



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

# Farm Connection

by  
Pauline Scott  
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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## **KIDS “GET IT” AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER THANKS TO HANDS-ON APPROACH**

The annual Harvest Fair attracted 700 people to Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road despite clashing with the September 23rd OSU/UNLV game. Fans found a way to do both, by arriving early and spending a few hours at the farm with their families before watching the game. It was a beautiful day in all respects, with the pond being a magnet for young fishermen.

New this year was a brightly colored applied science booth run by Professor Jeff, a member of the American Chemical Society, Columbus Section. He provided hands-on opportunities, including toys with photovoltaic cells that act like batteries to run tiny motors. Frightened crickets vibrated and skittered across the table. Spiders moved in children’s hands until a hand-cloud covered them up! Cars shot up a ramp into a hole. It was a perfect fit with Stratford’s philosophy of exciting kids to learn by encouraging participation, AND with the “electrifying” new solar project at Stratford.

Our plan to fill the south side of the barn and the machine shed roofs with solar panels is going full steam ahead! We estimate we will see a fifty percent reduction in our annual electricity bill, with the savings all going toward our children’s programs. We have initiated a fund to pay for the panels. Donors can become a Power Ranger by buying 5 panels for \$1,000 or a Sunbeam by purchasing 1 panel for \$200. To monitor our progress, we have a “thermometer” and list of donors on the wall in the front lobby.

Delaware Community Market helped sustain Harvest Fair volunteers with their delicious wraps. Our relationship is long, and we are one of many designated non-profits who receive a percentage of their sales. The Market sells our meats. Volunteer Christine Caruso aka Tuesday’s Cupcake Treat Lady, also markets her baked goods there. She will share her knowledge during an “Introduction to Basic Baking” at Stratford on November 18 from 9-1, and you can find further details on our web site.

Paula Ziebarth, a Stratford volunteer and the Ohio Bluebird Society Delaware Area Contact, overseas the monitoring of the bird boxes and Purple Martin gourd-shaped white houses located in the prairie. Paula shared some interesting facts along with this year’s fledged numbers. The Purple Martins are thriving, but the Bluebird attempts to raise a family amounted to only four compared to the Tree Swallows forty-three. This appeared odd at first glance as both birds utilize identical boxes and don’t compete for food as they eat insects found on different levels, but Paula had some answers.

All the boxes are in the prairie rather than the pasture, where livestock would brush against the posts and disrupt the nests. This is a problem for Bluebirds as they eat insects found at ground level in open areas, and the dense prairie vegetation is hard to penetrate. It forces them to fly further, leaving their boxes unprotected and vulnerable, especially from invasion by the English House Sparrow. The Tree Swallows feed on the abundant flying insects found in tall grasses, as well the flies on grazing cattle.

As the Eastern Bluebird stays in Ohio year-round, they do have a housing advantage over the migrating Tree Swallows. However, Tree Swallows will nest within 22 yards of each other, whereas Bluebirds require at least the equivalent of a football field separation due to many factors, which limits their choices. Should the soft-beaked insect-eating Bluebirds choose to nest in shorter grass areas, they are more prone to attack from House Sparrows, whose hard seed-cracker beak overpowers them.

Fall is breeding season for the sheep and goats at Stratford. As we kept some of this year's female lambs it was necessary to introduce a new ram to avoid inbreeding, and to initiate a new breeding line for our Tunis sheep. We collaborated with Delaware Preservation Park's Galant Farm to secure a ram. We introduced him to our youngsters four weeks ago, and later this fall he will breed with Galant's ewes. The old ram remains for now, and he has been used to breed with the older ewes.

The best corn stalks are still green with big fat ears, but they will eventually turn brown and we can harvest the bumper crop. The buckwheat, along with an abundance of foxtail grass seed, have been harvested. They were air-dried on the machine shed floor, and then bagged to use as a part of the winter feed mix for the chickens and pigs. The sunflowers were harvested last Tuesday, and their seeds will also be added to the mix.

On October 9 we welcomed a new employee. Barb Chu became our part-time Administrative Coordinator and a key regular figure at the front desk. Barb first came to volunteer at the front desk, gardens and greenhouse this past summer. She discovered our 5<sup>th</sup> grade "Messages from the Earth" program, and joined the fall teaching program. Barb placed her return to nursing on hold in favor of the outdoor environment at Stratford, and like so many of us loves her BP-lowering drive through the woods to get to Stratford.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Road, Delaware, Ohio, 43015, Tel. 740 363 2548. Email [StratfordCenter@aol.com](mailto:StratfordCenter@aol.com) or visit our web site at [StratfordEcologicalCenter.org](http://StratfordEcologicalCenter.org)