



MARY ANN SWETLAND
CENTER FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Darcy Freedman, PhD, MPH

DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Partners,

This past year was marked by historic events that transformed what we do and how we do it and affirmed why we are committed to advancing environmental health equity locally and beyond. The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and racial equity were interdependent themes during a year unlike any in a generation. As a Center, we were challenged to find new ways of working together—virtually inviting ourselves into each other’s homes, getting to know our families (human and non-human), and struggling to make sense of science as it played out in real-time. Our relationships both within the center among a remarkable staff and with outside partners, advisors, and affiliates were our most valuable resource of 2020. As we danced in the wave of time, trust served as the force that provided choreography amid chaos. It laid the foundation for executing a statewide rapid-response study examining COVID-19 trends in child care programs and was the backbone holding our team accountable as we released a Menu of Actions for Community Driven Food Systems Change. Thank you for trusting us to be partners and allies as we leverage the Swetland Center to advance transformative research, training and community engagement bringing us closer to the reality of environmental health equity.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darcy Freedman', written in a cursive style.

OUR VALUES



Innovative



Inclusive



Community Engaged



Collaborative

Our Mission and Vision

Our mission at the Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health, located in the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, is to study the complex interplay between the environment and health. The center places special emphasis on investigating the environmental determinants of health inequities to translate these findings into policies and practices that promote community and population health. The strategic vision of the Swetland Center is to leverage diverse skills and experiences through transformative research, training and community engagement in order to achieve environmental health equity by:

- **Advancing** applied and community-engaged environmental health research.
- **Integrating** environmental health and community systems science into medical and graduate education.
- **Engaging** the community in research translation to inform changes in policy and practice.





OUR APPROACH

With many influential contributors, the Mary Ann Swetland Center has pioneered environmental health research over the past three decades and continues to serve local communities. The foundation for the center was built in the 1950's, when David W. Swetland and Mary Ann Swetland addressed the need to educate and empower medical professionals to better understand environmental impacts on human health. Today, the Swetland Center, led by Darcy Freedman, PhD, MPH, focuses on research, training and education and community engagement to build capacity for the next generation of scientists to work alongside community partners to promote healthy places for people to thrive.

RESEARCH

This year, the coronavirus pandemic exposed deeply rooted environmental injustices and reinforced the need for environmental supports such as access to parks and greenspace, clean air, grocery stores and safe child care. In response, the Swetland Center expanded its efforts to include a new focus on COVID-19. It is through this lens that we broadened our research in existing areas focused on food systems, health equity and air quality.

TRAINING

The center is committed to developing a diverse community of scholars working toward actionable knowledge for transforming health. This commitment aligns with our vision for environmental health equity. Overcoming inequities in the socio-ecological environments that enable health and equity of opportunity requires an inclusive workforce. Our center is a supportive training ground for Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC) students. In 2020, we supported 30 students, 53% were BIPOC. We will continue to innovate training opportunities to promote racial equity within our center.

COMMUNITY

Engaging with the community was a crucial yet challenging part of 2020. The tension of this challenge forced us into a new paradigm for nurturing authentic engagement within guidelines for physical distancing. Through this, we birthed exciting developments in our work including the release of the Menu of Actions for Community Driven Food Systems Change. By catalyzing the impact of community-led research, we see opportunities for continued growth in 2021 as the center launches the Food Systems Change Fellowship program.

RESEARCH

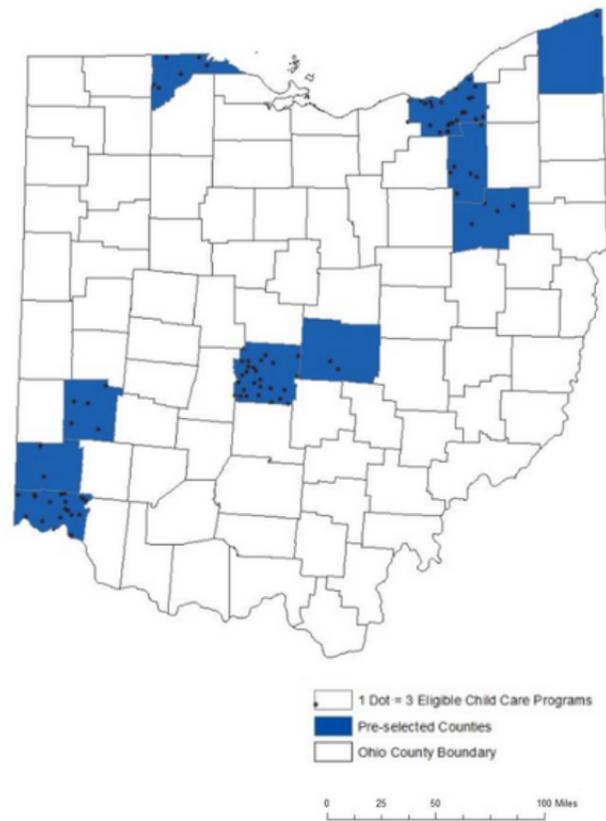
Ohio COVID-19 Child Care Study

In July 2020, the Mary Ann Swetland Center spearheaded a multidisciplinary study to better understand how to lower the spread and lessen the impact of COVID-19 among families and staff affiliated with child care programs in Ohio. The Ohio COVID-19 Child Care Study, funded by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation and conducted in partnership with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, was a rapid-response study designed to provide critical feedback to the state.

The study team, with expertise in child health and wellbeing, environmental health, epidemiology, and infectious disease management and control, conducted the study that included: (A) statewide examination of COVID-19 cases among child care staff and children attending child care and (B) in-depth analysis in 10 counties including data collection using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Key Findings:

- Compliance with COVID-19 mitigation strategies is keeping child care workers and children safe.
- Prevalence of COVID-19 in child care programs in Ohio was low.
- COVID-19 cases in child care are higher among staff than children.
- Community transmission of COVID-19 influences transmission risk within child care settings.
- Child care workers provide critical infrastructure for Ohio's economy.
- Additional support is needed for elementary-aged children completing remote learning in child care.





RESEARCH

Ohio Produce Perks Statewide Evaluation

Over the past decade, bipartisan support has grown for fruit and vegetable incentives designed to lower food costs among people receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In 2018, Produce Perks Midwest, an Ohio-based nonprofit, was awarded a Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant for \$4.6 million to be used to implement statewide incentive programming over three years. Darcy Freedman was selected as the statewide evaluator for Produce Perks, Ohio's SNAP incentive program. Since 2018, Freedman and the Swetland team have led multiple evaluation studies to understand and analyze program operations, program adoption and use, and diet and health among people receiving SNAP and Produce Perks users.

In 2020, the Swetland team sought to gain a better understanding of food purchasing and consumption habits among SNAP recipients, incentive program operations and utilization, and the impact of COVID-19 on low-resource families throughout Ohio. The team conducted surveys and interviews in Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Mahoning and Summit counties, and reported on and evaluated the impact of the incentive program offered at both farmers' markets and retail sites statewide.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

2020 Summer Virtual Internship

The center virtually hosted its second cohort of interns and trainees for ten weeks in 2020. Interns were immersed in engaging and thought-provoking experiences to enhance their awareness of and develop skills to address the environment's disparate impact on communities and populations.



Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research Fellowship

Swetland Center Pre-Doctoral Scholars, Gwendolyn Donley and Abigail Roche, were accepted into the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) Fellowship. This program promotes professional development, communication skills and the ability for doctoral candidates to explore the food and agriculture industry through a lens beyond academia.



Gwendolyn Donley, MS



Abigail Roche, MS, RDN

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

FreshLink Ambassador Technical Assistance

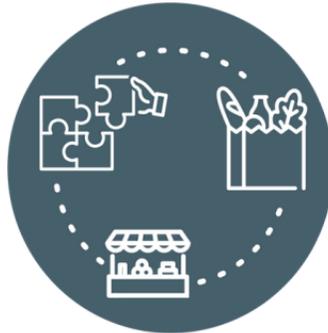
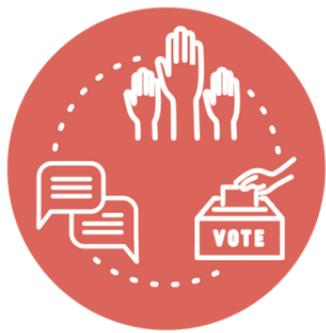
In partnership with the national Farmers' Market Coalition, the FreshLink Ambassador team developed a series of technical assistance guides outlining the key components of the FreshLink Ambassador Approach, which leverages community networks to increase awareness and use of fruit and vegetable incentive programs among people receiving SNAP.

The team provided eight virtual consulting sessions to community groups and organizations in California, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia interested in adopting the FreshLink Ambassador Approach in their local community.

Swetland Center Core Faculty Earned the 2020 Scholarship and Teaching Award

Case Western Reserve University's Scholarship in Teaching Award recognizes contributions to education, promotes teaching as a scholarly activity, and advances the careers of medical educators. Each year, awards are chosen based on purposeful planning, systematic implementation, and reflection and assessment for improvement.

In 2020, Karen Mulloy, DO, MSCH along with co-authors, Heidi Gullett, MD and Amy L. Wilson-Delfosse, PhD were recognized for their efforts to successfully develop and implement climate change curriculum into the first-year required course work for medical students.



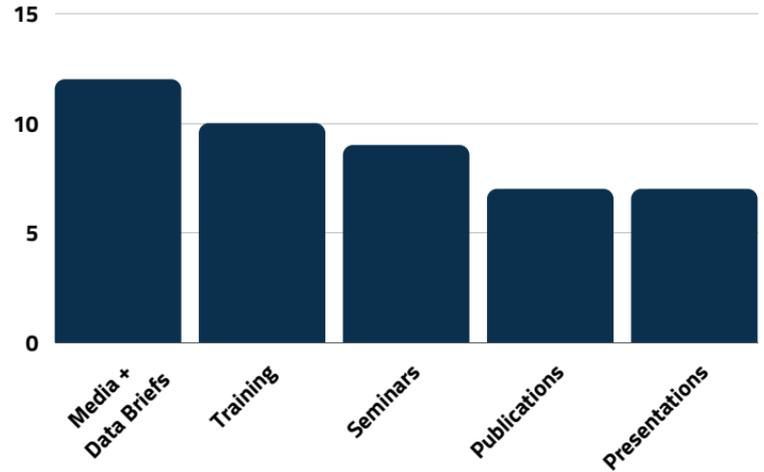
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Menu of Actions for Community Driven Food Systems Change was released in November 2020 by the Swetland Center and its partners. It allows for transparency about the food system and provides insights uncovered through intensive data gathering and community discussions supported by the Modeling the Future of Food in Your Neighborhood Study (foodNEST 2.0). It serves as a primer for thinking about the complexity of the local food system and why it is not producing outcomes of justice. Most importantly, the menu was designed to jumpstart community driven changes to local food systems that increase economic opportunity, food security, and fair access to fresh and healthy foods for residents in historically redlined neighborhoods. In 2021, the Swetland Center will activate the menu through the Food Systems Change Fellowship designed to be a "test kitchen" for growing capacity among community members hungry for change.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Swetland Center is focused on cultivating a diverse set of opportunities to engage students, staff, faculty and lifelong learners.

9	Staff
18	Faculty Affiliates
3	Core Faculty
7	Graduate Assistants
11	Trainees
12	Interns
59	Team Total

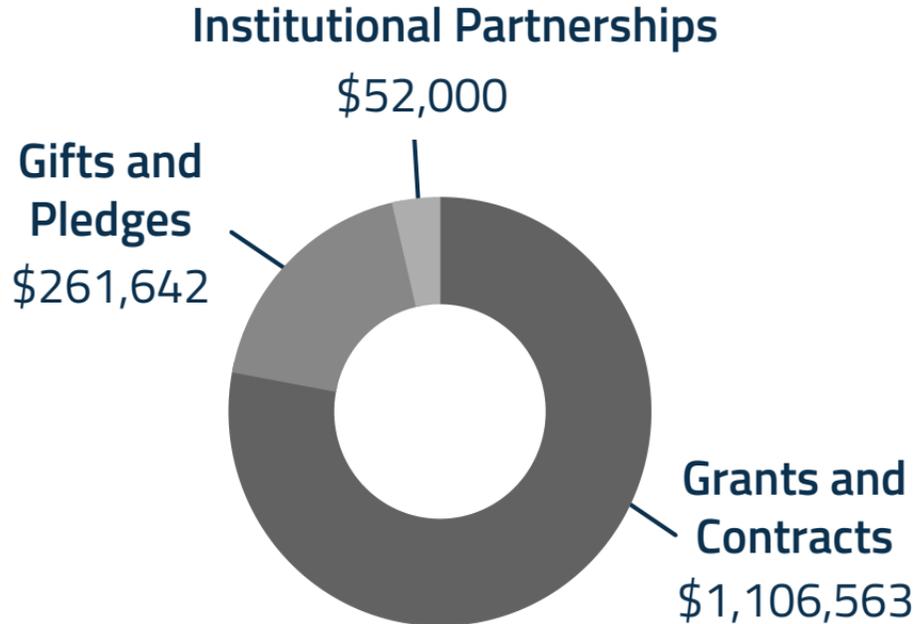


The Swetland Center prioritizes the dissemination of research findings. We provide a range of user-friendly ways to access our work so community leaders can inform policy around systems and environmental change.

OPERATING BUDGET

The 2020 operating budget of the Swetland Center was \$1.42 million.

Approximately 60% went to support the center's community-engaged research, 30% for training and education and 10% for community engagement.



2020 FUNDERS

- Cleveland Clinical and Translational Science Collaborative (CTSC)
- Drew and Debbie Sparacia
- Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research
- Margaret W. Wong
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
- Nationwide Children's Hospital
- National Dairy Council
- National Institute of Drug Abuse
- Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation
- Sears-Swetland Family Foundation
- The S. Livingston Mather Charitable Trust
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

Throughout 2020, we were reminded of the importance of using an adaptive model to guide our work as we focus on the complex interplay between the environment and community health. As we look ahead to 2021, we aim to:

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- Expand our environmental health capacity through strategic new hires.
- Establish action plans and benchmarks for leveraging our organizational structure to dismantle racism both within Case Western Reserve University and in the community.
- Launch the Food Systems Change Fellowship to build local capacity for community driven change of local food systems.
- Continue to promote the work of local, regional and national environmental health leaders through our monthly seminar series.
- Foster a robust training ground for students at all levels to lead environmental health equity research, policy and practice.



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