



Leap into Local Foods

☞ A Local Food Distribution & Infrastructure Workshop ☞

February 29, 2008

Ohio Department of Agriculture, Columbus, Ohio

A workshop sponsored by the 1st Annual Stinner Summit
Promoting Healthy Agroecosystems and Sustainable Communities

AMP/OARDC, Thorne Hall, 1680 Madison Ave, Wooster, Ohio 44691 (330.202-3537)

Almost 90 attendees weathered slippery and snowy roads to travel to the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) in Reynoldsburg on February 29 (leap year 2008) for a daylong Leap into Local Foods Workshop – a meeting as unique and significant as the day itself.

Leap year provides that one extra day every four years to make up for lost time. That's why Feb 29 was the perfect day for this select group to come together. Agricultural producers, food processors, produce auction managers, wholesale grocery and institutional food purchasers, chefs, entrepreneurs, Ohio Department of Development personnel, OSU Extension specialists, community and county planning professionals and representatives from ODA met to use this extra day to identify and tackle the challenges of getting food from Ohio producers to Ohio consumers.

The idea for the Leap into Local Foods Workshop resulted from the 1st Annual Stinner Summit held last September. The summit was held to honor the memory of Ben Stinner and his commitment to healthy agroecosystems and sustainable communities. The summit concluded with the decision to sponsor a local food system workshop and find some answers to this compelling question:

What are the roadblocks in getting food from Ohio producers to Ohio consumers and what can we do to remove them?

Greg Hargett, ODA Deputy Director, graciously offered the use of the Reynoldsburg meeting facilities to host the workshop. Invitees arrived at 9am and indulged in fresh brewed coffee and homemade cinnamon rolls using Ohio grown organic hard wheat produced by OSU's Organic Food and Farming Education and Research Program (OFFER) and baked on a Wayne County Farm.

A welcome was given by Casey Hoy, Kellogg Endowed Chair of the Agroecosystems Management Program at The Ohio State University and Brad Masi from the New Agrarian Center in Oberlin, Ohio.

Bob Boggs, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, dropped in to offer his support for the process and to thank the group for taking on such an important project. He said the ODA staff is ready to assist and participate in our efforts.

With the guidance of Steve Bosserman, a knowledge broker from Columbus Ohio,

eight working groups were formed. Using one of four primary food categories – grains, meats, dairy and produce – the groups identified the existing distribution flow from producer to consumer. This creative mapping exercise uncovered the many hurdles and opportunities facing our local food distribution system in Ohio.



ODA Director Bob Boggs addresses the workshop

The groups were then asked to write down as many interesting and thought provoking ideas and suggestions as they could for potential projects that could be accomplished during the 2008 growing season.

The ideas poured in and then the group members had the tough assignment to vote on their favorites in order to narrow down the project possibilities.

Much discussion and debate continued throughout the catered luncheon buffet. Michael Jones, a chef and director of Local Matters, developed the menu and assisted the Two Caterers Company to source the locally grown food. Delicious portions of Lake Erie Creamery goat cheese tart, green salad with Ohio roasted beets and poached apples and fresh baked focaccia bread from Omega Bakery were served. The dessert featured artisan ice cream sandwiched between meringue cookies, a wonderful treat made by Jeni's Ice Cream from the Historic North Market in Columbus.



Barry Adler, Jason Parker and Kathy Rhoads get ready to enjoy the luncheon buffet featuring Ohio local foods

After lunch, the groups were reconfigured based on the areas of interest selected from the morning sessions, keeping in mind the goal to develop and implement a meaningful project that will be reviewed at the 2nd Annual Stinner Summit scheduled for September 19, 2008. Seven project areas were chosen:

• **Creating a system for private institutional food services to increase their use of local foods**

The workgroup identified the opportunity to work with the numerous small educational institutions in the state that have a commitment to local foods. Five steps to strengthen the local food systems for institutional food services were proposed:



Parker Bosley, Dave Cannon, and Margaret Adamek discuss project ideas

1. Create a network between growers and institutional administrators.
2. Form a grower cooperative marketing system.
3. Engage chefs and their institutions in educating their consumers about local products.
4. Create a system to overcome seasonality and supply issues. Use Center for Innovative Food Technology, season extension research and education, student farms, and investment in infrastructure for freezing, drying and canning, etc.
5. Step up from private to public universities, and other large institutions. Use increased support to change vendor and payment requirements in ways that accommodate local producers.



Amalie Lipstreu, Sylvia Zimmerman, Abbe Turner and Jeanine Snyder

• **Marketing and education relative to Ohio produced foods**

Out of many possibilities, the proposed area of focus is to adopt and join the national *Buy Fresh, Buy Local* program for Ohio. The group is interested in including an educational component for schools and the general public.

This educational effort will help answer the question, "what is good food?", and create a larger and more comprehensive understanding of food quality. An important aspect of the educational and marketing effort is to tell the story of the farm and the food to the consumer.



Marvin Konkle, Jonathon Ferbrache and Ruth Stuart

• Value-added processing for Ohio produced foods

A thorough inventory and assessment baseline of agricultural resources, for production and processing, is needed to determine the current Ohio infrastructure. People with specific knowledge of value-added food products should come together to assess facility and production capabilities and address the needs for various sized facilities for different Ohio foodsheds.

• Transportation logistics for increasing volume of local foods

Localized hubs for small producers are currently key to consolidating supplies into commercially viable volumes. This workgroup proposes that more hubs be developed to assist producers in understanding the requirements of larger scale processors. This could stimulate more movement of locally produced foods.



Hugo Melgar-Quinonez and Casey Hoy

• Consumer-driven production practices; consumer education that leads to new opportunities and producer educational needs

Three main areas of emphasis were chosen by this group:

1. Compile a complete list of small grains that can potentially be grown in Ohio, list their agronomic and nutritional characteristics and promote educational activities that support production and consumption of these crops and develop a website to distribute this information to Ohio farmers.
2. Focus on urban neighborhoods with low-income households, particularly single parents with young children to: a) provide education about how and why to select and use healthy food products and make healthy choices; b) identify ways to remove the barriers to selecting and using healthy food products for this population.
3. Devise ways to connect health professionals to available locally grown fresh products so that they can best use these products in their educational efforts and recommendations for health.



Deb Stinner of OFFER/OARDC and Joe Logan from Ohio Farmers Union

• Expanding meat processing capabilities to meet the needs of consumers, processors, and diverse cultural preferences

The meat-processing group suggested several ways to build infrastructure for local meat processing and value added enterprises:

1. Job creation through public/private partnerships, training and retraining to build the labor force needed for meat processing, particularly for small scale producers.

2. Document and educate regarding opportunities for different processing techniques and procedures to meet the needs of emerging cultural groups in Ohio.
3. Identify and network with processors who may be willing to change and adapt to these emerging needs.



This creative dairy marketing idea from Trevor Clatterback and Carol Goland drew applause from the group

• Value added dairy processing

This group suggested three opportunities that would benefit local dairy industries:

1. Gather stakeholders to identify needs and resources for value added dairy products.
2. Create educational programs on topics such as cheese making, cheese storage, packaging, regulatory compliance and marketing.
3. Establish a dedicated staff person for technical assistance on dairy value-added processing.

Throughout the workshop, the participants were directed to a new website developed to keep group discussions going long after the meeting ended. Steve Bosserman, Casey Hoy and Samuel Rose created the site, www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/amp/olfsc to continue the networking begun at the workshop and allow others to join in.



Steve Bosserman demonstrates the new web site

The site makes it easy for those working together to share ideas and plans for their projects and to keep the momentum going. Anyone can request a membership, subscribe to one or more working groups and contribute to the discussion and effort. The site will also be useful to strengthen and expand the network of interested stakeholders.

The workgroups now have the opportunity to develop and implement their projects with the support possible from the Stinner Endowment Fund. The Agroecosystems Management Program (AMP) at The Ohio State University can also assist in seeking support for proposed projects from various sources.



Rug Phatk and Dave Igims from Giant Eagle, Inc.

The extra leap year day was put to very good use. There was a tremendous sense of enthusiasm and energy as the meeting ended late in the afternoon. Collectively, the workgroups tackled the big question of what could be done to strengthen Ohio's local food systems by addressing distribution challenges and opportunities. Wonderful ideas emerged and practical solutions were proposed.

The next step will require hard work, rolling up the sleeves and making things happen. Actually, not a difficult task at all for this group of creative and talented professionals committed to healthy agroecosystems, sustainable communities and a strong and vital local food system for Ohio.