Persistence Pays Off for Early Applicant

Joe Krajicek was one of the first farmers in Greene County to make applications to the Agricultural Easement Purchase Program through the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Joe first started working with Julia Cady, past president and advisor to TLT, in 2003. He submitted applications for a couple of years, but then backed away due to the increased competition from other applicants that scored higher than he did. But as the rules of the program changed, the competition lessened, so Joe decided to reapply. The motivation for doing a purchased easement “was to preserve my family’s farm forever and get a little money to reinvest in our agricultural operation,” said Joe.

From TLT’s perspective, the Krajicek farm was an important one to preserve. It connects to 682 acres of already preserved farmland, creating a block of 770 acres. In addition, since the time Joe bought the farm that his grandparents purchased in 1947, he has been implementing conservation practices throughout the property. A small creek that is a tributary of Massie’s Creek runs through the pasture and has grassed buffers installed through the Conservation Reserve Program. The rolling hills on the farm have been taken out of row crop farming and put into pasture or hay which helps prevent erosion. There are distinct pastures that are used for rotational grazing of the cattle. The cattle are also fenced out of the creek to protect water quality. There is definitely some development pressure for large rural residential housing around Cedarville that could have impacted this farm.

Every family has their own story about why they preserve their properties. Joe thinks, “everyone should look into the possibility of conservation easements, but money can’t be the only motivation. You have to have the desire for green space.” Green space is absolutely what you will find now as you drive down Tarbox Cemetery Road in Cedarville Township. “Easements benefit everyone in the community. People tell me they enjoy the drive because of the open views,” he said.

“Protecting local farmland, water, and natural areas forever.”
The recent “Growing Green: Regenerating Soils and Local Agricultural Economies” conference was a partnership between Community Solutions’ Agraria, Tecumseh Land Trust, and Antioch College. Several landowners in the “Jacoby Partnership” area participated, along with community supporters and project partners. Many of the practices described at the conference can be supported through local, state or federal partnership funding over the next 4 years.

The weekend started with a keynote presentation by Renee Winner, co-owner of Winner Family Farms, and Julia Barton with the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, who talked about how the Winners transitioned their 2,000 acre Logan County row crop and dairy farm to organic. They also preserved 1,400 acres through easement donations and the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program. These were huge decisions for this large family, but they have been successful from several perspectives:

* Making the farm more financially viable with higher organic prices
* Bringing farming practices in line with the family’s values
* Bringing the next generation into the operation
* Making land ownership possible for the next generation

Saturday featured a wide variety of speakers talking about many aspects of agriculture. Kevin McGruder of Antioch College and Carl Zulauf, OSU Emeritus, gave an overview of agricultural history in Ohio, and in particular how government policies play into the development and types of farms in America. Jim Hoorman of the Natural Resource Conservation Service related how soil health and the consistent use of cover crops can impact a farm’s finances. Owner of Janie’s Farm, Harold Wilken, spoke of his certified organic farm where he and his family grow and mill six different grains, along with corn, beans, and alfalfa in Illinois. He, Renee Winner, and Julia Barton provided great perspectives about the decision-making that goes into converting to organic, and the management of land organically over time.

The conference ended on Sunday with a hands-on soil health workshop at Agraria. Jim Hoorman and Bob Hendershot led the conference attendees through a series of demonstrations looking at soil health and ways to improve it.

**Growing Green Conference**

Fred Stockwell, Branson Pyles & Bob Hendershot discuss healthy soil practices in the field
First TLT Easement Completed in Pike Township

After 17 years of preserving prime agricultural land in Clark County, Tecumseh Land Trust closed on their first agricultural conservation easement in Pike Township, a beautiful 162 acre farm in the very northwest corner of the township. Rolling hills, prime soils, an historic home, and a long stretch of Honey Creek make this an ideal preservation project.

In 2014, Brent and Christine Pence, who own the now preserved farm came to TLT to explore their options to protect this good agricultural ground. With state and federal programs to purchase easements, TLT went to work to put together the application. The State of Ohio’s Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program and USDA’s Agricultural Land Easement Program through the Farm Bill were a good match for this property. Because of the farm’s proximity to other protected land in Elizabeth Township, Miami County, they scored higher in the program than some of the other farmers in the area who had tried before. The historic home added points to their application after a TLT volunteer submitted an application to the Ohio Historic Inventory. And overall changes to the state’s program made it possible for this farm to be competitive in the program.

After four years of working together, the Pences closed their agricultural easement with the Tecumseh Land Trust and the Ohio Department of Agriculture making this forever a farm. Brent says, “Martha Maxson, who owned the farm before we did, would be proud. I think she would be very happy with the steps we have taken to honor the history here.”

Since starting the Pence project, interest in land preservation in Pike Township has increased. TLT now has 6 projects moving forward in the township.

JACOBY CREEK PARTNERSHIP UPDATES

Property Consultations Available on Conservation Practices

Whether or not you are in the Jacoby Partnership area, Natural Resource Conservation Service professionals are available to visit your farm, listen to your ideas for improving conservation on your property, evaluate resource concerns that can be addressed through a variety of state and federal programs, and facilitate access to those programs. Our lead partner for setting up such visits in the Jacoby area is Layne Garringer, NRCS, 937-372-4479, layne.garringer@oh.usda.gov. Please call soon because funding applications for many of these practices are due October 1st.

Applications Made to Fund 3 Conservation Easements

In the 2019 agricultural easement funding round, we had three farm applicants within the Jacoby Creek Watershed target area. If all three are funded, that will make a good start to this project, with 271 preserved acres in the first year. If your farm is located within the Jacoby Creek Watershed target area, please get in touch this summer to discuss the opportunities available to you.
Converting to Organic Farming Practices

Consumer demand for organic food in America is growing by 20% a year and organic foods consistently command higher prices than non-organic foods. Yet the ratio of imported to exported organic products purchased in the US is currently estimated to be 8 to 1. Why can’t American farmers capture more of this market share?

Jason Ward, a young, local farmer with a passion for growing organic crops, responds, “Obviously, farming organically is not something you just decide one day...it is a different way of thinking...you always have to be willing to experiment and, sometimes, fail.” That is a scary prospect for every farmer – it takes 3 years to transition the land and earn the “organic” label. But the dietary needs of Jason’s family motivated him. After his wife was diagnosed with Celiac Disease, she found that non-GMO wheat worked as an alternative for her. Jason began to look at alternative farming methods, and at markets for non-GMO crops to sell while transitioning traditionally farmed ground to organic. He found there was a good market for “food grade” non-GMO soy beans.

He is currently farming over 400 acres, all organic or in transition, including Community Solutions’ Agraria fields (soon to be protected with a conservation easement) and three properties belonging to the Village of Yellow Springs -- Glass Farm, Sutton Farm (also protected by an easement since 1995), and the Center for Business and Education. Jason won the village contract when they decided to transition their land to organic last year. He’s looking for more land to transition.

Using low or no tillage, Jason applies an all-natural blend of composted material, uses cover crops, and – this year—is trying some “interseeding” with cereal rye, hairy vetch, and clover at Agraria. “This adds organic matter, keeps the soil carbon rich and feeds microbes, a perfect way to regenerate tired, over-farmed soil,” said Jason. The results are already apparent at Agraria where Jason’s fields are teeming with earthworms.

Local farmer grows organic grain in Yellow Springs
Mark your calendars for our 15th Annual Harvest Auction on September 13th. Doors open at 6 p.m. at the Hollenbeck Bayley Conference Center in Springfield with a delicious spread from Current Cuisine, an open bar serving wine and beer, plus homemade desserts.

We’ll have over a hundred silent and live auction items, featuring many that have been hotly contested in previous years as well as new and unique ones. TLT trustee Barbara Klopp has donated a case of her family winery’s Cotes du Rhone-style wine --- with samples! In addition to our very popular dinners, the live auction will tempt you with a craft beer tasting and farm tour from trustee Catherine Anderson. With a selection that ranges from Persian rugs to soybeans, there should be something for everyone.

The auction committee will gladly accept other donations throughout the spring and early summer. Do you have something unusual to add to our offerings? Some interesting antique in your barn or attic? A service that our members would appreciate or an experience they would enjoy? Contact the TLT office to make arrangements.

See you at the auction!
Welcome Our New Board Members

Land preservation and natural resource conservation are issues that resonate with a diverse group of people. That is certainly reflected in the make up of our board of trustees. With the recent additions of three passionate residents of Yellow Springs, we continue to broaden the perspectives that come into this organization. We welcome to the board Kim Iconis, Barbara Klopp, and Betty Ross.

Kim Iconis is a retired librarian who has worked at a number of institutions in the area, ending her career at Lexis-Nexis. In 2012, Kim first started volunteering to complete the Ohio Historical Inventories on farms. She really enjoys these projects because she learns so much about local history and the challenges farmers have faced in this area over the last two centuries. The next year, Kim attended her first auction committee meeting and today is one of the chairs of that committee. Kim started volunteering with TLT because she believes in the absence of government leadership in solving environmental problems, it is so important that we support local efforts to protect our water resources, our farmland and natural habitats.

After nearly thirty years abroad, nomads Barbara Klopp, and husband Rick, recently returned home to Yellow Springs. Barb retired from the United Nations in 2016, having most recently served in administrative roles in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and Kosovo. One of her post-retirement causes is supporting responsible land stewardship via her service on TLT's board, and education and easement committees. Rick and Barb are renovating their 1910 colonial house and Barb enjoys caring for the diverse palms, succulents and tropical plants growing in their glass greenhouse.

Betty Ross started her career as a classroom teacher, went into sales and marketing, then became a naturalist at the Glen Helen Outdoor Education Center. She fell in love with the birds and became Director of the Raptor Center for almost thirty years. While involved with wildlife rehabilitation and education efforts at the Raptor Center, she joined with several other individuals in the state to form the Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Association, and served as its president for many years. She is a long-time TLT member, and is now on the education and personnel committees since joining the board. She still volunteers at the Raptor Center, serves on the Glen Helen Association Board, walks many miles a day, and enjoys the spring and fall migrations in Cape May Point, NJ. She is on a monarch butterfly education team there, and three of her tagged monarchs were found in Mexico!

TLT has a fantastic group of dedicated board members. Thank you for all that you do!
Citizens Against Mining Update

Citizens Against Mining (CAM) wants to prevent mining, especially the extraction of limestone via a de-watering process, in Mad River Township, Clark County. In 2017, Enon Sand & Gravel (ES&G) filed a lawsuit against Clark County for the right to mine. The lawsuit was settled in 2018 and allowed mining in certain areas (see picture). Before mining other parcels, ES&G needs a permit from the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA).

CAM wants to stop expansion of the mine by organizing citizens to speak at BZA Hearings. Additionally, an attorney is representing property owners and argues that neighbors have the right to enforce zoning. ES&G also applied for an Ohio EPA (OEPA) NPDES permit to discharge wastewater into a local tributary. In 2018, the OEPA completed a study that identified wetlands near the site. The OEPA then asked ES&G how the wetlands would be protected. ES&G’s response was insufficient and the OEPA awaits further information from the mining company.

Operation Bluebird 2019 Edition

The Operation Bluebird project-based learning collaboration between TLT and Yellow Springs Schools is in its third year and there are some exciting changes! This year the students are monitoring nest boxes in two locations: Xarifa Farm and Agraria. Xarifa Farm is preserved with a TLT conservation easement and is owned by board member and education committee member Catherine Anderson. Agraria is an educational and research center west of Yellow Springs owned by local non-profit organization Community Solutions.

Since students enjoyed monitoring so much in the past, they are doing more this season. Each student will conduct their field research six times during April and May. They are focusing specifically on monitoring their designated nest boxes and exploring their research questions. Students will share their results with the Cornell Ornithology Lab, on social media at https://twitter.com/opbluebirdys, and at Project Based Learning (PBL) Exhibition Night at McKinney Middle School on Thursday, May 16.

Students checking blue bird box at Xarifa Farm

Having two sites will challenge the students to interpret their observations further. The Xarifa Farm trail was established four years ago and has active management of non-native house sparrows. This allows for more native cavity-nesting birds, such as eastern bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and carolina wrens, to be observed. The new trail at Agraria is off to a positive start and bluebirds are already nesting there!

The two sites have differences in environment and habitat. Almost all the nest boxes at Agraria are on farm fields, whereas the Xarifa trail nest boxes are on agricultural land, as well as near a meadow and large wooded areas. Both properties are along the riparian corridor of the Jacoby Creek (an area that is being restored by The Nature Conservancy).

When asked if she sees a difference on her property, Catherine Anderson said, “the number of bluebird nests has largely increased through the years and, certainly, we see many more around the farm.” She continued, “Truly, it’s magical and a great reminder that a few good-hearted folks and some dedicated students can really make a difference.”
Celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Preservation of Whitehall Farm

Sunday, June 2, 2019 from 2-4 p.m.

Yellow Springs News editor Amy Harper wrote about the preservation of the historic Whitehall Farm in an editorial on February 25, 1999 as follows:
“This is a story about one community’s attempt to preserve a sacred space, a diminishing resource and a way of life. It’s about how government and private citizens joined forces to achieve a common goal. It’s about how ordinary people can make things happen if they put their minds to it. It’s a story about us.”

Where: the lawn of beautiful Whitehall Farm - 4633 US RT 68 N, Yellow Springs 45387
Parking: come down the lane off of Rt. 68 - volunteers will direct you to the parking area
Schedule: 2 pm ~ Speaker Dorothy Pelanda followed by a brief business meeting - bring lawn chairs or blankets if you wish to sit
3 pm ~ guided walk by farm owners, Dave & Sharen Neuhardt of the historic farmstead & refreshments served

Sorry, no house tours this year.