

September 21, 2007 ☞ Northern Appalachian Experimental Watershed ☞ Coshocton, Ohio

1st Annual Stinner Summit

Argentine ants that were accidentally introduced into California didn't know any better than to cooperate with each other. And as a result they've been very successful, spreading throughout the entire state. So begins a story told by Casey Hoy, Kellogg Endowed Chair in Agricultural Ecosystems Management and host for the 1st Annual Stinner Summit.

Back in Argentina, when two ants meet they use their antennae to check each other's cuticular hydrocarbons. This tells the ants if they're related. If they are, the result is, "Great! Let's share food and raise our larvae together." If they're not, it's a fight to the death.

Originally, very few Argentine ants got into California, so the population's genetic diversity is very low, and the hydrocarbons are all pretty much the same anywhere in the state. As a result, the ants lack the ability to do anything but cooperate.

There's a lesson in this for the rest of us: We accomplish more by ignoring differences and working together. Ben Stinner was gifted in finding ways for people to work together, and the participants in the Stinner Summit spent the day celebrating that gift.

The 1st Annual Stinner Summit was held on September 21, 2007, at the North Appalachian Experimental Watershed (jointly run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC)). The meeting honored Ben Stinner's vision and passion for healthy agroecosystems and sustainable rural communities. It was a beautiful early fall day set among the scenic rolling hills of Coshocton County, the meeting room was decorated with harvest sunflowers and colorful gourds, a delicious luncheon buffet featuring an incredible selection of locally sourced foods was served, and 40 enthusiastic participants met to share their diverse agricultural programs and interests.



Deb Stinner, OFFER, serving the homemade cinnamon rolls



OARDC Director Steve Slack, at right in red shirt, discusses Stinner Summit with hosts Casey Hoy and Larry Phelan during the opening poster session.

The day began early with an informal gathering in the recently constructed hoop barn on the property. Participants displayed posters exhibiting their work and ideas. It was a great way to get the group mingling and to find the areas of common interests while enjoying several trays of golden-brown handmade cinnamon rolls baked using locally grown and milled flour.

The meeting then moved to the historic dorm building for formal introductions around the conference table. Realizing that working together is the only way to achieve the inspirational vision of Ben Stinner, the first objective was to create relationships between people and organizations. By finding commonality, an ever-expanding network of support can be built for healthy agroecosystems and sustainable communities in Ohio.



Attendees (L-R) Casey Hoy, Joe Konen (OSU Extension), Lisa Schacht (Ohio Produce Growers and Marketers Assoc.), John Anderson (OSU Animal Sciences), and John Ellerman (Ohio Farmers Union) during the introductions in the dorm building.

The second objective was to work together to find and plan one project to be completed in the upcoming year that would help build healthy agroecosystems and sustainable communities. Thanks to generous contributions from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, contributions from Ben's friends and colleagues, and matching funds from OARDC, the Ben Stinner Endowment for Healthy Agroecosystems and Sustainable Communities has accumulated over \$400,000, enough to fund annual Summits and about \$15,000 for the projects that result.

Before this session ended, Larry Phelan, Ohio State/OARDC entomology professor and chairman of the Stinner Endowment Committee, presented the first of what will be an annual commemorative poster designed for the event. Created by his daughter Chanda, the artwork shows a farmer handing a bountiful harvest basket to the next generation of farmers. The oak tree in the background symbolizes the enduring presence and strength of Ben Stinner.

Fresh baked bread, tomato and basil salad, and vegetable lasagna were served for lunch, followed by a dessert of apple crisp and fresh vanilla ice cream. The fruits, vegetables, dairy products and the flour for the baked goods were all grown locally.



The delicious luncheon buffet

The sessions after lunch were held under the shade tree on the front lawn. The participants divided into smaller groups to start the brainstorming portion of the meeting. Ideas tossed around for possible projects dealt with agricultural

policy, sustainable energy, an on-farm internship program, internet information mining of sustainable methods and practices, brownfield and school garden development, agribusiness incubators, expanding community art and music programs, varied education programs to enlist support from the legislature and general public, a guidebook developed for direct marketing rules and regulations, and developing a project to help solve distribution problems.

Through a process of prioritizing, the scope narrowed down to four selections. The groups were asked again to meet and identify specific projects that would meet the objectives of the Endowment.



Carol Goland (Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Assoc.), Larry Antosch (Ohio Farm Bureau Federation), Martin Shipatalo (USDA-ARS), June Barger (Farm Women's Network), Sylvia Zimmerman (Innovative Farmers of Ohio), Gary Moore (The Nature Conservancy) and Amelie Lipstreu (Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy) hash out the details of a project proposal.

Brownfield/School Gardens:

Funds would be granted to four groups for urban/suburban market garden development. The project would also allocate funds to several schools to start school gardens.

Internship Network Website:

The project would allow for a part-time position to identify and connect interns wanting to learn on-farm with existing farm enterprises willing to teach.

Local Food Distribution and Infrastructure:

A workshop was proposed to bring attention to the distribution problems currently experienced in the market place. Getting products to the consumer involves many logistical, transportation, quality control and storage issues. The workshop would bring together all those involved along the supply chain to foster cross-learning and information exchange.

Public Policy:

The proposed project would fund a lobbyist to facilitate communication by drafting a clear message and identifying potential opportunities to impact policy. Another key function would be the development of op-ed releases for distribution throughout Ohio.

After questioning by the Endowment Committee, comprised of Casey Hoy, Deb Stinner, Larry Phelan and Bob Hendershot (filling in for Joe Hartzler), a vote by all of the meeting participants selected the distribution and infrastructure workshop project for the upcoming year.

The Executive Committee decided a draft proposal for the project will be distributed to the Summit participants for input in refining the focus of the meeting.

Ben Stinner's vision of collaboration for building relationships based on common interests, his ability to see and understand the big picture, and his passion and enthusiasm for building healthy agroecosystems and sustainable communities were evident throughout the day.

New relationships were made. The group used collaboration to agree on a worthy project. The objectives of the meeting were met. The 1st Annual Stinner Summit Meeting was a complete success.



Commemorative Artwork for the 1st Annual Stinner Summit by Chanda Phelan