

## Brown 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.

#### Brown County Agriculture

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

In Brown County, there are 1,400 farms averaging 158 acres per farm. This is slightly smaller than the state average of 187 acres. The average estimated market value of the land and buildings per farm in Brown County is \$386,500, while the state average is \$509,307. In Brown County, 766 of the farmers list farming as their primary occupation while 634 list farming as their secondary occupation. The leading agriculture products in Brown County are:

- Soybeans, growing 88,211 acres on 445 farms
- Corn for grain, growing 17,395 acres on 186 farms
- Hogs, with approximately 3,648 sold on 34 farms

- Cattle, with approximately 16,201 in inventory on 573 farms

### Where Are We Today?

Brown County has historically been rural farming communities tucked neatly beside the winding Ohio River where the southern part of the county is rolling and hilly. Goods and services were marketed along the banks of the river and down to the city of Cincinnati. Although the transportation modes have changed, farming is still a major element to the local economy. Over 90% of farms are operated by a family or individual with the average age of principal farm operators at 50 plus years. In 2004 the average value of agricultural products sold per farm was approximately \$22,270. Formerly big in tobacco, that has all now changed with the Tobacco Buy Out. Recently, a new winery opened called the Meranda-Nixon Winery. This vineyard is a former tobacco producer, but now able to grow grapes. The county continues to look at ways to diversify in the agricultural sector. The average size farm is around 200 acres. There is a lack of computer knowledge in the agricultural sector and a need for Broadband services.

In the agricultural community of Brown County, many things are needed to increase technology adoption and usage. Although many individuals understand technology's value, some are still reluctant to change. 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.ohioproud.org), is an example of an opening to more information and a wider market for the farm community of Brown 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](http://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.

### **Southern Ohio Agricultural and Community Development Foundation (SOACDF)**

The SOACDF was established by funding through the Tobacco Master Settlement. The Ohio legislature saw the need to further assist the local economies that were negatively impacted by the reduction in tobacco production and therefore established this foundation to provide avenues for participants in the agricultural economy to enhance other areas of agriculture and offset the losses from the decline in tobacco revenue. As a part of that mandate the legislature also required that programs be implemented that would assist with non-agricultural employment creation and education. This organization has a developed grant programs in four specific areas: General Agriculture, Agricultural Diversification, Education, and Economic & Community Development. The Economic & Community Development grant program is specifically designed to assist prospective Economic Development projects desiring to

locate within Southern Ohio’s Burley Tobacco producing counties, of which Brown County is largest. Each of the larger tobacco counties has an annual allotment which can be awarded to projects. The window for this grant process is July 1-March1. [www.soacdf.net](http://www.soacdf.net)

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.

Agriculture Sector Assessment Overview			
Category	Current Assessment	Future Vision	Additional Comments
Networked Places	2	3	
Applications & Services	1	3	
Leadership	0	3	

The Brown County eCommunity Leadership Team found that the agriculture sector is just beginning to use technology and sees the value it can bring to local farmers.

- **Networked Places** – In the category of Networked Places, Brown County’s agriculture sector is currently at stage 2 on a 0 to 5 scale. Some growers, suppliers and processors have always-on connections to the Internet at their desks.
- **Applications & Services** – In the category of technology Applications & Services, the agriculture sector is currently at stage 1 on a 0 to 5 scale. Some growers, suppliers and processors use email and Internet.
- **Leadership** – In terms of technology Leadership within the agricultural community, Brown County is currently at stage 0 on a 0 to 5 scale. There is no technology or telecom plan.

There are several areas where Broadband can help the agriculture sector. Marketing information, virtual farm planning, Internet auctions, farm programs on line (goverenment agencies, FSA, Soil and Water), grant applications, producer websites for sales, web casting, and researching services and educational programs available in Brown County.

## Where Do We Need To Be?

The Brown County eCommunity Leadership Team sees great potential for the use of technology in the agriculture sector but understands the industry is limited in its resources and ability to implement changes within a brief period. The team has set goals to move to stage 3 in all categories on a 0 to 5 scale. The team's vision includes:

- Make educational courses available online, using Broadband and webinars.
- Enable more access to university resources online.
- 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.
- 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.
- Some suppliers and processors permit employees periodically to telework. Some growers, suppliers and processors encourage employees to take work-related classes offline.

In Brown County, the median commute to work is roughly 35 minutes for 18,691 people. Finding a way to enable telecommuting for 25% of these workers would result in over \$7.5 million in savings on gas alone (53 miles/20 miles/gal x \$2.50\*/gal x 240 day/yr x 4,672). On an individual basis, this is over \$1,590 per year per commuter, plus the environmental impact from reduced emissions and carbon credits.

## How Do We Get There?

### Priority Projects

- More classes to gain basic knowledge of computers in the agriculture sector.
- Promote ecommerce for those agriculture enterprises that already use email and websites.
- Create a listing of providers in the community to allow for the agriculture sector to better understand what service is available and from whom, by emphasizing technology education to all local producers.

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\* As the price of gas fluctuates, this formula is based on \$2.50 per gallon.

#### Other Potential Projects

- Evaluate the feasibility of creating a local agricultural portal to connect the agriculture community together for advanced information sharing, news and market distribution, etc.
- Keep up with the new technology in the farming industry, from equipment to chemicals, using the Internet.
- Emphasize technology education to producers.
- Increase Internet access awareness among the agriculture community.
- Connecting GPS with marketing tools.

The eCommunity Leaders within the agriculture sector include:

Doug Dyer, Brown County Farm Bureau

Kathy Jelley, Extension Educator & Consumer Sciences / County Director

Frankie Stith-Scott, Farm Loan Manager

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.

Sage Cutler, Southwest 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.