

# Master of Eats: Bobcats grow the local food economy

They tend milking goats. They harvest bread flour. They cater gourmet meals. They start hip restaurants. They create agricultural policy. OHIO alumni are building a sustainable food system right here in Athens — and making a living from it.

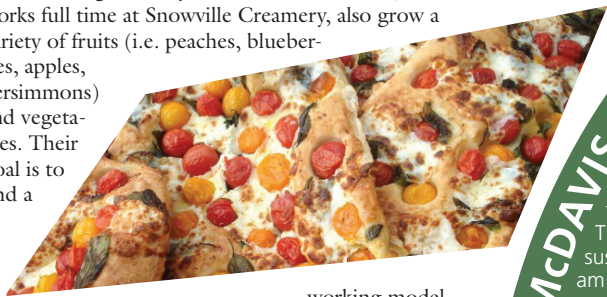


Armed with a master's degree in botany, alumnus Ed Perkins ('74) of Sassafra Farm says that most of his farming expertise comes from self learning: books, magazines, organizations like the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA), and the act of doing.

"I had to learn it all the hard way," he admits. Perkins grows leafy greens and other vegetables to sell to the Oak Room, Toscano's, Village Bakery, and Farmers Market customers.

Alumnus Rich Tomsu ('60) and his wife, Ann Fugate, began farming in the 70s when the mayhem of the Vietnam War and the Nixon era compelled them to go back to the land, despite the fact they didn't know the first thing about growing food. After graduating in English and teaching for many years, Tomsu established what is now called Rich Garden's Organic Farm, while Fugate continued to work as an administrator in the College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Cat Cutcher ('00) teaches women's and gender studies at OHIO while still finding time to keep up with the goats, donkey, dogs, and cats on Willow Farm in Meigs County. She and her husband, who works full time at Snowville Creamery, also grow a variety of fruits (i.e. peaches, blueberries, apples, persimmons) and vegetables. Their goal is to find a



working model where they can maintain career ambitions while still making a return on the farm's produce by selling to local restaurants.

Cutcher is finishing her Ph.D. in Cultural Studies in Education and she draws parallels between her country of focus—Kenya—and southeast Ohio. The rural parts of both Kenya and Appalachia have abundant resources and agriculture but also face dilemmas of poverty, unemployment, and debt from land ownership. These insights have driven her to activism, but perhaps her greatest form of activism is her return to the land.

Wife and husband team Michelle Gorman ('92) and Chris Chmiel ('92) harvest pawpaws, black walnuts, and ramps, native species to southeast Ohio. Through their business, Integration Acres, they sell inventive value-added products, such as pawpaw jams

and fresh goat cheese. But perhaps their best known product is the annual Pawpaw Festival, held every September at Lake Snowden. Gorman's journalism degree equipped her with solid marketing tools, including Web site design and advertising.

Noting that 70% of a typical person's diet comes from grains that are *not* grown in southeast Ohio, Michelle Ajamian ('05) and her partner Brandon Jaeger decided to pilot a project to grow and process staple food locally. Together they created the Appalachian Staple Foods

Collaborative and tested the viability of growing grains and beans with success. The two have received numerous grants and community support to harvest plants such as amaranth, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, adzuki beans, and dent corn. This year they launched Shagbark Seed & Mill Co. to process beans, grains and oil seeds.

Helping local food producers such as Ajamian and Jaeger on their way to market is one alumna supporting them behind the scenes.

Leslie Schaller ('75), is director of programs at the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACENet). ACENet assists in product development and rents their community commercial kitchen facilities to



Gorman and Chmiel also credit their success to the community and OHIO. In fact, Professor of Food and Nutrition Dr. Robert Brannan and his students are currently developing a variety of pawpaw recipes for them.

"I would say OU and the community have fostered our business," Gorman notes. "I don't know if we could have done this anywhere other than Athens."

By: Annah Korpi

## FROM PRESIDENT McDAVIS: The Sustainability Journey

How can an institution go about "greening" its campus?

First, **practice what you preach** by making it a central institutional priority. We articulated sustainability as a priority in our university's strategic plan, Vision Ohio.

**Lead by example.** As president, I felt it was important to make a public commitment in support of the work already underway on our campus and to challenge our university community to strive to do more. In March 2007, I became the first four-year public university president in Ohio to sign the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment.

**Examine institutional infrastructure.** On the operations side, staff in our facilities department took a leadership role to examine how cost savings could be coupled with sustainability efforts. They formed networks with peers at other institutions and became the home for implementation of sustainability initiatives within our operations. Without the cradle of this initiative beginning there, I am sure that we would not be as far along as we are today in our work to become a more sustainable campus.

**Look for opportunities to involve the university community in sustainability efforts.** In 2006, we created a position within facilities, an office actually, to move our work beyond just examining ways to use sustainability initiatives to cut our utility and operations costs. The Office of Sustainability is still based in our facilities operations, however, the scope and charge of the office extends beyond dollar savings. Through the Office of Sustainability, we are more able to proactively integrate sustainability into the core values and central mission of Ohio University.

**Implement long-term solutions.** One of the most telling steps we have taken to prove our commitment to sustainability is our 10-year campus master plan. This plan is focused on investing in our current infrastructure. We will renovate and refurbish our buildings. For example, our former student center will become the new home for our Scripps College of Communication.

We also have begun to examine the potential end of our central plant's reliance on coal and what opportunities there may be to transition toward greener fuels. Students have galvanized momentum around this key issue. Their passion and partnership in our sustainability efforts are important to achieving our long term goals in our sustainability journey as an institution.

We are not where we want to be, but we have started a journey, one that has become a point of pride for our university community, our state, and our nation.

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1 Riverside Drive  
Athens, OH 45701  
phone: (740) 593-0460  
fax: (740) 593-0638  
[www.ohio.edu/sustainability](http://www.ohio.edu/sustainability)

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Established In May 2006, the Office of Sustainability is committed to improving the efficiency of our facilities, greening our practices and processes and strengthening our campus-wide culture of environmental mindfulness. For campus and community sustainability initiatives, research, projects, organizations, and many other topics, please visit [www.ohio.edu/PlanetOHIO](http://www.ohio.edu/PlanetOHIO).

If you have contributions or questions for Planet OHIO News, please contact [sustainability@ohio.edu](mailto:sustainability@ohio.edu).