

## Vision Statement

### Kellogg Endowed Chair of Agricultural Ecosystem Management

When I was recruited to come to Ohio State in 2016, one of the most exciting elements was the ability to join a college and university committed to facilitating interdisciplinary and engaged scholarship on agroecological systems management to improve the resilience and sustainability of viable US farming and food systems. I have long worked to build interdisciplinary teams and engage farmers and stakeholders to better understand and increase adoption of socially, economically, and environmentally robust farming systems to improve working landscapes and rural communities. The InFACT initiative and long-term Agroecosystem Management Program (AMP) were nationally known efforts that aligned with my career goals. Since arriving, I have been able to build relationships with a diverse set of OSU research and extension faculty from across our college and university, and with a growing network of farmers, farm and conservation organizations, and community leaders that share my interests in these topics.

The core goal listed in the Kellogg AMP Endowment: To “develop multi-disciplinary and stakeholder engaged efforts to **produce innovative research and teaching programs concerned with an ecological approach to farm and resource management, in support of whole farm, farming community, and natural resource management**” is a mission that I wholeheartedly embrace. The vision I have for AMP is to support ongoing and emergent efforts by CFAES faculty and our partners to build these types of research, extension and teaching programs. In my capacity as interim AMP director, I’ve spent the last year organizing and implementing a series of roundtables and feedback sessions to gather information our research and extension faculty (and from farmers and stakeholders) to identify the priority topics and types of AMP investments that would best advance our shared goals.

Theoretically, I see the core of any agroecosystem as **a farm operating within the context of a larger working landscape and institutional environment**. The focus for an agroecosystem management program thus begins with identifying, innovating, and supporting farm management approaches that leverage agroecological resources and processes (as opposed to purchased inputs) to meet critical farm production needs in the face of a changing climate and markets. Examples of agroecological practices include the use of diversified crop rotations (including cover crops and perennials), manure and compost, integrated crop/livestock systems, and intentional management of woody/nonwoody vegetation. Successful agroecological farming systems need to generate sufficient output/production while sustaining the agroecological processes and natural resource base on which it depends.

As a social scientist, I am also keenly aware of the importance of the social and economic dimensions of farming systems and recognize that the long-term viability of any agroecological system requires consideration of its ability to sustain farm profitability and viability, farm household and farm worker wellbeing, and community quality of life. Unless an agroecological farm can meet the lifestyle and career expectations of a next generation of farmers and workers, it will be destined to fail over time. As a result, an agroecological management program must account for the interconnections between biophysical (agronomy, soil health, biodiversity, etc.) and socioeconomic processes and outcomes.

More broadly, while farm production lies at the core of any agroecological system and is an appropriate place at the center of AMP’s work, the performance of individual farms depends on their broader socioeconomic and institutional environment. For example, farmers working on landscapes with many other agroecologically-oriented operations and strong peer-to-peer learning networks are more likely to thrive than isolated farms without a strong social support system. Similarly, access to processing and marketing infrastructure capable of handling the diverse farm products produced on agroecological operations is critical to their viability. Finally, agroecological farming systems are capable of generating

significant ecosystem services for society, but without well developed policies and markets to reward farmers for creating these benefits, a farm can struggle to compete in the marketplace.

For all these reasons, agroecological management forces us to broaden our work to include attention to markets, policies, and the entire food supply chain. Indeed, a growing number of scholars and practitioners have recognized that the structure and dynamics of the food system constrain and enable opportunities to build agroecological production systems at the farm and community-level. In return, the ways in which we produce food have important implications for the access, availability, and affordability of food that the food supply chain provides to consumers. I envision AMP supporting work that recognizes the important food systems interconnections between the farm and the consumer.

### ***Concrete Steps I Would Take for AMP***

First – While AMP has a long legacy of important and impactful projects, the current generation of CFAES faculty is not well connected to its work. There is an opportunity and need to engage a wide circle of university colleagues and external partners to revisit and update its mission and vision statements, and to use these to build a 5-year strategic plan. I see this as a process that should be done collaboratively and from the ground up. I'd invite interested research and extension faculty at OSU, innovative Ohio farmers, and other key stakeholders to a full day workshop to help clarify core goals and identify program priorities for AMP. We would then use our endowment resources, CFAES research and extension assets, and solicit new funding to support a comprehensive program to achieve these goals.

Based on feedback from the 2021 Stinner Summit and our 2022 Roundtables, I recognize that our community deeply values the role AMP can play as a network builder and facilitator to connect and coordinate actors within and outside of Ohio State. We should continue to convene diverse teams and stakeholders to encourage interactions and seek significant external funding to implement new collaborative research and outreach projects. Critical topics identified by our stakeholders that should be addressed include: Climate change and adaptation; Equity in land access and food justice; Enhancing opportunities for the next generation of farmers; and Markets and supply chains.

Second -- The complexity of a working agroecological farming and food system requires land grant universities to adopt a more holistic, interdisciplinary, and collaborative approach to research and extension that engages teams of scientists with complementary skills as well as farmers as full partners in the development of innovations and solutions. I would seek resources to enable the active participation of farmers, scientists, and stakeholders to identify key agroecological research questions and outreach and engagement needs. This should build on existing areas of strength in CFAES and link to college and university initiatives promoting interdisciplinary, community engaged research.

More broadly, I believe that agroecological approaches should be relevant and impactful for a wide range of farm types and farm sizes. Some of the most innovative and ambitious farmers working to utilize agroecological processes are in the organic, sustainable, and regenerative farm communities. As such, AMPs work should be more closely coordinated with the OSU Organic Food and Farming Education and Research (OFFER) program. However, lessons learned from collaborating and working with these innovators have immediate importance for more conventional farms, and I see opportunities to partner with and support ongoing OSU research and extension programs focused on soil health, agronomic crops, manure/livestock, small farms, urban agriculture, and forest and woodland management.

Third -- My vision for AMP also includes a strong teaching and education mission. This includes helping grow and develop enrollment and courses for the new CFAES Sustainable Agriculture Major, re-energizing the Agroecosystems Specialization in the Environmental Studies Graduate Program (ESGP), and providing new experiential education opportunities for undergraduates as part of summer research internships and other hands-on learning programs.