



The rolling hills on Hidden Falls LLC near Decorah, Iowa.



Cover: Guests walk past prairie and corn fields that Joe Merten and his family have planted on their Austin, Minnesota, farm during a field day in August 2023. Joe hosted the PFI event, which explored ways to create a legacy of conservation in traditional row cropping systems.



Guests meet some of the goats Dayna Burtness and Nick Nguyen use for brush control on their farm near Spring Grove, Minnesota, during a PFI field day in September 2023.

From the President and Director

2023 was another year of growth for Practical Farmers of Iowa: growth of members, staff, budget – and impact. This growth is exciting, as it amplifies the positive change we can bring to our landscape and communities. But it's only possible because of the strong relationships created via our supportive farmer network.

During his keynote at the Cooperators' Meeting in December, for instance, Sam Bennett recalled specific moments where farmers shaped his farming paradigm and practices. In one, he shared how Vic Madsen, who farms near Audubon, Iowa, cautioned a group of researchers who were planning trials to prove that cover crops were the best in any system, anywhere. Vic encouraged these farmers to craft trials to better their farms and warned that "evangelizing without credibility was the wrong path to choose."

Sam also shared how Mark Quee, who farms near West Liberty, Iowa, changed the way Sam views his farming operation. "I was very caught up in the details of production and day-to-day work," Sam says. "Mark encouraged us to look at our farms and land as an artist's canvas that begins anew each spring – to find beauty and satisfaction in the wild things and spaces, and to make your farm your canvas, your art, your song or your prayer."

As we continue to grow and evolve, the words of PFI co-founder Dick Thompson – who lived by his philosophy of "get along, but don't go along" – remain as relevant as ever. Guided by that motto, Dick, his wife Sharon, Larry Kallem, Rick Exner and other founding farmers laid the groundwork for PFI and how we operate.

Dick's words are a reminder that we don't have to choose between living our values and building community. Despite any differences we may have, we can always find common ground, be courteous to our neighbors and find ways to work together towards the values we do share. Thanks to all of you for exemplifying those values as we all strive to create a more resilient future. It's our sincere hope that through Practical Farmers, you can keep growing, learning and finding inspiration for the work you're doing on your farms and in your communities.

This annual report is full of exciting activity and impact from 2023, organized by work we've undertaken to achieve our strategic directions. You'll find examples of how farmers are helping each other through PFI's network. You'll also notice text boxes highlighting some of the results from our 2021-2023 objectives and key results, which we crafted to help us achieve our strategic directions. Our goals were audacious, and we did not meet all of them, but we made impressive progress. For a full report, or any questions you have, please contact us.

Thank you for your ongoing support and participation. We look forward to a bountiful 2024!

Nathan Anderson Board President Sally Worley
Executive Director

Sally Worley

Our Mission

Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.

Our Vision

An Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

Our Values

Welcoming everyone

Farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge

Curiosity, creativity, collaboration and community

Resilient farms now and for future generations

Stewardship of land and resources

Our Guiding Principles

Farmers lead our programming.

We focus on providing extensive opportunities for members and others to network.

We secure extensive media featuring farmers and our projects.

On-farm research and demonstration is a core part of our programming.

We partner with agencies, organizations and universities that can effectively help us achieve our goals.

From PFI's 2021–2026 Strategic Plan

Practical Vision

Many voices driving Iowa's agriculture narrative

Effective leaders creating positive change for our food and farm systems

PFI well-positioned for success, impact and growth

Robust markets for a diversity of farm products

Healthy environments stemming from responsible land stewardship

Thriving rural communities filled with resilient and profitable farms

Farming is a desirable vocation and new farmers are equipped to succeed

A diverse and inclusive PFI network

Strategic Directions

Equipping a deep bench of leaders to inspire change towards a diverse and vibrant landscape

Strengthening our network to foster deeper connections, a sense of shared community and partnerships that help spread PFI's vision

Driving the narrative and amplifying diverse viewpoints

Paving a path to prosperity for regional food and farm businesses

Growing organizational capacity for long-term impact

2023 PFI Board of Directors

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Nathan Anderson - President

DISTRICT 2 (North Central)

Jack Boyer

DISTRICT 3 (Northeast)

Shaffer Ridgeway

DISTRICT 4 (Southwest)

Jon Bakehouse - Treasurer

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Gayle Olson

AT-LARGE FARMERS

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Anna Hankins

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Debra Boekholder

Membership & Office Assistant

Alisha Bower

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Heather Brown

Grants Finance Manager

Kasey Bunce

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Rachel Burke

Beginning Farmer Engagement Coordinator

Valeria Cano Camacho

Senior Latino Engagement Coordinator

Sarah Carlson

Senior Programs & Member Engagement Director

Steve Carlson

Membership & Office Manager

Margaret Chamas

Livestock Viability Manager

Rebecca Clay

Senior Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Rachel Deutmeyer

Senior Video Coordinator

Lydia English

Senior Field Crops Viability Manager

Chelsea Ferrie

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Stefan Gailans

Senior Research Manager

Natasha Hegmann

Senior Horticulture & Local Food Coordinator

Taylor Hintch

Senior Field Crops Education Coordinator

Morgan Jennings

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Amos Johnson

Senior Livestock Education Coordinator

Miranda Johnson

Human Resources Manager

Tamsyn Jones

Senior Editor & Magazine Coordinator

Liz Kolbe

Farmer-Led Education Director

Sarah Krumm

Senior Graphic Design & Photography Coordinator

Emma Liddle

Membership Coordinator

Emma Link

Senior Research Coordinator

Martha McFarland

Senior Farmland Viability Coordinator

Sophie McGovern

Marketing Project Coordinator

Kyleigh Meyeres

Office Assistant

Vanya North

Habitat Education Coordinator

Solveig Orngard

Field Crops Education Coordinator

Jennifer Reddel

Cost-Share Administrative Assistant

Chastity Schonhorst

Finance Coordinator

Jacqueline Venner Senske

Senior Horticulture Education Coordinator

Elizabeth Wilhelm

Media Relations Coordinator

Brad Woodson

Habitat Viability Manager

Sally Worley

Executive Director

Emily Yaddof

Senior Digital Marketing Coordinator

Grace Yi

Senior Habitat Viability Coordinator

Carly Zierke

Digital Content Coordinator

Christine Zrostlik

Marketing & Communications Director

PFI Co-Founders

Larry Kallem Ames, IA The late Dick & Sharon Thompson

Boone, IA





PFI staff enjoy time together in 2023. (Left): In March, staff shared food and games in West Des Moines, Iowa. (Right): In October, communications staff visited Berry Patch Farm in Nevada, Iowa, to pick pumpkins.

Equipping a deep bench of leaders to inspire change towards a diverse and vibrant landscape.



Farmer-to-Farmer Education

PFI's farmer-led education work creates platforms for farmers to share their knowledge and experience, and to help them build strong support networks. These events are truly farmer-led: Farmers select the topics, serve as hosts and educate one another. Farmer attendees also contribute immensely to the discussion.

In 2023, PFI held **218** events that were attended by **5,166** people. In addition, PFI was represented through speaking or outreach at **89** events.



The late Chris Blanchard – a gifted vegetable farmer and teacher from Decorah, Iowa – exemplified this spirit of openness. In 2010, he presented at a community supported agriculture workshop where he said he was "sharing his experience as an example, not a model." Practical Farmers events harness Chris' advice. Farmers teach more freely when presenting their experience as options, rather than rules. They explain the context of their farm, what worked and what didn't. Farmers are also more receptive when ideas are presented as options and they can decide what aspects apply to their own farms.

Honoring the Leaders

Practical Farmers of Iowa is led by many. Last year, hundreds of members served as leaders by teaching, outreach, mentorship and more. We recognize these leaders for their contributions.

Dean and Judy Henry received Practical Farmers of Iowa's 2023 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award for their contributions to creating vibrant communities, healthful food and diverse farms.

The founders of Hidden Falls LLC received PFI's 2023 Farmland Owner Legacy Award for their vital role in stewarding the agricultural landscape, rural communities and opportunities for beginning farmers.





43 field days, 2,110 attendees

Our 2023 field day season welcomed the most attendees to date. Twenty-nine first-time hosts deepened the bench of farmer leaders. Steve Strasheim was one of those. He welcomed 75 people to his farm in Mitchell, Iowa, on Father's Day to share how he found creative ways to access land in town, how he raises diverse crops in a small area and how he started an on-farm store. He also discussed his geothermal hoop house.

Attendee Marena Henkle said the most valuable part of the field day was "seeing the 'raw' footage of the operation and equipment used," and that "Steve's information was honest and extensive." Marena's comments encompass common feedback we hear about what makes field days so valuable. Attendees repeatedly laud being able to see the operation firsthand, hearing directly from farmers, the opportunity to build connections with others and the honesty and openness of the hosts.



"Steve's information was honest and extensive."

- Marena Henkle

Steve Strasheim hosted a 2023 field day on his farm in Mitchell, Iowa.

A Wide Variety of Farmer-Led Events

- 12 farmer-led webinars
- 78 annual conference sessions 28 peer group meetups and socials
 - 8 shared learning calls

Plus

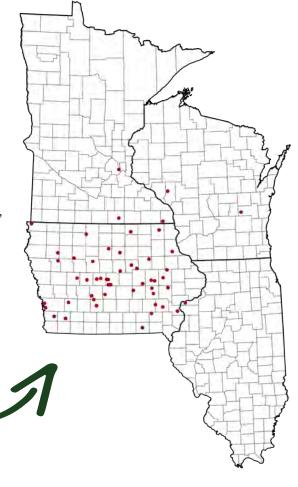
- "Agronomists in the Know" webinar series
- "A Year in the Life" workshop series
- Beginning Farmer Summit
- · Commercial Apple Growers Workshop
- · Cooperators' Meeting
- · "Explorando Agricultura" workshop series
- Midwest Covers and Grains Conference

On-Farm Research

Practical Farmers' on-farm research legacy precedes the organization. Co-founders Dick and Sharon Thompson independently conducted research on their farm to help make science-based decisions. When they helped found PFI in 1985, their approach infused PFI's ethos. Our on-farm research program officially started in 1987 and since then, more than 240 farmers have conducted 1,300 research trials on their farms.

Farmers are firmly at the helm of these projects. Farmers set the parameters for these trials so they can answer specific questions, and they conduct the research on their farms. PFI staff help ensure trials follow best practices for robust data collection and help analyze the data. In 2023, farmers researched a range of topics, from variety trials of cauliflower, oats and soybeans; to roller crimping cover crops; to tarping in vegetables for weed control; to biological seed treatments; and more.

In 2023, **48** farmer researchers participated in **78** trials.





Adam Ledvina

Farmers Adam Ledvina of Chelsea, Iowa, Bailey Lutz of Decorah, Iowa, and Emily Fagan and Hannah Breckbill, also from Decorah, all collaborated on a trial comparing profit and kid growth of goats and sheep castrated at four weeks versus eight. "It's been helpful to have some actual analysis of data to address assumptions," Bailey says, reflecting on the trial. "I feel I left with more curiosity and questions than I had before."

This sentiment is common among PFI's farmer-researchers. The process of conducting on-farm research helps them answer one set of questions while sparking new ones. This blend of discovery and curiosity, learning and sharing, is what gives PFI's Cooperators' Program its power.

By designing and carrying out their own trials, farmers are the drivers of knowledge. Using science, they're able to challenge a convention or a marketing claim. Not all practices will work equally on all farms. Equipped with data from their own farm, farmers can feel more confident about making – or not making – a change.

Farmers also inspire and collaborate with one another on research. These relationships build community among farmers and boost their trust in the results. Rob Stout, who farms near Washington, Iowa, says, "I am more likely to read about research results on someone's farm I have met."



Bailey Lutz



Hannah Breckbill & Emily Fagan



"I feel I left
with more
curiosity and
questions than
I had before."

- Bailey Lutz



2021-2023 Report Card

Strategic Direction 1:

Equipping a deep bench of leaders to inspire change towards a diverse and vibrant landscape

Objective:

PFI catalyzes farmers' curiosity into action.

Goal:

95% of farmers exposed to farmerled education and research in 2023 have a change in knowledge.



Result: 98%

Goal:

50% of PFI members report changing farm practices as a result of farmer-led education and research in 2023.



Result: 78%

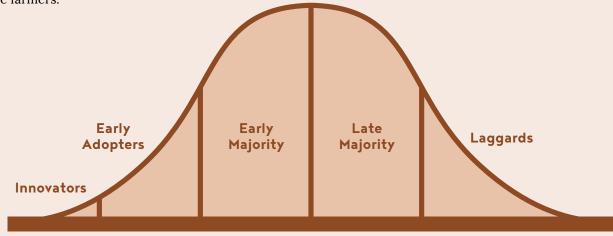
Strengthening our network to foster deeper connections, a sense of shared community and partnerships that help spread PFI's vision.

Growing Our Network

PFI's network drives farmer-to-farmer education and builds a sense of belonging and shared power among farmers. We have been working hard to grow this network, since we know from data and experience that people involved with us have a strong track record of making the changes they want to see to their farms and communities.

Diffusion of Innovation Model

PFI is intentionally growing its network in multiple ways. Original and early members of the organization are largely early innovators and early adopters per the diffusion of innovation model. We want to continue reaching these farmers.

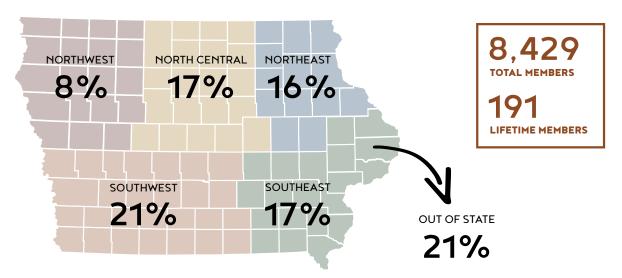


But we have also increased our focus on the next group of farmers, that Everett Rogers' diffusion of innovation model describes as the "early majority." These farmers are unlikely to be first to make a change. They usually need to see evidence and hear other farmers' success stories before they're comfortable adopting new practices. Our farmer-to-farmer model is uniquely suited to fulfilling those needs. As part of our effort to foster broadscale environmental and community benefits, we are now actively recruiting these farmers.

Members have also asked us to increase our focus on further broadening our big tent. In response, we are working intentionally to build relationships with different groups of historically underserved farmers. We're learning their needs and seeking to understand their unique challenges so we can offer meaningful programs and a broader range of speakers, interpretation and translation.

We're committed to creating an inclusive network and are embracing this work so we can more fully live our value of welcoming everyone.

Farmers and friends of farmers both report making a difference. Henry Corbin, a nonfarmer from Nevada, Iowa, says, "My time both as staff and now as a member has helped me reach where I am at with my career, and helped me further my education and desire to make a lasting impact on my community and state."





2021-2023 Report Card

Strategic Direction 2:

Strengthening our network to foster deeper connections, a sense of shared community and partnerships that help spread PFI's vision

Objective:

Farmers feel a sense of community and shared power.

Goal:

Farmers in all of lowa's 99 counties host events.



Result: We held events in 68 lowa counties + 4 counties in Illinois + 10 counties in Minnesota + 2 counties in Nebraska + 1 county in Wisconsin

Goal:

100 members report PFI has enhanced their capacity to make an impact in their communities.



Result: 780 members told us we helped boost their capacity to make an impact.

Goal: PFI has 10,000 members by Dec. 31, 2023.



Result: We had 8,429 members by the end of 2023

Driving the food and farm narrative and amplifying diverse viewpoints.

Amplifying Farmer Voices

The public narrative in agriculture is more polarized than agriculture really is, which impedes people from coming together to build resilient farms and communities. Practical Farmers works to feature many voices to showcase the complexity of farming, as well as the innovations farmers are putting forth to create a healthier food and farm system.

Last year, we helped get out the word in local and national publications.

This coverage included a broad range of member voices:

Members were featured in the media at least **573** times, with at least **295** individual members sharing their perspectives.

Carly Zierke, PFI's digital media coordinator, says, "People love to hear about other farmers more than any other content."



Tricia & Seth Engelbrecht

2023's top post on Facebook last year, with more than **18,000** views, was a spotlight of farmers Tricia and Seth Engelbrecht of Waverly, lowa.





"People love to hear about other farmers more than any other content."

- Carly Zierke

Civil Eats published "Bringing Oats Back to the Farm," featuring Landon Plagge, who farms near Latimer, Iowa, and Lydia English, PFI's senior field crops viability manager. Landon and Lydia discussed the role oats, a coolseason small-grain, play in our food system and efforts to bring them back to more farms.



Landon Plagge Photo credit: Anne Plagge



Lydia English

2021-2023 Report Card

Strategic Direction 3:

Driving the food and farming narrative and amplifying diverse viewpoints

Objective:

PFI is a household name.

Goal:

10,000 people interact with PFI's media on a weekly basis.



More than 17,000 people did so

Goal:

500 members are featured in PFI's media or external media.



594 members were featured

Paving a path to prosperity for regional food and farm businesses



Despite being equipped with production know-how, many food and farm businesses are unable to expand or launch due to lack of labor, capital, processing infrastructure and markets. Members have asked PFI for financial, technical and business assistance to help them meet their goals.

Land Access

Land access remains a primary barrier for beginning and aspiring farmers. In 2023, PFI's land access navigators helped 47 land seekers in their search for secure land tenure that fits their needs. Twenty-two landowners received landowner coaching about ways to increase conservation and create succession plans for their land. We also selected new tenants for our farm in Granger, Iowa, which was donated to PFI in 2016 by Angela and John Tedesco. Farmers from Global Greens – the incubator farm program created by Lutheran Services in Iowa to help farmers who came to Iowa as refugees start their own farm businesses—will start growing fresh table food at this farm in 2024.



Adopting New Practices Through Cost-Share

Practical Farmers' cost-share programs stemmed from farmers expressing interest in making changes but telling us they faced financial barriers to doing so. Farmers have shaped the design of these programs to ensure they are relevant and effective.

1,943 farmers planted 627,747 acres of cover crops

291 farmers planted 23,824 acres of small grains and reduced nitrogen on 7,578 acres of corn in extended rotation

Cover crops are an effective entry point to diversifying Iowa's agriculture. Not only do they benefit farmers directly in several ways, they have soil, water and other ecological benefits. Helping farmers reduce the burden of incorporating cover crops into their systems empowers them to keep making changes, especially when surrounded by a network of others who are curious and open to sharing their experiences.

Ben Moest farms near Winslow, Illinois, with his brother Grant. They farm just under 3,000 acres of non-GMO corn, food-grade soybeans and small grains used for seed and grain. Ben has participated in PFI's small-grain cost-share for the past few years. He says, "Access to the knowledge and wisdom of others has helped to bring about better understanding personally, and provides some confidence and inspiration to try different and new things." Ben and Grant shared their experience with other farmers at a field day they hosted on their farm in 2023.



Grant & Ben Moest

At the request of our membership, we have expanded our cost-share offerings. Here's a snapshot of some of our cost-share impact from 2023:

Habitat and Precision Conservation Cost-Share:

- · Installed 8 oxbows with \$131,583 invested in habitat
- Completed 30 pollinator projects + invested \$20,538 in habitat, resulting in 290 acres of restored habitat and 333 acres of improved habitat

Grazing Infrastructure Cost-Share:

 Served 43 farmers + invested more than \$200,000 in grazing infrastructure to help get more livestock on the land

Through all of these investments, PFI is sharing in the cost of establishing practices that benefit farmers and the environment. But the total investments are much higher: These numbers only reflect the monies funneled through PFI programs, not the investments that farmers have made alongside these dollars.

Business Support

Farmers have asked for help establishing good business practices. The following programs helped farmers invest in business infrastructure and expertise in 2023.

Produce Safety Cost-Share:

30 farmers enrolled, investing \$56,500 in produce safety

· Farmer of Color Seed Grants:

Served 49 farmers, with \$75,000 invested in growing their farm businesses

Savings Incentive Program:

19 beginning farmers active in the program, working to save money and improve their business plans

Labor4Learning:

18 trainees received training from experienced farmers on 16 farms

· Farm Business Coaching:

26 established farmers received advice on opportunities to improve their businesses

Cover Crop Business Accelerator:

8 additional farmers started in 2023



Shaffer Ridgeway

Practical Farmers has also served as a partner in Iowa's Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program, which has given us the opportunity to collaborate with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Valley RC&D and more. Since its inception September 2022, the program has helped 234 farmers sell \$2 million in products. PFI board member Shaffer Ridgeway, owner of Southern Goods LLC near Waterloo, Iowa, has sold beef and Southern produce to the Waterloo community since 2019. Shaffer says LFPA has "allowed us to get a fair price for what we're selling. We cannot scale our businesses and pay employees without getting a fair price."





2021-2023 Report Card

Strategic Direction 4:

Paving a path to prosperity for regional food and farm businesses

Objective:

Food and farm businesses thrive.

Goal:

PFI facilitates payments of \$5 million to farmers to reduce the financial burden of trying new things on their farms.



Result: We facilitated \$7.56 million in payments.

Goal:

PFI connects food and farm businesses to \$1 million in capital to launch or expand food and farm businesses.



Result: We connected these businesses to \$6.2 million in capital.

Goal:

80% of Cover Crop Business Accelerator participants accomplish their top three year-one goals after writing business plans.



Result: 92% accomplish those goals.

Goal:

PFI has invested time and financial resources in three food and farm businesses owned by farmers of color.



Result: We distributed financial resources to 49 farmers of color.

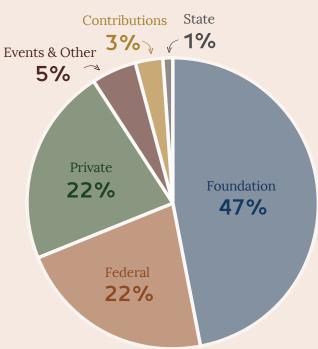
Growing organizational capacity for long-term impact



2023 was another year of internal growth at PFI. We completed some major information infrastructure upgrades to help us spend more time on our mission and less time using systems we've outgrown. Getting these systems in place had its challenges, but the transition was key to sustaining a growing organization. We are continuing to upgrade our membership software to make it easier to track member interest and engagement. We also hired 17 additional staff in 2023 to support our growing suite of farmer-directed programming.

Along with our internal growth, our budget and membership continued to grow. These trends clearly signal that funders and farmers are interested in our programming. We're excited because they also mean more opportunities for us to create positive change in communities and on the landscape.





Expenses \$7.9 M

\$148,740 came from donations above membership from 337 individual donors. A full list of donors and grantors will be available in the summer issue of the Practical Farmer. \$171,000 came from membership income.

We are extremely grateful for these individual contributions. This unrestricted income helps serve direct farmer and organization needs that are not covered in grants and is vital to our budget.

\$3 Million+

The amount PFI paid directly to farmers in fiscal year 2023:

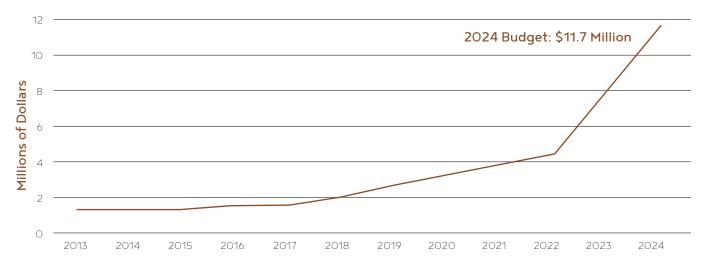
\$173,959

The amount we paid farmers for their leadership educating, hosting, mentoring, researching and serving as spokespeople in the media.

\$2,849,000

The amount we invested in practice adoption through cost-shares.

Annual PFI Budget, 2013-2024





2021-2023 Report Card

Strategic Direction 5:

Growing organizational capacity for long-term impact

Objective:

PFI staff are equipped and empowered to triple our impact.

Goal:

PFI has an annual operating budget of \$10 million.



Result: The board of directors approved PFI's budget for fiscal year 24, which began Oct. 1, 2023, at \$11.7 million.



Join or Renew Your Membership

Joining or renewing your membership is easy and immerses you in an incredible community that provides support and education on many agriculture issues, from production, to conservation, to profit and more.

Serve as a PFI leader

Thank you to all of you who served as leaders of our organization in 2023. We truly value what you bring to the table and hope you will continue to serve this organization. We would love to have more of you join us to provide governance and guidance, teach at and host events, share your stories with others and help mentor beginning farmers.

Attend Our Events

We organize events year-round to help you build resilient farms and communities. Please take time to attend, get to know others and learn from our member-leaders. Please bring your friends and neighbors along!

Engage With Us Online

We know it's not always possible to attend events in person. When you can't come to a field day, workshop or conference, connect digitally with PFI: Follow us on Facebook, X, YouTube and Instagram, and like, comment, share and retweet our posts – and let us know what you're up to.

Join the Email Conversation

Joining an email discussion group is one of the simplest ways to stay connected to the PFI community. Keep informed, share events, meet other farmers, landowners and non-farmers interested in diverse agriculture and get the support you need to make practical food and farm decisions. We often hear from members that these forums are one of the most valuable member benefits.

Stay connected with us! practical farmers.org x.com/practical farmer facebook.com/practical farmers youtube.com/pfivideos instagram.com/practical farmer linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa



Please continue to support Practical Farmers of Iowa financially. Donations are a vital funding source, helping to keep us financially nimble and able to respond quickly and directly to our members' needs. Your donation to Practical Farmers of Iowa is tax-deductible. We graciously accept cash donations, gifts from donor-advised funds, gifts of grain and employer match gifts.

Please consider making a planned gift to Practical Farmers of Iowa. This will not only help you create a legacy benefiting diverse farms and vibrant communities, if may also simplify your estate plans and increase your income. There are many ways to leave a planned gift.

Visit practicalfarmers.org to learn more.













PRACTICAL FARMERS of lowa

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