

THE BUDGET

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Local Edition

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Sports



Football, Cross Country
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Obituaries

Erma Hershberger, 87, Millersburg
Alma Miller, 84, Millersburg
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Ag matters: No matter your background

By Beverly Keller
The Budget

Agriculture is a big part of what makes Wayne, Holmes, and Tuscarawas counties work. To better understand the value of agriculture, particularly in Wayne County, a two-day event was hosted by Dr. Shoshanah Inwood of the Ohio State School for Environment and Natural Resources last month.

"We learned that communication really is key," Inwood noted. "The issues are the same for both our English and Amish farmers - something that perhaps neither group had recognized before. By walking alongside each other, I believe there are solutions to be found."

Inwood noted that part of the two days which included a bus tour and discussion panel allowed the agriculture world to meet on a level playing field with those from economic development and manufacturing. Together, these three sectors are vital to the area's economy. The events allowed all three groups to better understand the needs of the area and each other.

"We are really excited about the future as all the pieces and parts of greater Wayne County are seeing ways to work together," Inwood said. "We are most excited to see possible growth of the Ag Success Team. The group was created by the Wayne County Commissioners over 20 years ago. They meet once a month at 7:30 a.m. to share information about



Photo from OSU Extension

One of the stops on the bus tour included Greenfield Farms where participants learned about the company and its various roles in the community.

various parts of the agriculture community in our area and really helped to spark the idea of a bus tour."

Inwood noted that one of the best parts of the two-day event was seeing people from various walks of life interact and learn from one another. "To-

gether we were able to experience the bounty of Wayne County," Inwood shared. "We also learned that much of the work of Wayne County farmers haven't been documented as many are from the Plain Community and have not traditionally taken part in the census of

agriculture that is conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture every five years. That is something we are hoping to facilitate a fix for in the future to show the true value of the farmer to our way of life."

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Limber Pirate drumline dips



Car, bike accident claims life

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Inwood noted that by spending two days together through the bus tour and speaker-based lunch, the group made up of people from the Plain Community as well as economic development-minded individuals and leaders from across the greater Wayne County area saw that they may not be that different after all. “There really is no difference in the problems faced by the English and the Plain farmer,” Inwood noted. “They are both facing what to do when it comes to succession and passing a farm down to the next generation. They are both looking at how to utilize their resources and get a fair price for their crops. Their problems are essentially the same.”

Farmland preservation is something that everyone in at-

tendance could understand. “Land values spiked during COVID,” Julia Freedgood of the American Farmland Trust. “We do not know what is causing this. When farmers say land values are through the roof, they aren’t exaggerating.”

The bus tour included stops at 3D Meats, Mount Hope Produce Auction, Moreland Fruit Farm, and Greenfield Farms.

A special feature of the event was a luncheon that featured Freedgood and some of the findings from the first time the group met earlier this year. “One of your greatest assets is your farmland,” Freedgood told the group. “Our mission is to protect farmland and am grateful that you do, too. Based on our maps, 75 percent of your land is in agriculture and 81 percent of

that is Nationally Significant as the most productive, versatile, and resilient farmland in the country.”

For comparison sake, Ohio in general has about 72 percent of its land as Nationally Significant while just 39 percent of the continental United States can be classified as the same. “From my point of view, this land is a National treasure,” Freedgood shared. “Beyond its value for food production, when managed well, it provides a host of environmental benefits from flood protection to water quality, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. And of course, it also provides the factory floor for agricultural economic opportunities.”

She noted that Wayne County’s comprehensive plan -



Photo from OSU Extension

Members of the group visited the Mount Hope Produce Auction as part of the tour to explore Wayne County and surrounding areas value-added agriculture world.

Onward, is deeply rooted in agriculture. “Your farmers want to be good stewards of the land,” Freedgood noted. “About a fifth are using soil health practices like low and no till and cover cropping and you have \$14 million annually in organic sales. In fact, you had a 13 percent increase in organic farms between 2012 and 2017 and a 20 percent increase in sales.”

There are approximately 3,700 farmers in Wayne County

are more young farmers, under the age of 35 than there are over the age of 65. “That is likely due to the Plain Community,” she said. “Also nearly a third of area farmers are new and beginning - 1,169 new and beginning which is about 32 percent.”

Another interesting note from Freedgood praised the resourceful nature of the Plain Community. “The 2020 Ohio Farm Poll of Wayne and Holmes Counties found the Plain Community committed to

and supermarkets, all of which help keep dollars in the county.” She applauded the local producing sector that includes dairy brands like Daisy, Smith, and Hartzlers as well as Gerber Poultry, Smuckers, Paint Valley Farms and more. The largest auction house in the state of Ohio is Mount Hope and located in Holmes County. Wayne County Line Auction was opened in 2013 and has doubled every year since and has more than 150 growers, many of

