

# Ohio Organic Farmer Researcher Network: Reflection and Planning Meeting

December 7, 2023

## Open Floor Feedback on Group Events

- Janell: I really enjoyed the pre-OEFFA conference session! Many of us are already all there and so no special effort required and it provides a great launching pad for conversations for the rest of the conference.
- Michelle: It's a hard job to engage farmers because we're so busy but I think the network has done a good job so far of offering various points of engagement and there are good ideas for moving forward. I'm very excited about collaborative research on multiple farms
- Reviewing previous topics
  - Heirs' property – Denise reported that Central State's Community and Economic Development team is working on this issue and focusing on resource development. Denise shared previous conversations on this topic and is looking to connect people to existing efforts with CSU faculty.
  - Vegetable Variety Trials - Denise spoke with Dana Hilfinger from Johnn's Selected Seeds. We have several people excited about doing variety trials. Will continue to work on developing this idea.

## Reviewed recent network member survey

- Had 28 responses from educators, farmers, and researchers. Most had been involved and indicated a strong interest in helping our network grow.
- Network goals were ranked in the following order
  - 1- Create partnerships to ensure organic research uses real farm conditions and on-farm research uses sound research practices
  - 1- Share resources such as grant funding, ongoing study opportunities, etc.
  - 2- Share results of organic research to a wider audience, including past research.
  - 3- Develop farmer-led research questions
  - 4- Foster development of research projects by helping form working groups.
  - 4- Facilitate coordinated on-farm variety trials
  - 5- Create a research agenda specific to the Ohio organic farming sector

## Open Floor Goal Review

- Facilitating Connections
  - Create a "dating app" (short videos or descriptions), or bulletin board, or even a person, that can connect farmers to researchers, ideas, etc. and try to match up people with common interests.
    - Possible to connect to existing resources
    - A first step might be to create a simple membership directory for our group, listing interests and knowledge, what we are doing, questions, etc.

- Use monthly meetings to allow academics to ask for research participants in their project and farmers ask for researchers to assist, furthering collaboration
- Use a regular newsletter to share grant, research opportunities, short research results summaries or ideas/partnerships written in classifieds style.
- Small seed pilot projects and taking advantage of small opportunities can lead to larger projects, partnerships, and grants.
- Compensation For Farmers
  - The network got grant funding to support something like paying farmers in the network based on their desired involvement. Reviewed 3-tier payment system.
    - Farmers would be compensated for leading a working group, presenting at a monthly meeting, helping with an in-person event
  - Growers had varying views on how important it was to be paid for their time. The money we offer doesn't necessarily pay them well, but at least values their time and contribution, which all agree
    - Lindsay: farmers deserve to be paid for their times. Too often they are not.
    - Ann: would be good to pay farmers to look grants proposals and make sure they make sense and are relevant.
      - Michelle and Lindsay were both interested in reviewing Warner Grant proposals when Doug offered.
    - Michelle: Practical Farmers of Iowa model makes a lot of sense in that it assumes that while farmers have a lot of great questions about practices, they probably don't have the ability to design robust trials or to analyze the data once collected. So I like the idea of researcher support to help farmers hone questions, design trials, know how to collect good data, analyze it, and potentially write papers or bulletins on the research.
      - Doug- Agreed! That is a model that we would love to see take off in Ohio. A key element of PFI is that the questions and leadership come from farmers first.
- Subgroups?
  - Denise recommends finding a more common goal for this network as it seems to be a broad goal to get researchers involved that aren't just trying to propel their research but rather to engage in farmer ideas and bridge them to research. Asks if subgroups of the network would be beneficial
- Role of Network
  - Needs to stay focused on problems that can be solved with on-farm research.
  - Bridget: I would say that most of the growers are already doing some sort of outreach to other growers and their own on farm trials. What we are short on is the data collection and putting it to use.
  - Another concern with farmer-led research ideas is the time and energy it takes to do a lit review...

#### Future Meetings or Partners

- Planned already:
  - OEFFA conference in Feb

- Organic Grains (Jan)
- Future Ideas:
  - Organic Dairy farmers
  - Partnering with Wisconsin's organic veg conference and pairing with an in-person Ohio event.
  - Janell: going to farmers or farmer markets where farmers are happy to talk (ie Worthington) (go during slow season ie Jan/Feb!)