

Ashtabula County Agriculture Sector

Why Is This Important?

Too often in the past, the agricultural community saw little need for Broadband technology in the day-to-day activities of maintaining farms and livestock. However, Broadband technology allows for growing innovation in agriculture, simplifying and mainstreaming important daily tasks and developing marketing and sales. Farmers are beginning to see and understand the value of Broadband and are demanding access for their farms. With high-speed Internet, farmers can remain up-to-date with everything from the weather to the conditions of chicken coops equipped with temperature-sensitive monitors. Livestock farmers can access market prices and gain access to the latest in livestock management techniques.

Farmers can advertise and even sell goods on the Internet, generating customers from all over the world. The Internet can also help Ohio farmers diversify their operations and develop cutting edge revenue streams, thus alleviating losses due to political or environmental change. Internet resources can give Ohio farmers an edge on production and results. The possibilities are virtually endless. The marriage of agriculture and high-speed Internet can produce abundant success for farmers across Ohio by creating a wealth of opportunities.

Ashtabula County Agriculture

- Ohio Department of Agriculture, www.ohioagriculture.gov
- OSU Extension, www.ag.ohio-state.edu
- Horticultural Business Information Network, hbin.tamu.edu
- Ohio Grown Products, www.ohioproud.org
- Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, ofbf.org
- Ohio Fire Marshall Fire Prevention, www.com.state.oh.us/sfm/fmpr

In Ashtabula County, there are 1,283 farms averaging 133 acres per farm. This is in line with the state average of 187 acres. In Ashtabula County, 723 of the farmers list farming as their primary occupation while 560 list farming as their secondary occupation. The leading agriculture products in Ashtabula County are:

- Soybeans, growing 23,885 acres on 208 farms
- Corn for grain, growing 16,591 acres on 302 farms
- Cattle, with approximately 8,662 sold on 390 farms
- Cattle, with approximately 20,244 in inventory on 509 farms

Where Are We Today?

In the agricultural community of Ashtabula County, many things are needed to increase technology adoption and usage. Although many individuals understand technology's value, they need encouragement to utilize it for themselves. Education will allow the agricultural community to understand the benefits of technology and should alleviate much of the fear that prevents individuals from using it.

The following statewide resources support the agriculture industry at the county, city, and township level:

OSU Extension

OSU Extension is an outreach educational entity of The Ohio State University. Ohio State University is the Land Grant University in Ohio and is the leader in Agricultural Research and Education. In 2004, Battelle found "OSU Extension is purpose-designed as an organization for producing positive economic and social impacts." For example:

- Every 1 percent increase in agricultural output achieved through Extension programming brings \$149 million in output to Ohio, \$29 million in personal income for Ohioans and 2,712 jobs.
- Farmers who read digital Extension newsletters report significant savings and profit generation. Readers of: CORN (the Crop Observation and Recommendation Network) newsletter saved \$11.3 million in pesticides (used).

Located at www.extension.osu.edu, the Extension offers a wide variety of services and provides a great deal of information. For example, on this website, OSU Extension's Family and Consumer Sciences program has compiled resources designed to help individuals accumulate adequate savings to meet long-term financial goals and obligations. There is also a six-lesson curriculum developed to help young people with their own money-management skills. Understanding the value of technology, the Extension uses a high-speed Internet connection in their office.

Online applications and programs minimize the amount of time and effort it takes the agriculture sector to gain access to information and reports needed to sustain a more efficient and effective operation. There is a bio-based technology development site where farmers are invited to submit their technologies to the "Cell to Sell" initiative database to connect the local grower to larger tech-farming initiatives. Proper use and updates can equip the agricultural sector with the knowledge of the university at their door with the click of the mouse.



Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation

The Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation was established in 1985 to further initiatives that improve the quality of life in all of Ohio's agricultural communities. The Foundation strives for measurable community improvement through its support of special projects that focus on agricultural education, environmental and economic issues. Areas of interest include, but are not limited to, technology advancement, agribusiness development and risk reduction opportunities.

Ohio Department of Agriculture

From the homepage of the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), www.ohioagriculture.gov, a farmer can find information regarding regulatory issues, promotional programs, ODA Calendar of Events, market development and grants. Visitors can access information about a number of programs on the website including animal health, food safety, an interactive map of Ohio agriculture information by county, pesticides and disaster animal response. Other items available online through the Ohio Department of Agriculture include news information, statistics, student resources and annual reports.

Ohio Department of Agriculture's Division of Markets provides opportunities to expand domestic and international business through a wide range of marketing programs and variety of marketing services and resources. In one of the coming additions consumers will have the opportunity to virtually experience Ohio's top wines and wineries through the Ohio Wine TV program. It launched in November 2008 and is a free, online service that offers monthly subscribers access to expert-led tours of several of the state's more than 100 wineries. These programs increase sales and consumer awareness of the best food and agricultural products our state offers.

Ohio Proud is the Ohio Department of Agriculture's marketing program which identifies and promotes food and agricultural products that are made in Ohio and grown in Ohio. Their website, www.ohioproud.org, is an example of an opening to more information and a wider market for the farm community of Ashtabula County, and serves both consumers, who may be seeking farm products and growers who are seeking help in marketing their agricultural products.

Ohio Farmers Union

Ohio Farmers Union, www.ohfarmersunion.org, is a grassroots general farm organization representing more than 300,000 family farmers nationwide. The members are farmers, rural residents, and consumers. They have organized to develop a comprehensive program for rural America and to do the things together that no individual can do alone. Members are given information, education, cooperation, and legislative representation. OFU strives to sustain and strengthen the family farm structure of agriculture and gives members the opportunity to make a difference by participating in state meetings that guide the direction of our organization.

Local farmers are currently using the Internet to check the weather, monitor crop prices, research and purchase equipment and parts. Community training is recommended for other uses and applications. It was also noted that many farmers have to take jobs outside of agriculture just for the healthcare benefits it provides.

Farmers and ranchers in the county try to constantly learn new ways to improve productivity and generate greater profits. Many people in the agriculture industry are now starting to use online resources to obtain information and to promote their products. Limitations are funding, generational barriers and education/training.

Agriculture Sector Assessment Overview			
Category	Current Assessment	Future Vision	Additional Comments
Networked Places	3	5	
Applications & Services	3	4	
Leadership	2	3	

The Ashtabula County eCommunity Leadership Team found that the agriculture sector is just beginning to use technology to its advantage and believes the Internet to be essential to business operations.

- **Networked Places** – In the category of networked places, Ashtabula County’s agriculture sector is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Most growers, suppliers and processors have always-on connections to the Internet at their desks. Some mobile workers have laptop computers and can access the network remotely. Affordable videoconferencing facilities are available in the community.

- **Applications & Services** – In the category of technology applications & services, the agriculture sector is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Most growers, suppliers and processors have informational websites. Some websites can accept credit card purchases. Some growers, suppliers and processors participate in the electronic supply chain.
- **Leadership** – In terms of technology leadership within the agricultural community, Ashtabula County is currently at stage 2 on a 0 to 5 scale. The Internet is seen as essential to business operations. Employees are trained on basic applications.

Where Do We Need To Be?

The Ashtabula County eCommunity Leadership Team sees great potential for the use of technology in the agriculture sector. The team has set goals to move networked places from stage 3 to stage 5, applications & services from stage 3 to stage 4, and leadership from stage 2 to stage 3, all on a 0 to 5 scale. The team's vision includes:

- Affordable Broadband is available throughout the county.
- There are education and training programs in place, specifically tailored to the agriculture sector.
- Funding is available to assist members of the sector with hardware purchases and monthly service costs related to Broadband.
- Most growers, suppliers and processors use VoIP to save money. Most computers have video cameras. Some growers, suppliers and processors use Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to track inventory and equipment.
- Some growers, suppliers and processors outsource most of their computing services. Some growers, suppliers and processors sell goods out of state or internationally.
- Some suppliers and processors permit employees periodically to telework. Some growers, suppliers and processors encourage employees to take work-related classes offline.

How Do We Get There?

Project Ideas

- Work with all county level initiatives to extend affordable Broadband service to all areas of the

county.

- Explore opportunities for providing the sector with the technology training and education currently needed.
- Identify and secure potential sources of funding that could be used to assist members of the sector in adopting Broadband service.

Other Potential Projects

- Keep up with the new technology in the farming industry, from equipment to chemicals, using the Internet.
- Emphasize technology education and online marketing opportunities for producers.
- Promote ecommerce for those agriculture enterprises that already use email and websites.
- Increase Internet access awareness among the agriculture community.

The eCommunity Leaders within the Agriculture sector include:

Jessica Hazel, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation

Danielle Dufour, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation

David Marrison, Ohio State University Extension

In working toward the advancement of the agriculture sector goals, Connect Ohio recommends that additional participants be brought into the process who may include technology providers, subject matter experts, community organizations and others which serve the agriculture community, and the resources of agencies and commercial providers of products and services to the agriculture sector.

Dave Davidson, Northeast State Operations Manager for Connect Ohio will continue to work with the agriculture sector leaders to advance selected projects toward their completion. By leveraging Connect Ohio's project management process, its research information, and its partners, projects will be defined, developed, and reviewed to help assure that the local teams are equipped to execute them. Connect Ohio will assist in the identification of funding sources, introducing technical resources, and helping to define the measurable goals that will ensure that the projects are actionable, measurable, and valuable.