing a permanent agricultural easement on their land.

As a Local Sponsor, Wayne County assists the ODA in finding eligible farms and helps the landowners through the application process. Because this year’s allocation (\$81,108) is lower than usual, we will be looking for very special properties to best use our available funds! Eligible properties must be at least 40 acres or be adjacent to another permanently preserved property.

If you are interested, visit [wayneohio.org/planning-department](http://wayneohio.org/planning-department) and download the “2024 LAEPP Pre-screening Questionnaire”. Landowners must submit the Questionnaire, or contact the Planning Department at [AgPlan@WayneOhio.org](mailto:AgPlan@WayneOhio.org) or 330-287-5420, no later than April 1, 2024.



# PRESERVING HISTORY

## FRIENDS OF OHIO BARNS REVIVES HISTORICAL BARN SURVEY

By the numbers, the March 1 barn survey revival at the Buckeye Agricultural Museum & Educational Center was a success with at least 79 in attendance not including speakers and volunteers. Sponsored by Friends of Ohio Barns and the Ag Success Team, the program was designed to engage the public about the importance of historic timber framed barns as well as to complete the Wayne County barn survey. Of the 16 townships, Canaan, Congress, Chippewa, Baughman, Sugar Creek, and Salt Creek Townships were not completed.

Rudy Christian and Laura Saeger, owners of Christian and Son, Inc. from Burbank kicked off the meeting. They explained the official barn survey booklet which was developed for the Wayne County barn survey and used in other communities. Rudy also talked about the importance of maintenance of historic timber framed barns and the many styles of barns which reflect the ethnicity of the families who settled Ohio.

Debbie Franks, a teacher and Wooster native said, “as we drove home to Indiana, we tried to identify the barns we saw using the survey book we purchased at the meeting.”



**Barn experts Laura and Rudy!**

Paul Locher, curator at the Buckeye Agricultural Museum talked about the Billman-Buchholz barn which is partially housed in the museum as part of the permanent collection. The structure is believed to be the oldest barn in Wayne County and dates to 1815. Before it was dismantled to make way for the Wooster High School, it was used for potato storage and raising pheasant chicks. Originally it is believed that the family who built it lived on one side as half of it was chinked. Paul asked how many people if this was the first time in the museum and around half had never been in to see the amazing collection of farm artifacts.



# PRESERVING HISTORY (CONT)

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Dan Troth, President of Greentech, discussed how timber framed barns became the official architectural symbol for Ohio. Dan is one half of the Barn Detective duo during the Friends of Ohio Barns annual barn tour and conference. The conference moves to a different county each year and the tour allows participants to see six “best of the best” historic timber framed barns in the featured county. The 2024 conference will be in Tuscarawas County the end of April. Registration is now open to the public at [www.friendsofohiobarns.org](http://www.friendsofohiobarns.org). Seating is limited for the barn tour on a first come first served basis.

Barbara Lang and Debbie Beck presented the Historic Family Farm program through the Ohio Department of Farmland Preservation. Debbie Beck prepared and submitted the Varns farm application which will be the 17th registered farm in Wayne County. Beside the pride of at least 100 years of continuous ownership of a farm by the same family, the designation gives the applicant an additional five points on their application for Clean Ohio funds through the Ohio Department of Farmland Preservation.

Finally, Jessica Eikleberry shared information about permanent easements available through the Ohio Department of Farmland Preservation including the Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) which is a competitive process for Clean Ohio funds.

Thank you to the Wayne County Visitors and Convention Bureau for their generous donation of bags of swag for the door prizes.

The next tentative public event will be an antique primitive tool trivia night on November 15. A program on Native American earthworks and artifacts in Wayne County is tentatively scheduled for mid-March 2025.



## MISSED THE MEETING? DON'T WORRY!

Friends of Ohio Barns is still collecting information about historic barns around Wayne County and looking for volunteers to help complete the survey.

Go to <https://form.jotform.com/240013350714138> or scan the QR code to share information about a barn or sign up to volunteer.





# WOOL FOR YOUR GARDEN? EWE BET!

## SHEEP FARMERS RECEIVE GRANT TO DEVELOP MARKET FOR SURPLUS WOOL

Sheep farmers have something GREAT to look forward to...

Great Lakes Natural Fibers Inc. (GLNF), a new 501c3 non-profit in Wooster, received notice that they were awarded \$99,190 from the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to purchase equipment to create a market for wool in the horticultural industry.

In 2023, Mid-States Wool Growers Cooperative, the only regional aggregator of wool from shearing, closed its doors after 100 years. This was particularly bad timing as sheep farming in Ohio is increasing, and with it, wool production. (Even sheep produced for the meat market need to be sheared.)

With the wool stacking up in their barns, a group of concerned sheep farmers from around the region convened to try to find a solution. After exploring several options for wool products, they settled on the horticultural industry.

Soil and potting mixes are currently amended with peat, vermiculite, and perlite to increase the water-holding capacity and provide aeration. Great for plants, but these products also lead to the depletion of peat bogs and the high carbon footprint of vermiculite and perlite from transportation and overseas mining operations.

But wool, made into pellets, can be a sustainable substitute for these products. Wool stores up to 33% of its weight in water which it slowly releases into the soil and, as the wool degrades over time, it releases nitrogen, calcium, magnesium, iron, sulfur, and other micro nutrients making it an all-natural fertilizer. Wool can also be used around the garden in other ways. Felted wool mats can replace plastic weed barriers and shredded wool can be mixed with seed to be a delivery method for habitat restoration, landscaping, and crop establishment. With some seed money from 'Pathways to Prosperity', an OSU project seeking to create rural wealth through food and agriculture, GLNF incorporated in June 2023 and GLNF President, Monica Bongue, wrote and submitted a grant to purchase equipment and get the business off the ground.

Funds from the grant will be used to purchase equipment to make wool pellets and mats, develop, and market products. The group will be working closely with researchers at OSU's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences to study the properties of the products as well as farmers, gardeners eager to test.

"Sheep farmers are already involved in many sustainable practices," says Bongue referring to how sheep are commonly used in many integrated pest management strategies to control pests in horticultural crops and to "mow" places like orchards. "Integrating wool into horticulture creates a symbiotic system that maximizes land use efficiency, enhances soil health, and generates multiple revenue streams for farmers. I see exciting new opportunities."

Questions can be directed to Monica at [greatlakesnaturalfibers@gmail.com](mailto:greatlakesnaturalfibers@gmail.com).



## WHAT IS AN "AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT"?

Agricultural Districts are a companion law to the Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) program. The CAUV provides relief on farmland property taxes while an Agricultural District provides protection for farmers from nuisance lawsuits, defers development assessments, and can offer additional scrutiny of eminent domain acquisitions.

Both Ag District and CAUV can be signed up for separately in the County Auditor's Office and needs to be renewed every five years.

To be an Agricultural District, land must meet two criteria:

- Be devoted exclusively to agricultural production or devoted to and qualified for payments or other compensation under a federal land retirement or conservation program.
- Be ten acres or more in size or produce an average yearly gross income of at least twenty-five hundred dollars during a three year period.

The benefits of enrolling in an agricultural district include:

- Nuisance suits protection - Agricultural district status can protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits as long as the farmer is following acceptable best management practices. This can serve as an affirmative defense in frivolous lawsuits for odors and noises associated with agriculture.
- Deferring assessments - Another aspect of development that can impact a farm is the extension of water, sewer and electric lines. These lines are usually paid for by the landowner and often assessed on frontage. A farmer with extensive frontage could face costs large enough to require selling a portion of the farm. To prevent that, the law defers the assessments on agricultural district farmland, excluding the homestead, until the land is changed to another use or withdrawn from the agricultural district.
- Scrutiny of eminent domain acquisitions - If eminent domain is used on 10 acres or 10 percent of the total agricultural district land, whichever is greater, the law calls for a review by the state director of agriculture to determine if an alternative to the proposed project is possible. The result might be a re-evaluation of the project with less or no agricultural land being taken.

For additional information refer to the Ohio Revised Code Chapter 929: Agricultural Districts or review the Ohio State University Extension - Fact Sheet - "Agricultural Districts in Ohio."

## WAYNE SWCD FISH SALE

Wayne Soil & Water Conservation District is accepting orders for our annual fish sale. The fish are offered in cooperation with **Fender's Fish Hatchery in Baltic**. All items must be pre-ordered.

**Order deadline: Fri., March 29**

**Pickup: Tues., April 9th from 9:00-10:00 a.m. at the Wayne Co. Fairgrounds.**

Orders must be picked up at the specified time. Customers need to bring enough containers to hold the purchased fish.

For more information and order form, visit [wayneswcd.org](http://wayneswcd.org) or call the office at 330-263-5376.





# HELP FOR NEW FOOD BUSINESSES

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## OSU EXTENSION LAUNCHES NEW FOOD BUSINESS CENTRAL ONLINE COURSE

Are you a baker ready to sell your home-baked goods? Are you a farmer looking for value-added opportunities for crops you've grown or livestock you've raised? Are you an entrepreneur aiming to use local agricultural products to make value-added foods? The new Food Business Central online course through Ohio State University Extension can equip you with knowledge and strategies to launch a successful farm-raised or home-based food business in Ohio.

Navigating food regulations, establishing a new business, and applying best practices for food safety can be challenges for food entrepreneurs. "Many people interested in starting a food business aren't sure where to turn first," says Emily Marrison, OSU Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator and course development team member. "This course is designed to serve as a centralized hub to connect participants to information and resources regarding all types of food products they might want to make and sell."

OSU Extension experts will help you develop a Food Business Action Plan and learn what you need to start off organized, safe, compliant, and strategic. The self-paced course focuses on several food types including cottage foods and baked goods, canned foods, meat, poultry, eggs, and more. Throughout the course participants will consider key questions and develop action steps to take on their journey to start a food business. As food entrepreneurs complete the course, they will have the answers they need to complete a business plan with help from their local Small Business Development Center. The cost of the course is \$25, and registration is at [go.osu.edu/foodbusinesscentral](https://go.osu.edu/foodbusinesscentral).

The development of the Food Business Central online course has been funded through a grant from North Central Extension Risk Management Education. This assistance comes from the United States Department of Agriculture through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to develop resources that help farmers and ranchers effectively manage risk in their operations.

## MAKE A STATEMENT WITH AN ASA

Ag Security Areas, or ASAs, double as a level of protection AND as an economic development tool - providing tax abatements on new ag construction. A farm can be part of an ASA even if they are already protected by a permanent easement or trust to take advantage of the tax benefits.

Plus, ASAs make a statement. An ASA signals that the farms in that area are not interested in selling for housing or development. Plus, starting or joining an ASA also shows that you, the farmer, recognize the importance of protecting prime farmland. Ron Becker, retired OSU IPM Coordinator and farmland protection advocate asks, "If growers cannot recognize the importance of this valuable nonrenewable and irreplaceable natural resource, how can we expect the other 98% of the population to?"

While ASAs are not permanent (they expire after 10 years unless renewed) they can slow down farmland loss, which is important at this time. American Farmland Trust estimates that 40% of farmland will change hands in the next 20 years as farmers retire. Making sure that enough farmland is available is necessary to ensure we can feed and clothe future populations.

"Your farms were established by previous generations, not only for their benefit, but also for future generations, will we have the wisdom to do the same?"

# IT'S ALL CONNECTED...

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## WHAT IS A 'FOOD SYSTEM'?

According to researchers at Ohio State, agriculture makes up 20% of Wayne County's economy, but this isn't just our County's 2,000+ farms! This part of the economy also includes the area's many ag support industries including suppliers, processors, distribution companies, retail markets, and tourism.

All of these pieces together, along with those of us who eat each day, make up what is called a "Food System".

American Farmland Trust describes a Food System as "...connecting production, processing, distribution, acquisition, consumption, and disposal of waste." This comes from the idea of "systems-thinking" that investigates how different individual components influence and affect each other within an environment or organization.



Having a strong Food System, like what we have in Wayne County, can help shield us against shocks and shortages and protect natural resources, support economic development, and can even promote better overall public health!

When we look at the system as a whole, we can see how "supporting agriculture" can mean anything from a land conservation program to supporting farmer mental health initiatives, creating new ag education opportunities for kids, exploring public policies, developing healthy food access programs, or helping a new farm-based business get off the ground.

By working together on the whole system, we can ensure "Ag Success" for Wayne County.

## ABOUT THE AG SUCCESS TEAM

The mission of the Wayne County Ag Success Team is to secure Wayne County farms and farmland for future generations by serving as a convening resource that supports the many initiatives that sustain and add value to our agricultural community. Our goals are to:

- Promote and strengthen the viability of farms by fostering a vibrant and diverse food and farm economy.
- Educate the public about the important role agriculture plays in our community.
- Support agricultural systems and production practices that leverage our natural resources while protecting the environment and health of the people who live here.
- Identify holistic approaches that help farmers and make farming an appealing and attainable way of life.

The Ag Success Team is a network of farmers, food and farm supply chain businesses, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, capital providers, economic development organizations, and local government with diverse perspectives, deep knowledge and experiences, strong community connections, and a passion for protecting and preserving Wayne County's food and agricultural systems.

## HAVE NEWS TO SHARE?

Call 330-287-5422 or send to [AgPlan@WayneOhio.org](mailto:AgPlan@WayneOhio.org) to be included in future updates. Newsletters will be published "seasonally". All information is reviewed prior to publication by the Wayne County Commissioners for relevance & content.

**Scan code to sign up and have our newsletter delivered to your email >>>**

