The first year Dianne and her husband, Ron, raised sheep, one of the sheep was struggling to give birth. Turning to the internet, Dianne found an instructional video from someone in Australia delivering a lamb, and after watching it, she pulled out the lamb as Ron stood behind her with a flashlight.

“Thank God I had children and wasn’t totally new to that,” she said.

The Gansleins began a farm after working jobs unrelated to agriculture.

Dianne’s career was in marketing. Ron taught adults with developmental disabilities. They had never before lived in a rural area.

By the time the Gansleins were in their fifties, their two daughters no longer lived at home, and they were hankering for a change.

In the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Peebles, Ohio, they bought a 66-acre farm that had not been in operation for 50 years. On it stood an equipment shed built in the early 1900s—the only vestige of what the farm used to be. They bought Icelandic sheep and, later, a mill to process wool.

Intrigued and a bit daunted by the process of establishing a working farm, Ron enrolled in the New and Small Farm College, taught by OSU Extension for people starting out in farming. Through the classes, he made contacts with agencies that he’d use over the years. He also learned of an opportunity for a grant he’d later receive to help finance putting in roads, fences, erosion control, and water lines.

The Gansleins’ business has grown. Along with raising sheep and processing and selling the wool and meat, Dianne and Ron raise chickens to sell the meat and eggs. They will also be selling vegetables starting this summer.

“It would have taken a whole lot longer to get me where I am at right now without the classes,” Ron said. “There’s no doubt about that.”

The way Dianne Ganslein got her start in farming is similar to the way people with no experience in say, mechanics, change an alternator: “It was farming by YouTube,” she quipped.

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Harmful algal blooms in rivers and streams are neither well understood nor easily predicted, and CFAES researchers are hoping to change that.

With a three-year, $681,343 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, a team of CFAES scientists plans to develop a widely applicable system for assessing watershed health and determining when a crisis is looming.

“If we can create a diagnostic tool that can be used in watersheds of all types, it will allow us to better manage and prevent major problems relative to nutrient enrichment and harmful algal blooms,” said Mažeika Sullivan, the study’s leader and director of CFAES’ Wilma H. Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park.

“We want to take the science and create a tool for natural resources agencies, educators, and watershed-protection organizations so that we can be less reactive and more proactive,” Sullivan said.

Much of the previous work on harmful algal blooms in Ohio has focused on the Lake Erie watershed. With this project, Sullivan and his collaborators aim to uncover more information about waterways in the Ohio River basin, and in the river itself.

Algae is a normal part of freshwater systems, but when harmful colonies proliferate, they choke out native plants and animals and can produce toxins that can be deadly to people and animals. Harmful algal blooms also raise the cost of water treatment and hurt tourism and recreation industries in Ohio and throughout the nation.

To flourish, harmful algae need sunlight, slow-moving water, and nutrients—specifically, nitrogen and phosphorous.

“We need to have a much better understanding of how these nutrients play out in all kinds of environments, including urban areas and forests and other nonagricultural watersheds,” said Sullivan, an associate professor in the CFAES School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR).

“We think of harmful algal blooms mostly in lakes, but they can occur in rivers and reservoirs, and what this project is really getting at is understanding these problems in a different context because each individual ecosystem is different.”

The study focuses on Ohio River catchments of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana and, in particular, on nonagricultural freshwaters. The grant is part of the EPA’s Science to Achieve Results program.

Contributors to shifts in nutrient levels in waterways include climate, landscape, flow, and a multitude of other factors that the scientists will take into consideration as they develop their diagnostic tool, he said.

Though it’s early in the process, Sullivan said he anticipates a complex diagnostic model for scientific applications, and he envisions a simpler online tool that would allow a user to plug in data on a specific watershed and receive a classification such as healthy, moderate risk, or high risk relative to nutrient enrichment and harmful algal blooms.

Other CFAES researchers working on the project are Lauren Pintor and Kaiguang Zhao, both assistant professors in SENR.

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MAŽEIKA SULLIVAN
Director, Wilma H. Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park
More Ohio students had access to locally produced foods in their school cafeterias in 2017, thanks to the efforts of CFAES’ Farm to School program.

Those efforts also meant that more Ohio growers were able to expand their farm operations to fulfill the increased demand for local foods by one of Ohio’s largest school districts.

The “Ohio Days: My Plate, My State” initiative in Columbus Public Schools works to serve entire meals that are locally grown and locally produced to 52,000 students once a month throughout the school year. The ongoing effort is a joint project of Farm to School, the city of Columbus, and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

Ohio Days meals include turkey from Bowman & Landes in New Carlisle; gravy and dressing from Sandridge Food Corp. in Medina; apples from Bauman Orchards Inc. in Rittman; milk from United Dairy Inc. in Martins Ferry; and a salad mix from Waterfields LLC, a hydroponic facility in Cincinnati.

“Research shows an average 5 percent increase in income for individual farmers from Farm to School sales and establishment of long-term revenue streams,” said Amy Fovargue, youth wellness program coordinator for Farm to School. “Data also point to improvements in student health behaviors, including choosing healthier options at school meals and consuming more fruits and vegetables at school and at home, related to Farm to School activities.”

Farm to School is a national initiative. In Ohio, it is led by OSU Extension in partnership with numerous organizations and industry groups.

Farm to School works to increase students’ access to healthy foods; increase students’ knowledge about food, health, nutrition, and agriculture; and create economic opportunities for growers, said Carol Smathers, an OSU Extension field specialist and the program’s director.

The Ohio Days program was initiated last year and has now increased to include other school districts in the Franklin County area, Fovargue said. In addition, a local foods directory was created, listing Ohio growers who are able to source local foods for the participating schools, she said.

“Columbus City Schools is making new connections with more local producers and is substantially increasing the portion of their food budget spent on local foods,” she said.

Ohio Farm to School will serve as the local host for the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference in Cincinnati from April 25 to April 27. The conference is for school districts looking to start or expand a Farm to School program; consumers interested in local food opportunities; and growers looking for ways to sell fresh, local foods to schools and other institutional cafeterias.

The conference is expected to draw more than 1,000 farmers, producers, educators, school-food-service professionals, parents, business leaders, and OSU Extension experts as part of an effort to get more fresh, locally grown and locally produced foods into more school cafeterias and increase farmers’ economic opportunities, Smathers said.

“The national conference highlights innovative Farm to School approaches. Participants will become aware of many ways their own work fits within Farm to School efforts,” she said. “They will leave motivated to forge new procurement channels, plant school gardens, and offer more Ohio-grown foods in their communities’ cafeterias.”

For more information about Farm to School and the conference, visit go.osu.edu/farm2school-conference.
Food safety hotline provides answers to consumers

How long can you safely leave perishable foods out of the refrigerator? What’s the best way to thaw frozen foods? How long can you keep canned foods? Call 1-800-752-2751 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday and a CFAES food safety expert will likely have the answer to these and other food-related questions.

Created in 1985 by the Ohio State Food Industries Center as a service to support the needs of Ohio-based food processors, the Food Safety Hotline is now a consumer resource for any popular food issue, said Heather Dean, hotline coordinator.

“Sometimes it’s just as simple as someone going through his or her food pantry and asking questions about expiration dates.”

Raising barley for beer: A new prospect for Ohio farmers

Most of the barley grown in Ohio has fed farm animals, but that’s about to change. A new barley malting facility is opening in Marysville, so the demand for barley raised for beer is about to rise.

CFAES grain experts are helping farmers navigate the challenges of raising barley for beer, which is different from growing it to feed farm animals.

Recently, these experts published a guidebook, available at go.osu.edu/CEZN. They continue to test barley seed varieties in plots across Ohio, and to watch for diseases that attack the test plants. They’re optimistic that the crop can be a boon for farmers seeking extra income and for the craft breweries hankering for Ohio-grown ingredients.

Plant questions? Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer

How soon in the spring can you plant snap peas? What are the best shade trees to grow in Ohio? Get science-based answers to your gardening questions using CFAES’ “Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer” site (go.osu.edu/AskaMasterGardener). Type in your question, attach a related photo if you have one, state your county, and get an answer by email. The free service is provided by Master Gardener Volunteers, plant experts trained by OSU Extension.

Hey, geese! Get off my lawn!

Right now, before spring gets underway, is the best time to keep Canada geese off your property, CFAES specialists say.

The majestic, once-rare honkers, now sometimes a nuisance due to their grass-eating, lawn-soiling, and aggressive nesting behavior, start staking out territories in late February and early March, and often start nesting by the middle of March.

That’s a crucial time frame, Marne Titchenell and William Lynch say in a CFAES fact sheet called Coping With Canada Geese: Conflict Management and Damage Prevention Strategies, because “many strategies to alleviate goose problems are best employed before geese build a nest.”

Also a factor is that Canada geese are protected by law, so there are limits to what you can do to dissuade them—to goose them along, as it were.

Read the full fact sheet at go.osu.edu/CFAESgeese.