SPEAK OUT

September 2009

Restoring Prosperity to Ohio

Introduction

Farm families often rely on off-farm income, either to support on-farm activities or to provide family health insurance, which can be very costly. Traditionally, this off-farm income has come in the form of manufacturing and service jobs in our county seats and larger cities.

Unfortunately, as our economy continues to deteriorate we have seen a steady decline of good paying jobs that offer benefits. This decline has had a severe impact on the traditional farm family, such as what happened when Huffy Bicycles left Celina years ago and left hundreds of members of farming families unemployed.

Beyond a source of supplemental employment, cities also fill a number of other functions for the farming community. Indeed, farmers also typically want to have their adult children living close, down the road, on a neighboring farm -- just not in the basement! But the children need quality jobs, which are especially important for those children who went away to college. Companies are increasingly attracted to places that the "creative class" are attracted to, places with picturesque downtowns and walkable communities. While some struggle in this area, many county seats, such as Marietta, have been relatively successful in attracting the "creative class."

Greater Ohio

Greater Ohio is a nonpartisan, foundation funded, nonprofit organization that focuses on "smart growth" in Ohio.

It accomplishes its mission by actively promoting public policies that encourage economic growth and improve quality of life through intelligent land use. Greater Ohio was created five years ago as a campaign to inform –through research, education and grassroots organizing – residents and elected officials about the important role that smart growth policies can play in making Ohio a more prosperous place to live.

Greater Ohio believes that the farming community has a strong interest in maintaining and revitalizing Ohio's cities as a way to preserve their way of life. As the state's "smart growth" organization, it is concerned with growing Ohio's economy and improving our quality of life through intelligent land use. Ensuring that our urban areas are lively places of the highest quality is a primary means to both growing our economy and protecting our agricultural assets.

Greater Ohio has identified four primary drivers of economic activity that must be leveraged to varying degrees if we are to revitalize Ohio's communities: Innovation; Workforce; Quality of Life; and

Infrastructure.[1] These four drivers of economic activity hold surprising relevance to the day-to-day routine of a farmer. In fact, a close inspection reveals the essential interconnectedness between these economic drivers, urban vitality and agricultural success.

Moving our state forward

It is well established that the survival of cities relies on external food sources cultivated by farmers. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship between farmers and cities. Urban areas provide a market for farmers' products; in turn, farmers consume a diversity of goods and services in the urban cores that do not exist in a rural setting, such as healthcare. In addition, attractive and vibrant cities act as critical nodes of population density, which function to limit the expansion of people into the surrounding countryside. Conversely, unattractive and listless urban areas promote further outmigration of residents into surrounding suburbs and emerging exurbs, which typically consume productive farmland and transform it into low density residential housing. And this is where the four drivers of economic activity are intimately tied to the health and success of the farming community.

Urban areas that provide the best market for farmers' products, the most diverse array of products and services for farmers to use, and limit residential outmigration into surrounding farming communities are those that have strong and active economies. And strong economies are created by leveraging the aforementioned drivers of economic activity.

For example, places that foster a spirit of innovation and create inventive products and practices attract more economic activity than places that are content with processes of the past. However, it is equally important that the local workforce is adequately trained and educated in order to participate in and take full advantage of emerging and innovative business sectors. Additionally, it is crucial that vibrant cities have sufficient infrastructure and capacity (e.g. transportation, telecommunication and energy distribution) to move goods, ideas and workers quickly and efficiently. Finally, it is essential that these urban areas are (re)developed and maintained in a manner that is physically and aesthetically appealing to ensure the maintenance and potential growth of the population currently residing in the area. Clearly, the four drivers of economic activity profoundly affect the overall quality of urban areas, which in turn, strongly influences the health of the farming community.

Progress in these drivers must be complemented by state and local governments embracing regional collaboration to allow communities to fully leverage their assets and advance prosperity to compete on a national and global scale. We no longer live where we work, live where we shop or even shop where we work. However, our local governmental funding system is predicated on residents conducting economic activity within 5 miles of where they live. In counties over 40 percent of their funding comes from sales tax revenue. Communities cannot fund the overall activity of local governments resulting in severe cuts to essential local services, such as fire and police protection; that is why your local sheriff is taking

[1] Greater Ohio's partner, the Brookings Institution, in its Restoring Prosperity to Ohio Initiative identified these "prosperity drivers" in its national blueprint for prosperity, and Greater Ohio has adopted these for Ohio.

patrol cars off the road - you are shopping in the big city, in some counties up to 60 percent of retail activity for those residents is going on beyond the county borders.

Action items

Below are some key suggestions that the state could implement to incentivize revitalization in our smaller towns and county seats that reflect the four key drivers discussed above.

1. Training and retraining workers in this new economy is going to require state support for our local community colleges. Thought should be given to training that capitalizes on current assets, including various markets for agricultural products, but also for the skills many farmers already have, such as welding.
2. Before companies approach local officials during their site selection process, they usually ask to see the local economic development plan; something rural counties often lack or are outdated. Greater Ohio has developed a proposal that would provide a funding source to aid in the creation of economic development plans for rural communities.
3. Rural Ohio needs the sharing of revenue to ensure that some of the money made in counties where farmers shop gets back to the counties where farmers live to support sheriffs on rural roads and other essential local services.
4. Attractive urban areas are critical for the farm family. Shopping is close by and spouses along with children have off-farm employment within an easy commute. Ohio's Main Street program currently serves 38 communities with Wooster being the longest serving program. This program functions as a local initiative to redevelop attractive downtowns and should be supported by communities that could benefit from this service.
5. The recently enacted Historic Tax Credit for Rehabilitation currently shows a 5 to 1 return for state and local governments. Many of the communities targeted by this program are in rural areas, such as St. Clairsville in Belmont County. By preserving this program, county seats and other urban areas have an incentive to revitalize historic buildings which makes these cities more appealing and may also attract and retain young people.
6. If you want to save farmland, you need to make our cities a more attractive place in which to live. In order to do so, abandoned industrial properties must be cleaned up quickly and programmatic changes at the state level need to be made for this to happen effectively. The Clean Ohio Fund is a tool in the state's tool box that could be used in connection with other state programs.
7. Rural elected officials are expressing concern over the separation between where individuals who need employment live and where suitable job opportunities actually exist. Surprisingly, transit issues in the rural sections of Ohio drive this issue, in addition to business location decisions and other site selection criteria.

Questions:

1. Picture back to a time when your county seat or nearby urban area was vibrant. Describe the qualities that made it prosperous.
2. Why are young adults leaving our towns today? What has changed from the past to today that causes them to leave?
3. In light of the changes of our 21st century economy, what do we need to change to make our county seats and urban areas vibrant and vital again?

October Topic: The Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board

Information Sources:

Gene Krebs, co-director, Greater Ohio - www.greaterohio.org

CONNECTIONS

COMPARE YOUR RESPONSES

The following is a representative sample of the responses to the July Speakout Guide on the issue of the *Social Media in Agriculture*.

1. **What value could social media provide to you? If you already use social media, how are you using it and for what purposes?**

- Telling the farmer's story.
- It is a good and cost effective way to reach a large audience, in a timely manner.
- We use the OFBF Web site, but many of us in our 70s are not users of Facebook or Twitter.
- Social media certainly has its place, especially among those in the generation behind us.
- Social media can provide an exchange of ideas for business or hobbies.
- It can be a link to family members scattered around the world.
- We felt that social media would be helpful in getting the ag story out.

- This discussion guide truly brought out the difference between old fuddy duddies who can't/won't use a computer and those who know computers are a way of life and social media is essential to growth and survival in business these days.
- Social media could be used to promote and protect agriculture/farm issues.

2. If you are hesitant to use social media, what are the top three reasons for your hesitancy?

- Privacy
- Lack of typing ability.
- Not enough time to spend on the computer.
- Lack of interest in acquiring new skills.
- Cannot afford high speed internet in the country.
- The slowness of dial-up internet connection/the expense of satellite connection.
- There is a generation gap and our members are unfamiliar with social media forms.
- The learning curve – we just don't know how to do it.
- Not enough time – can't get all the newsletters, newspapers and journals read the way it is.
- Kids don't want you on their social network.

3. How can OFBF help support your use for social media?

- Use the social media to fight HSUS and other opponents of sensible agriculture.
- Supply pro-active materials that we can use in sharing with friends and former classmates not involved in agriculture.
- Rural areas need broadband.
- Farm Bureau council meetings are our "social media."
- Education.
- Encourage high speed internet providers to make high speed available to more people in rural areas at a reasonable price.
- It sounds like OFBF has a good start on making the computer useful for solving some of our present problems.
- Educate the public on where their food comes from.

PUBLIC POLICY

Ohioans for Livestock Care

The Ohio legislature overwhelmingly approved a bipartisan resolution to place on the ballot this fall a measure that would create the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board. The measure is strongly supported by legislative leaders from both parties, Gov. Ted Strickland and Ohio agriculture organizations.

The board will set standards for livestock and poultry care that take into account issues of **food safety, local availability and affordability of food and best farm management practices for animal well-being.** Board members will consider those issues in the context of how they impact overall animal health, biosecurity on

livestock farms, animal disease prevention, food safety and affordable food supplies.

Ohio's livestock and poultry farmers are firmly committed to responsible care for their animals to providing safe, locally grown and affordable food for consumers. Farmers recognize they must do more than what is expected of them to maintain a high level of consumer confidence in the food they produce, and that's why Ohio farmers have come together to put in place this regulatory framework.

To learn more about the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board, to volunteer on the campaign, to donate, or to talk with a farmer from your community, visit **www.ohiolivestockcare.com**.

COMMUNICATIONS

Visit Ohio Farm Bureau at the Farm Science Review

Ohio Farm Bureau will once again be in the red building at the corner of Friday Avenue and Beef Street at the Farm Science Review in London, Ohio, Sept. 22 through 24. Stop by for an apple and some water, have your membership questions answered, register for a chance to win free groceries for a year, hear the latest on the ballot proposal to create the Livestock Care Standards Board and much more!

ORGANIZATION

Watch here for future news and events from the Organization department.

HONEYBAKED WINNER

WA-JA-SA Advisory Council
Sandusky County

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