

the Practical Farmer

working together, always learning

SPRING 2017



On the cover



Attendees walk across a lush field of cover crops on Ward Van Dyke's farm in April. Ward hosted a field day as part of Practical Farmers' "Cover Crop Caravan" spring field day series.

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the Practical Farmer

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership, and helps keep farmers and friends of farmers in touch with one another through informative articles on relevant farming topics, current on-farm research, upcoming events and other news of interest.

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(Back issues are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, articles may be reprinted or adapted if credit is given. Clippings and notice are appreciated).



A Lot of ♥ at Practical Farmers



Recently, I had to use correction tape to calm my enthusiasm while writing a thank-you note to Tina Bakehouse. Tina, who farms with

her husband, Jon, near Hastings, had led our staff and board through a retreat on effective presentations and effective coaching to help farmers own the stage.

It is not often people leave public speaking training feeling pumped up. But we all did! We were inspired by the quality of her leadership, her obvious amount of preparation and how well she gets Practical Farmers and its members.

During the retreat, we identified two things as important when coaching farmers to deliver quality presentations:

1). Affirm farmers' expertise: Farmers are applied scientists. Nobody else has the level of agronomic and business knowledge combined with the hands-on experience they do. Other farmers want to hear detailed data about other farms, told from the farmer's perspective, so the data is paired with real-life experience.

2). Help farmers use storytelling to be themselves. Other farmers want to hear unfiltered experiences, both good and bad, to help inform decisions for their operations. Provide tools to help the farmer lead the presentation, shape the message and identify two or three main points – and help farmers craft engaging presentations, including a hook at the beginning and POW! at the end.

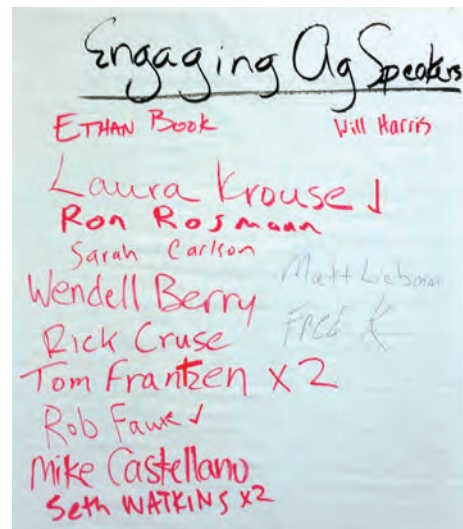
View a preview of our impressive lineup of field days on pages 14 – 15. As a result of our retreat with Tina, the quality of our field days will be even better!

Back to my thank-you note and over-exuberance: I wrote at the end without thinking "We ♥ you, Tina!" Then I worried: Is ♥ too strong? Tina will

realize I am simply passing on that the staff and board admire and appreciate her, right? Is ♥ inappropriate to send professionally? (Overthink much, Sally?) My internal conversation led me to take out my correction tape and change ♥ to "appreciate."

It also led me to think about how ♥ feelings come out often and sincerely in Practical Farmers of Iowa. This organization is a genuine support system created to help people achieve goals to improve Iowa's farms and communities. The commitment of members in PFI – you'll see a summary of people serving as leaders through governance on page 23 – is ♥-inducing. On page 4, you'll read about a generous gift from someone unknown to Practical Farmers until after her death that causes a ♥ feeling.

Shortly after, as I was compiling a long list of ♥-inducing member testimonials for our 2016 annual report, I found this gem from Jon, Tina's husband: "Tina and I were talking last night about how you can tell all of the food at PFI events is grown and prepared with love and care. I think that also can apply to the general feeling of PFI events. Maybe not quite a full-on love-in,



During the retreat, board and staff members identified people they believe are engaging agriculture speakers.

but the energy is good across the board." Apparently, my ♥ wasn't overstated!

Below are a few words of ♥ from our members in 2016.

Happy field day season – I hope to see you at one soon!

Sally Worley

Heartfelt Sentiments from Practical Farmers Members

» **Susan Jutz, Kearney, Nebraska:** "The number-one thing I love about PFI is the community – the support system. The second thing is what I've learned from conducting on-farm research trials, and knowing how to use that data."

» **Ralph Gauer, Silver City, New Mexico:** "You guys are SO useful...even from 1,000 miles away."

» **Ricardo Salvador, Washington, D.C. (via Twitter):** "I just report the truth. @practicalfarmer one of the best things #Iowa has going, & a national treasure for ag and as community of learning"

» **Rory Van Wyk, Winterset:** "Practical Farmers of Iowa is one of the most supportive organizations I have ever been part of."

» **Kate Edwards, Iowa City:** "Breaking into farming is hard and without support, impossible. Having the support of Practical Farmers of Iowa has enabled me to be a successful farmer."

» **Paul Ackley, Bedford,** after attending Practical Farmers SW Iowa cover crop meeting: "Thanks for a day feeling normal. It was one of the good ones."

» **Margaret Smith, Hampton,** responding to a discussion list post seeking red bulls: "Thank you, so very much, for your contacts and suggestions as we were looking for bulls. We found them! It's great to be part of this electronic community with so many helpful and caring people! Thanks, again. Love our PFI community!"

May Our Spirits Bloom With Kindness

The story behind a stranger's generous gift

by Sally Worley

In July 2016, Practical Farmers of Iowa received a letter informing us that Ruth Schoeneman had died, and Practical Farmers was listed as a recipient of part of the remainder of her estate. No one on staff was familiar with Ruth Schoeneman. An internet search revealed that Ruth's sister was Adele McDowell, of Des Moines. Adele has been a member of Practical Farmers since 2009. Practical Farmers sent a condolence and thank-you note to Adele. In early 2017, we received our portion of Ruth's estate – \$68,195.

The amount of the gift surprised everyone. Practical Farmers followed up with Adele to let her know how much the gift meant – and to find out how such a generous gift from a stranger came about.

About Ruth

Ruth, Adele and their three siblings grew up on a farm in Butler County. From Ruth's obituary:

"She was a bit of a tomboy who preferred being outside to housework. Pulling morning glories and milkweeds from young corn plants, feeding chickens and milking cows were among her chores that she declared were preferable to, 'being cooped up in a kitchen any old day.' Her high spirit was evident when she rode horses bareback and cajoled her little sister into swimming in the deep waters of Beaver Creek. Never mind the blood suckers that had to be picked off tender limbs afterward. Ruth spent the majority of her career as a caseworker for Cook County Department of Human Services in Chicago,



Adele McDowell, of Des Moines, has been a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa since 2009. She suggested that her sister, Ruth Schoeneman, list Practical Farmers as a beneficiary of her estate.

assuming the position of case supervisor before her retirement."

How Ruth Found Practical Farmers

Ruth lived in a care facility in Waterloo for the last seven years of her life. Adele drove monthly to visit her during that time. "I don't like freeways, so I would drive there

"Practical Farmers is showing the economic and ecologic value of practices like cover crops, buffer strips along streams, testing tile water, crop diversification and strip intercropping – all of which contribute to long-term solutions for water and soil quality."

and back on rural roads," Adele says. "As I drove, I saw these farms with soil laid bare from fall to spring. They didn't even leave the residue!"

During these visits, Adele helped Ruth, who had no descendants beyond nieces and nephews, identify additional recipients for her estate. Adele recommended Ruth list Practical Farmers as a recipient.

"Practical Farmers of Iowa is helping farmers think about how bare ground is robbing their children and grandchildren. Saving our black soil should be a farmer's top priority," Adele says. She adds that water quality also needs to be a top priority for Iowa's farms, in part because of the impact Iowa farming practices have on the annual low-oxygen dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico that can't support marine life. "Water quality and soil go hand in hand, really. The fact that we are contributing to the dead zone makes me ill."

Adele says she was drawn to Practical Farmers because of its work to help farmers think of viable alternatives to the current system:

"It is difficult to fault farmers for doing what they know will generate a profit. But our monoculture farming, coupled with chemical weed control, is having a devastating impact on our soils. And I hate

seeing all the soil erosion. That stuff is black gold.

"Practical Farmers is showing the economic and ecologic values of practices like cover crops, buffer strips along streams, testing tile water, crop diversification and strip intercropping – all of which contribute to long-term solutions for water and soil quality. In a recent issue of [the quarterly newsletter], one farmer said it best: 'I feel my job is to get out of the way of nature as much as possible, and let the plants and animals show me what works best.'"

Seeing Iowa's farm fields during her most recent trip through rural Iowa has filled Adele with hope. "I like to think farmers are doing a little better job of covering the soil. I see more green in the fields, and also shrubs and trees surrounding the fields."

What Will Happen to Ruth's Donation?

Per our planned giving policy, this donation was invested in our endowment at the Des Moines Community Foundation. The donation's principal will not be spent. Instead, Practical Farmers will have access to the earnings on an annual basis, forever.

May Our Spirits Similarly Bloom

In 2016 Adele wrote to a letter to the Des Moines Register: Her letter, titled "May Our Spirits Bloom with Kindness," talks about how to choose kindness in a world full of negativity. Adele ends her letter to The Register with a quote from George Santayana: "The world is not respectable; it is mortal, tormented, confused, deluded forever. But it is shot through with love and beauty, with glints of courage and laughter, and in these the spirit blooms."

Ruth's gift will continue to bloom each year, providing Practical Farmers with ongoing resources to help farmers learn how to farm profitably while protecting Iowa's soil and water. ■

To learn more about how to make an estate or other gift to support Practical Farmers' mission into the future, contact Sally Worley: sally@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

The Scent of Warm Earth

by Clark Porter

Farmers know it intimately. The smell of the warming earth on an early-spring night is like a whispered promise from God. Regardless of the passage of time – and in spite of the springs that have flown past – it is a smell of hope, of green summer days in the future.

I remember the smell from my youth. Like many aromas, it carries memories on its wings. I recall driving down a dark country road with the windows down, frogs singing in the ditches. It wasn't simply the scent of spring that night. The whole world smelled new, and my future unfurled beneath my imagination like skeins of cloth in the wind.

The scent of warming spring earth is largely composed of two compounds: geosmin and 2-methylisoborneol, products of soil bacteria that are awakened from their slumbers by rain and sun. But for me, those compounds are actually like airborne neurotransmitters, carrying memories from year to year.

I can also recall one very special May night in the early 1980s, when the smell of fresh earth arose with a mist along a creek. I was working with a friend to shape up a new piece of ground my family bought. As we sometimes did in those less enlightened days, we disked with the wings up. It was an unseasonably warm day, and as the sunset surrendered to moonlight, a cool mass of misty air ascending from the creeks and draws carried the smell of freshly worked soil. I was driving a Massey Ferguson with a dusty, noisy cab. I only had about an hour to go, but I stopped the tractor just to experience the night and soak up a little silence.

As I sat in the cab, I noticed a fox on a nearby hill. This was part of an old creek pasture I was supposed to be working up. Soon, she was surrounded by about five kits. They jumped and tussled with one another to be near her head. Clearly, she had just returned with supper. They played in the mist and moonlight for half an hour, oblivious to my presence. I could hear the water resonate from the shallows of the creek, punctuated by the chant of frogs. Conscious of my task and the late hour, I finally started up the tractor again.



I couldn't bear to disc that fox den, nor that part of the old pasture, and so I didn't. I steered past it, giving the fox and her kits plenty of room to live and play. I even flagged the area so a commercial sprayer would not go near the den. When the young men working at the co-op talked about area wildlife, I never said a word. The foxes and I were united. We shared a common exhilaration over the scent of warm earth, a delicate covenant forged in the night air.

My efforts were successful. I saw the fox and her kits a few times that spring. By late June, the crops hid their den, and by fall they were long gone. They had no idea I spared their home. Perhaps it wouldn't have made sense to some people, but preserving that piece of pasture for the fox family filled me with a private joy. Perhaps too, it was the magic of that smell, the scent of warm earth on a spring night, so full of life and promise. ■

Clark Porter grows corn, soybeans and occasionally oats on his family's farm near Reinbeck. He is a former teacher and non-profit administrator. A PFI member since 2012, Clark is an advocate for healthy soil and clean water.

He and his wife, Sharon, a Spanish teacher, have two grown sons. In his spare time, Clark enjoys kayaking, hiking and camping throughout Iowa and Minnesota.

Fit for the Field

Managing health and strength while farming vegetables

by Liz Kolbe

If you are driving through small towns in western Iowa, drive by the playground. You might catch Carl Glanzman, of Oakland, on the monkey bars, working on his grip and stretching his shoulders en route to deliver greens to Omaha restaurants. Carl is 70. To stay active in retirement, he began growing greens and other vegetables at Nishnabotna Naturals in double-dug beds – and yes, double-digging is as much work as it sounds.

Fruit and vegetable farming is strenuous work, and most growers in Iowa do much of the labor on their own or alongside their employees. Their bodies are their most valuable tool. Maya Ramaswamy, a graduate student at the University of Iowa who presented at Practical Farmers' annual conference in 2016, studies the physical health of beginning farmers (farming fewer than 10 years). Of the 98 farmers she interviewed, 69 percent have low-back pain; 62 percent have neck and shoulder pain; and 45 percent have elbow, wrist or hand pain. She found that most or all of farmers surveyed reported frequently doing repetitive work, grasping small objects, working in the same position, bending or twisting their backs, and lifting or carrying heavy objects.

To reduce injury and pain, farmers can make systematic changes – such as having adjustable work stations; setting up pack houses to reduce the number of times produce is lifted; and using appropriate carts, wagons and tools. But some things need to be addressed at the body level. I asked PFI fruit and vegetable farmers how they stay fit during the off-season and physically healthy during the growing season (March – October). Regardless of age, the most common response to keeping bodies healthy during the growing season was stretching. Yoga, massage and chiropractor visits were also popular, along with staying hydrated, taking

breaks, getting sleep and hiring younger employees.

Jack Knight, who was a farm worker for 30 years, recommends learning to do jobs ambidextrously. Even if it's slower at the beginning, he says working with your non-dominant hand at least 20 percent of the time makes an immense difference to your endurance and the longevity of your career. And while Jack, of Luana, acknowledges there is an ergonomically optimal way to do every job, "doing it a little bit differently" on occasion is healthy. For example, if you've been bending over to weed, switch to your knees for a few minutes halfway through the row to rest your hamstrings and lower back.

Pain and injury risks aside, farmers also have to combat an annual cycle of gaining and losing strength, endurance and flexibility. For Carl Glanzman, in addition to his playground fitness, he has a membership in his community's workout room during the winter and takes a February vacation to ride bikes and take "vigorous, barefoot walks" on the beach. Other farmers bike, do yoga, use kettlebells or lift weights, focusing on building core strength and balance. Despite this variety, the overarching message from farmers: Stay active. ■



John Wessellius, The Cornucopia Farm, Sioux Center



At 53, John is still a competitive person and sees vegetable farming as a sport. He hires younger employees whose company keeps him energized and focused for longer lengths during the day. Though he admits he's "slowed" down a bit and gained a few pounds from four years ago when he had slimmed down to his 12th-grade weight, he keeps fit in the winter by exercising with his grown children and sneaking some turns with his wife Janna's workout videos and dumbbells.

Danelle Myer, One Farm, Logan

Danelle, 45, says she used to do a lot of cardio in the off-season, but now focuses on strength: kettlebells, weights, planks and core work. She increased how often she got massages this past winter, "hoping to get in better shape when not pushing it so hard on my body." During the growing season, Danelle gets a monthly massage focused on areas that regularly hurt: knees, back, neck, hips, wrists and feet.

Amber Mohr, Forktail Farm, Avoca

Amber, 38, jests that she maintains her health by petting cats and eating "a lot of cheese." But she also chases three young children around – an activity that Ellen Walsh-Rosmann, mother of two toddlers and owner of FarmTable Delivery in Harlan, confirms is good for fitness any time of the year.



From left to right: Danelle Myer, Amber Mohr and Jeremy Hall (Amber's husband) pose together during Practical Farmers' 2016 annual conference.

Gary Guthrie, Growing Harmony Farm, Nevada

Gary was 41 when he realized he wanted to farm – or as he puts it, "when I finally figured out what I wanted to do for the rest of my life." At age 50, his back "popped" ("I was doing way too much in a day and not stretching during the day," he says) and he soon discovered the benefit of a good chiropractor and daily stretching. He still visits the chiropractor to maintain proper alignment, and gets a monthly massage (for which he trades vegetables). Now at 61, he lifts weights and does cardio on the bike, though he admits "the trick is to keep it up during the growing season." But he notes: "All of that work over the years has been worth it, and I wish I would have been disciplined enough to do a bit more."



Erik Sessions, Patchwork Green Farm, Decorah

Erik, 46, uses kettlebells during the off-season to maintain his core strength, which helps him jump into tasks like potato planting and garlic mulching feeling comfortable in his favored work position: the stoop (see photo at right). At 6 feet 2 inches tall, Erik prefers stooping to squatting, as it's easier on his knees (which "are getting more creaky each season," he says). While he is "happy to report no major injuries yet," he is starting to see signs of repetitive injury stress on his hands and elbows, and is mindful of doing repetitive tasks in moderation, using quality cutting tools and hiring younger workers to help out – all of which he says "is so far doing the trick."



T.D. Holub, Garden Oasis Farm, Coggon

Growing up in a farming family, T.D. was aware of the potential for injury from repeated work. His grandpa's hands, for example, often fall asleep from years of butchering chickens. "One day I gutted 64 chickens and by the end of the day I couldn't squeeze my hand into a fist," T.D. says. "Those things add up over the years." To avoid some of those issues for his own body, T.D., now 27, intentionally looks for mechanical replacements for repetitive work on his vegetable farm, and is careful to keep his body safe.



T.D. has an advantage over some other vegetable farmers in this area: His degree from the University of Iowa is in health and human physiology. In his first few years farming on his own, he taught exercise classes and played basketball in the winter and spring. But he's given up the exercise classes because he doesn't need the extra income, and he's given up basketball to avoid injury. This past winter, he got some exercise building a walk-in cooler on the farm and weight-training at the gym. Next winter, he plans to start riding a fat bike (an off-road bicycle with big "fat" tires often used on gravel and snow).

During the season, T.D. has noticed that his grip strength improves, but his wrists are very tight. He stretches at the end of every day, focusing on his wrists, shoulders, lower back and other spots bothering him that day. His favorite stretch is lying on his back and throwing one leg across his body, which loosens up his lower back. He also is careful to always stretch evenly – spending equal time on the right and left sides. "I used to just be worried about getting the work done," T.D. says, "but now I'm more conscious of how I lift and how I can change my systems to avoid things that could cause injury over time. I know it will be important going forward."

Denise O'Brien, Rolling Acres Farm, Atlantic

Denise O'Brien, 69, does an early-morning yoga practice every weekday. She begins with Sun Salutations and then focuses on balance and restorative poses, like Tree Pose, Downward-Facing Dog, Happy Baby, Triangle, several twisting poses and Corpse Pose. As much as possible, she squats instead of bends, but often finds herself using Downward-Facing Dog when picking vegetables or weeding across a bed.

Denise visits the chiropractor and has a massage monthly, and benefits from a newly installed infrared sauna in their home. Even still, she has bad habits. "I find myself walking briskly with my head bent forward like I am walking into a wind – which seems like most of the time," Denise says. When she realizes she's doing this, she makes a point to "stand straight with good posture and move forward deliberately slower." And though she spent many years barefoot in the garden, she now appreciates quality shoes; her favorite are Merrill boots.



Sand Family Seeks the Right Family to Purchase Well-Loved Land

by Teresa Opheim

Anita O’Gara and her three brothers grew up “in the shadow” of an old country church and cemetery near Urbana in northeastern Iowa.

“**S**t. Mary’s Cemetery always felt like part of our land to me,” Anita says. “My great-grandparents bought the farm in the 1870s, including land surrounding the cemetery where they were later buried. The farm sustained the family when they came from Luxembourg. During the time my brothers and I grew up there, it was a typical farm of its day. We had hogs and beef cattle. Chickens were running loose, and there was a milk cow and a huge garden. Mom sustained us by canning everything in sight. It was hard work, of course, but it was a nice life!”

The family story followed a familiar trajectory: Anita and her brothers – Duane (a Practical Farmers member), Ron and Richard Sand – went on to college and pursued non-farming careers. Through the years, their father, Howard Sand, let go of the pigs, the chickens and the cows. Eventually, the crops consisted of only corn and beans. The farm buildings provided storage, or sat empty except for grandkids playing in them.

Howard, who was born on the farm, moved to town in his 80s to be closer to his wife, Esther, then a resident of the Lutheran Home in Vinton (of which “the family cannot speak more highly,” Anita reports). He sold 2 acres that included the house and outbuildings so the homestead could be home to a new family. He enjoyed keeping active in farming, though, through a crop-share arrangement with his tenant neighbor on the remaining 114 acres.

By the time he was 97, however, it was time for Howard’s children to become more active in the farm management. Careers had taken Ron and Richard out of state, while Anita and Duane both settled near Des Moines. The siblings began discussions about how to better manage the farmland.



↑ Howard Sand celebrated his 100th birthday with his four children: (left to right) Anita, Duane, Richard and Ron.

“Dad loved the crop-share handshake agreement. He still felt like a farmer. But he wasn’t actively managing the land,” Anita says. “Duane’s career centered on soil and water conservation policy, and he pointed out where tile needed to be repaired and grass waterways replaced. I held Dad’s power of attorney and handled other things for him, but I didn’t want to step into the tenant relationship and the farming. We hired Hertz Farm Management on Dad’s behalf, asking them to handle repairs and look at soil health.”

The siblings also began discussing what would happen with the land when their dad was gone, which “seemed weird talking about, at first,” Anita says. Years before, Howard and Esther made it clear that they expected the land would be sold, and Howard had suggested auction. “They had seen too many families where siblings fought about the land. Dad didn’t talk much about this, but we knew how strongly he felt about it. Preserving family was more important than preserving land.”

After Howard’s death in December 2015 at age 100, the Sand siblings talked through their options via phone calls. “We talked about permanent land protection but decided against that. The land is not under development pressure,” Anita says. “Soil health and conservation practices are important, and we felt that a landowner who lives on the land and actively farms it might be inclined to take the best care of the land.”

The Sand siblings decided they didn’t want to go to auction because “we didn’t want to leave the next owner to chance.” Land down the road had recently sold to a farmland investor before land-owning neighbors had an opportunity to purchase. Brothers Ron and Richard especially appreciated that “if you keep the land in the hands of someone who lives in this area, you are benefitting the school and the vibrancy of the area. You give back to the community. We wanted to hand over that deed to an established family that was nurturing another generation.”

Their common goal became: Give good farmers who are part of the community a good first chance to own this land.

Anita recalls, "Duane came up with the idea of a private sale, identifying local families who were established farmers, who had another generation coming into their farm operation and who might want to purchase. Hertz said they could help, but they don't have a lot of call for that. They mainly see people wanting to go to auction or publicly list their farm for sale."

Some families heard of Howard's death and expressed interest in buying. Duane sleuthed out other good prospects by asking friends in the area for ideas, and he made the first phone calls to the farm families. After consulting with his siblings, Duane then provided a short list for Hertz, and the company started a series of one-on-one, one-at-a time conversations in the order the Sand siblings had laid out.

"My brothers and I agreed we weren't out to get top dollar," Anita reports. "We were out to find a fair-value offer. We wanted to be happy with who we were selling to. We needed to go with the flow a bit."

The Hertz firm's objectivity and experience were helpful to the Sands. The Hertz staff provided the appraisal and handled all the business conversations, negotiations and paperwork. Through conference calls, the staff kept the siblings informed on progress and created opportunities for the siblings to discuss and make decisions.

"I'm so glad my brothers and I talked during Dad's lifetime about how best to sell the land someday. Knowing we were in agreement on what was important to us made a difficult time so much easier." — ANITA O'GARA

"We were certainly blessed in finding that Duane Kuhn, who lives on an adjacent farm, had the desire and the assets to buy the land," Anita says. "His son was finishing at Iowa State University and majoring in agriculture. They are rooted in this community."

While the siblings learned to make business decisions about the land together, that doesn't mean that the sale of the Sand land isn't still, almost a year later, powerfully emotional for all of the siblings. "Letting go of family land feels like you have let go of your identity, and it takes time to work through that," Anita says. "Our roots are still there. There is something in you that is sunk deep in that soil. It's a process of letting go. You feel like you're losing a piece of yourself, but you're not. We are so much more than what we own."

The Sand family's story has many parallels with the people Anita serves at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, where she works on permanent protection with many who love their land. "The emotions are stronger than they realize, but they need to make logical decisions. The ones I have sorrow about are

the ones where death is recent, the siblings hadn't talked about the land before and they need to decide too soon, even while they are grieving. I know two families right now where land decisions are causing great tension among the siblings. In that situation, families often say, 'Let's go to auction and get it over with,' but that may not be the decision they are happy with later on.

"I'm so glad my brothers and I talked during Dad's lifetime about how best to sell the land someday. Knowing we were in agreement on what was important to us made a difficult time so much easier. The fact that our homestead had been sold years ago helped us, too. We went through the loss of the house and buildings 20 years ago. The sale of the house was hard for some grandkids, but they are not so attached to the crop ground.

"I'm grateful that my brothers and I are not only speaking to each other, but we are closer than ever after going through this together. We have good communication and common values. Those values are a huge legacy from our parents. This process helped me understand that."

Ron Sand sums it up this way: "We all feel that the farm sale was made easier knowing that we are passing the land forward in a way that supports our local community. That community has been a part of our family for over four generations. It will always be home to us." ■



← (Left) 1921 the farm was home to young Howard (center in hat), his parents Anthony and Clara, and three of his four siblings. (left to right: Joe, Irene and Florence. Marie is not shown.)

← (Right) Howard Sand (left) and his parents and siblings gather at the farm to celebrate Anthony and Clara's anniversary. Howard's siblings are (left to right) Florence, Joe, Marie and Irene.

Research and Sharing: A PFI Science Perfected

Cooperators reflect on how PFI research has helped them

by Stefan Gailans

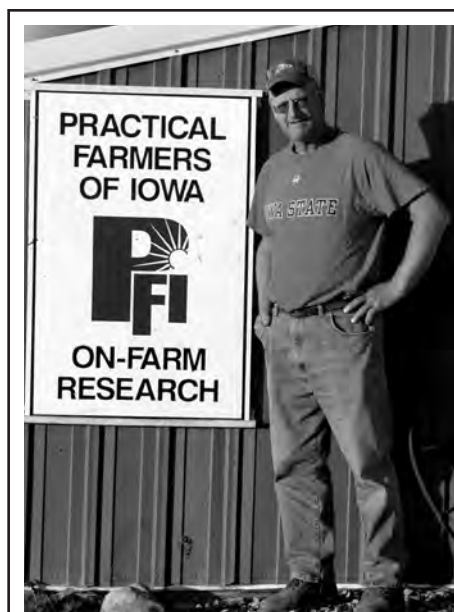
"While PFI cooperators don't have all the answers, they do have a tool for working towards those answers."

So reads a portion of the preamble to the annual reports from Practical Farmers of Iowa's early days that outlined all the on-farm trials that occurred in the previous year. The tool mentioned is a randomized and replicated strip trial – the hallmark experimental design that members participating in the Cooperators' Program have been using since its inception 30 years ago.

The drive to search for answers also continues to be a defining attribute of PFI cooperators. They employ the scientific method: A hypothesis is formed based on prior work or observations; a trial is designed to test that hypothesis; conclusions are drawn based on the data collected; those conclusions are shared with others, which spur new questions and hypotheses. Thus, the cycle begins anew. For PFI cooperators, there has always been a special emphasis on the sharing component of this method. This process works toward the ultimate goal of the Cooperators' Program: to ensure current, practical, farmer-directed on-farm research is conducted and shared with other farmers in Iowa, the Midwest and beyond.

Research By and For Farmers

"I personally value the research done for and by Practical Farmers members because it is a more peer-to-peer review of actual farming practices or methods," says Greg Rebman, a PFI member and frequent reader of research reports who farms near Frederick, Illinois. He finds the research cooperating farmers are conducting to be both objective and relevant – and says he appreciates that each finished research report clearly describes how a trial was conducted and the farmer's conclusions. "So many times when looking at [other]



INFORMED BY RESEARCH

"[In the future] I plan to scout more and monitor the crop's progress so I can head off any production problems."

– **TIM SIEREN**, describing how his research with green manures has given him insights into managing his cereal rye small-grains crop.

research trials, as a farmer, I'm never quite sure of [details like] 'timing,' how the plots were put in and the actual thoughts and processes on a commercial level," Greg says. "The members doing on-farm research as part of PFI's Cooperators' Program see how it can be applied to the real world and what benefits either accrue or do not materialize." When a new research report is published on our website, Greg is often one of the first to comment and get a conversation going with other farmers on one of our email discussion lists. "I credit a lot of my own recent success to those conversations," he says. "I would not have had the confidence in my 2016 rye enterprise had I not boned up on reports and contacted individual members on the discussion list to give me direction. We are expanding our cover crops and nitrogen 'tweaking' having been guided by some of the research done."

Throughout the years, cooperators have tested ways to manage weeds with less inputs, investigated the efficacy of biological amendments advertized by ag suppliers and compared manure to purchased fertilizers as sources of crop nutrients. More recently, field crop farmers have been trialing cover crops and extended crop rotations. Fruit and vegetable growers have started exploring flowering herbs that may attract beneficial pollinator insects to their farms. Both of these issues lend themselves to exploration via the randomized and replicated strip trial approach – PFI's time-tested "tool" for getting to the bottom of things. And quite often, cooperators will tell you that conducting on-farm research answered questions they didn't even think to ask at the inception of the trial.

Practical Cover Crop Insights

For Tim Sieren, extending his crop rotation to include small grains has given him a chance to successfully establish legume and brassica cover crops in the summer. Tim and his family run Green Iron Farms near Keota in Washington County, in the southeastern part of the state. He sees a link between his farm name and his efforts to keep his farmland covered year-round. "My farm name originated from a small business where I was, and still am, fabricating antique tractor parts from new metal – green iron – for John Deere, also green iron, tractors," Tim says. "It also included my crop farming business, which included John Deere, Art's Way and Houle – green iron – machinery, so the name was obvious." While Tim says the family "didn't exactly have cover crops in mind" when they originally named the farm, he thinks the name fits well with his strategy of year-round green cover thanks to cover crops and small grains.

Tim has been investigating "green manure" cover crops between the small grain and corn phases of his crop rotation. These plants – which are grown specifically for their ability to add nutrients back to the soil – are either interseeded with or seeded directly after the harvest of the small grain, and can potentially reduce the amount of fertilizer or animal manure needed by



VETTED AND SHARED BY FARMERS

"I personally value the research done for and by Practical Farmers members because it is a more peer-to-peer review of actual farming practices or methods . . . I would not have had the confidence in my 2016 rye enterprise had I not boned up on reports and contacted individual members on [PFI's email] discussion list to give me direction."

– GREG REBMAN, of Frederick, Illinois, on how he benefits even as an out-of-state member from research led and shared by PFI farmers.

the succeeding crop in rotation. Tim has used strip trials to compare high and low nitrogen fertilizer rates applied to corn planted following green manure cover crops like red clover, Austrian winter peas, hairy vetch, rapeseed and radish. While he typically plans on applying 190 pounds of nitrogen for corn following soybeans in rotation, the green manures have allowed Tim to cut that rate by close to 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

Because Tim establishes the green manures with or just after a small-grains crop – in his case, cereal rye that is harvested for cover crop seed – he says he's noticed "a bit of a learning curve" with his small grain production. But conducting trials has given him new insights for dealing with some of the problems he has encountered. "[In the future] I plan to scout more and monitor the crop's progress so I can head off any production problems," Tim says. This echoes sentiments expressed by fellow cooperator Dick Sloan, who has also learned from conducting trials involving green manures about the importance of scouting his small-grain crops. Additionally, using diverse cover crop mixes following his small-grain crop has presented Tim with opportunities for his cattle to graze. He appreciates this added benefit to both his operation and soil – a benefit that blossomed from trials initially designed to test nitrogen rates.

Testing Herbs for Insects

Alice McGary is among the farmers in PFI's horticulture research group looking for ways to support pollinating insects on their farms. At Mustard Seed Community Farm near Ames, she seeded replicated strips of annual flowering herbs (borage, lemon

basil and anise hyssop) among beds of pollinator-dependent fruit and vegetable crops. During the growing season, Alice and her farm crew noticed the most pollinator insects in the borage in mid- to late July; in the lemon basil in late July; and in the anise hyssop in early August. These observations mirrored the flowering periods of each herb. "The basil probably had the least amount of flowers at times," Alice says. "We periodically harvested one of the three rows [of basil] by removing the top third of branches. I think this was very helpful in renewing and



UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES

"In this trial, we had three replications on quite different areas of our farm . . . We were able to see how much our soil affected the health of plants during drought-like conditions."

– ALICE MCGARY, describing her research on how different herbs attracted pollinators resulted in new knowledge beyond the scope of the project.

staggering the plants' efforts to flower. We should have done this more frequently and systematically for better blooms. The borage and hyssop continued to have a lot of flowers from the time they started flowering until frost. They didn't require any management from us to make this happen."

In addition to attracting pollinators with their blossoms, borage, lemon basil and anise hyssop are also culinary herbs. Alice learned, however, that attractiveness to pollinators and marketability do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Whereas borage grew quickly into robust plants that competed with weeds early on and consistently attracted pollinators, Alice described it as her "least favorite herb" because its strange taste would require some creative marketing. The lemon basil, on the other hand, is much more familiar and easily marketable, she says. It also grew well and competed with weeds – but of the three herb species, "[the lemon basil] seemed to provide the least pollinator habitat." Tradeoffs!

Like Tim's trials, Alice's experiment brought with it learning experiences outside the initial scope. "Usually, because of our crop rotations, we do not have the same plant in three different areas of our farm," Alice says. "In this trial, we had three replications [of the flowering herbs] on quite different areas of our farm, allowing us to compare the soil types. We were able to see how much our soil affected the health of plants during drought-like conditions. It made a huge difference!"

Learning For All

As most cooperators will attest, each on-farm trial brings with it unique learning experiences – for both the farmer conducting the trial and those reading about it in a report or hearing about it at the annual Cooperators' Meeting. It's the sharing and discussing of these experiences and ideas that Illinois farmer Greg Rebman most appreciates: "Many times, through the conversations we have, we don't necessarily find all the answers, but light is shed on why some trialed practice did or did not work." That's all part of the scientific method Practical Farmers has been using for years. And they will continue to question, investigate, share and question (again) into the future. ■

Forage-Fed Pigs

An interview with farmer Steve Diebele

by Meghan Filbert

Many Practical Farmers members are interested in forage-centric pork production. This interest prompted us to invite Steve Diebele to present a session at our 2017 annual conference in January. Steve and his wife, Marie, raise pastured pigs and grass-fed beef at Golden Bear Farm near Kiel, Wisconsin. Steve's conference session – on raising pigs on a forage-heavy diet without the use of corn or soybeans – attracted a big crowd eager to learn. This article delves deeper into the details of Steve's feeding practices.

A Focus on Meat Quality, Human Health

Steve says the Berkshire pigs at Golden Bear Farm are not fed corn or soybeans because the Diebeles' desire to produce the highest-quality meat for improved human health. Steve produces what he calls "choice pork," which is pork that has a nearly ideal ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fatty acids, and elevated levels of conjugated linoleic acids (known as CLAs). "Foods with high levels of omega-3 fatty acids promote heart health, boost the immune system and protect against cancer," Steve says. "Foods with excessive levels of omega-6 fatty acids contribute to heart disease. Corn is high in omega-6 and weak in omega-3. It has the worst ratio of all grains, is imbalanced and heart-unhealthy." Instead, Steve's grain ration consists of barley and field peas, which contain more omega-3 fatty acids. Forages are also an excellent source of healthy fatty acids and CLAs.

This is what excites Steve about feeding forage-heavy diets to his livestock. He sees connections between conventional food production systems and chronic disease rates in humans. "I read the obituaries in the newspaper about all the people who courageously fought cancer," he says. "This is why we produce food [on our farm] in the way we do. We're trying to provide nutritionally dense, healthy pork."

How Much Can Pasture Replace Grain?

In Steve's system, forages reduce the amount of grain in his rations anywhere from 10 to 60 percent. "A conservative estimate is a 10 percent reduction in grain – but with good pasture and management, forages can reduce grain in feeder pig rations by 20 to 50 percent," Steve says. "In sow rations, it's close to 25 to 60 percent reductions."

Tom Wilson and Taylor Williams, of Nevada, raise pastured pigs at Remnant Hills Farm



Above: Steve and Marie Diebele **Below:** Berkshire pigs rotated through pasture at Golden Bear Farm
Opposite: (left) Hereford-Berkshire crossbred pigs at Remnant Hills Farm **(right)** Tom Wilson checks a sow and her piglets at Remnant Hills Farm.

and attended Steve's conference session. When Tom first started raising pigs three years ago, he tried to finish them as quickly as he could because that's what he thought he should do. But he soon realized that a slower-growing pig provided higher-quality meat. "We're working towards feeding an ideal diet consisting of 50 percent pasture, 25 percent grain and a 25 percent mix of whey, veggies and spent grains from a local brewery," Tom says. "We've seen the difference in flavor, marbling and fat quality from diverse pig diets."

Steve and Tom, along with all forage-based livestock producers, have to work hard at finding the balance between feeding forage and achieving acceptable rates of gain. "Anytime you offer forages to pigs, you're doing incredible things to improve the nutritional value of the feed, the pig's



Steve Diebele's Ration

In addition to forages, fruits and vegetables, Steve feeds his pigs a ration consisting of:

- ✶ 4,750 lbs barley
- ✶ 2,450 lbs field peas
- ✶ 500 lbs liquid molasses
- ✶ 250 lbs mineral mix
- ✶ 200 lbs brewer's yeast
- ✶ 100 lbs dried kelp
- ✶ 50 lbs dried whey-based milk replacer
- ✶ 4 gallons of apple cider vinegar per ton



immune system and the flavor of the pork," Steve says. "But you're causing yourself to suffer because growth rate potential decreases. Feeding nutritionally potent foods is counterproductive to putting pounds on."

Steve's suggests this compromise: Offer high-quality grains along with forages. This way, forage-fed pig producers can achieve high growth rates, a good feed conversion ratio and still produce pork in an environmentally friendly manner. With this approach, Steve says, you can achieve quality and quantity.

Steve's Ration

In addition to available forages, Steve's ration includes barley and field peas along with molasses, brewer's yeast, kelp, whey-based milk replacer, minerals and apple cider vinegar. After eliminating corn and soybean meal, Steve needed to boost the protein levels in his rations. "Barley doesn't have very high protein or palatability, so I included field peas, which are high in both," he explains. "Both the brewer's yeast and the milk replacer also boost protein and palatability." Steve says that, lately, his field peas have been adequately providing protein and he could probably get rid of the milk replacer and yeast. He adds apple cider vinegar to help prevent the feed from going musty and he thinks the acetic acid does a good job of pre-digesting the grains.

Meeting Pigs' Lysine Needs

Soybeans are a traditional source of lysine, an essential amino acid that pigs must consume in order for other amino acids to work efficiently. When soy is eliminated from the ration, another source of lysine must be provided. Fishmeal is a source, but Steve has avoided feeding fishmeal for three reasons: the potential for rancidity, issues with palatability and the risk of it flavoring the pork.

"I'm still negotiating my way through the lysine requirement and don't have a perfect formula," admits Steve. For now, the field peas are offering what he thinks his pigs need. He hopes to learn more about lysine requirements and wonders if he can grow certain forages or process grains in certain ways – such as grinding, steaming or flattening – to increase the lysine content in his rations.

Average Pig Growth Rates

Steve's average daily gains range from 1.2 to 2 pounds per day, depending on the age of the pig. "Under controlled conditions in the barn, we get our best growth rates," Steve says. "When pigs are on pasture, there is much more variability in growth – but we have the opportunity to provide nutrient-dense forages to our pigs."

Steve's average daily gains verify Tom Wilson's goals of reaching 1.5 to 2 pounds

of gain per day. Ideally, Tom's pigs reach 300 pounds by 7 to 8 months of age – and he adds that he feels the pigs that perform best are those that were born on his farm, not the feeders he buys. "I can't source good enough feeders in Iowa because most are from mothers that never ate forages," Tom says. "My best option for producing profitable forage-fed pigs is to raise my own sows and piglets." Tom continues to build his Hereford-Berkshire-Red Wattle crossbred herd by breeding only the gilts with the best foraging abilities.

During the 2017 grazing season, Tom plans to feed each pig 3 to 4 pounds of grain per day (a decrease from his current 5 pounds per day) to complement the diverse forages in his pastures that his pigs will rotate through every four to seven days. Tom also plans to seed small food plots of radish, turnip or beets, which the pigs can be turned into when pastures need a rest. ■

Learn More

➔ Read about growth rates of Steve's forage-fed pigs in this blog: practicalfarmers.org/blog/2017/05/09/forage-fed-pigs-growth-rates-golden-bear-farm

➔ Find Steve's grazing strategies, paddock layout ideas and suggested forage mixes at practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/annual-conference-multimedia

➔ Learn more about Golden Bear Farm at goldenbearfarm.com

2017 Field Day Season Has Arrived!

32 Farmer-Led Learning Opportunities Across Iowa

Practical Farmers' 2017 summer field day season is almost here. **Our first field day of the season is May 21, in Chariton**, featuring Jill Beebout, of Blue Gate Farm, and antique implement expert Jeff Lauber.

We listened to your ideas and feedback, and have planned a robust season featuring topics from goat production to growing mushrooms, small grains to soil health, on-farm conservation to managed grazing – and more! Some events will highlight on-farm research underway through PFI's Cooperators' Program. Other events will explore urban farms, berry production and the role of farmland owners in land stewardship. Here's a sneak-peek at the range of farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities this year!

Season Launch: Sunday, May 21

Chariton • 2 – 5 p.m.

Join Jill and antique implement expert Jeff Lauber to see and try a wide variety of antique and vintage two-wheel tractors, push seeders, wheel hoes and implements. Jeff will demonstrate and discuss the benefits and challenges of the specific models for current farm use, and will compare the antiques with newer models (where possible). Jill will share her experiences using “absolutely functional” antique and vintage equipment for vegetable production.



2017 Late-Spring – Early-Autumn Field Day Schedule

MAY 21 – CHARITON

(Jill Beebout with Jeff Lauber)

Two-Wheel Tractors: Old Technology, New Inspiration

MAY 30 – SIOUX CENTER

(Matt Schuiteman)

Grazing Cover Crops

JUNE 8 – HOLLAND

(Fred Abels)

Strip-Till and Cover Crops – *In partnership with Iowa Learning Farmers and ISU Extension*

JUNE 9 – COGGON

(T.D. Holub)

Tractors and Tools with T.D.

JUNE 15 – RED OAK

(Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman)

Gaining Resilience, One Conservation Step at a Time

JUNE 22 – MCGREGOR

(Phil Specht and Mary Damm)

Using CSP and Managed Grazing for Biodiversity

JUNE 24 – IOWA CITY

(Jon Yagla and Wren Almitra)

Earning a Living With Urban Farming

JUNE 27 – STATE CENTER

(Deb and Eric Finch)

Managing Parasites in Goat Production With FAMACHA Training

JUNE 28 – MINBURN

(Craig Fleishman)

Ridge-Till, Weed Management and Oat Production

JUNE 29 – NEW HAMPTON

(Tom and Irene Frantzen; James Frantzen and Amanda Luna)

Two New Grains and Their Uses: Hybrid Rye and Kernza

JULY 11 – IDA GROVE

(Scott, Jack and Linda Ausborn)

Transitioning to Organic Crop Farming – *In partnership with Iowa Organic Association*

JULY 15 – MT. PLEASANT

(Marty and Mary Schnicker)

Growing the Giants . . . And for Farmers Market

JULY 17 – GRUNDY CENTER

(Grundy SWCD and ISU Extension)

Cover Crops – Different Methods for Different Folks

JULY 26 – NEVADA

(Dean, Judy and Mike Henry)

Grafting, Summer Pruning and New Fruits at Berry Patch

AUGUST 3-6 – CARROLL, OHIO

(Dave Brandt)

Bus Trip to Dave Brandt's Farm in Ohio

AUGUST 3 – CHARLES CITY

(Wendy Johnson and Johnny Rafkin)

Managing Potholes and Matching Conservation Efforts to Farm Goals

AUGUST 8 – COLUMBUS

(Tyson Allchin)

Oyster Mushroom Production

AUGUST 13 – CLEAR LAKE

(Jan Libbey)

Farmer-Led Local Food Aggregation

AUGUST 14 – JEWELL

(Kevin and Ranae Dietzel)

Grass-Based Dairying and Value-Added Production

AUGUST 17 – WALKER

(Cheryl and Mike Hopkins)

Grazing Goats: From Pasture to Market

AUGUST 17 – AMES

(Practical Farmers of Iowa)

CONFERENCE: Rotationally Raised – Making Small Grains Work

AUGUST 21 – BEDFORD

(Russ Wischover)

Grazing Heritage Cattle and Sheep on Converted Crop Ground and Prairie + Solar Eclipse Viewing

AUGUST 24 – DES MOINES

(Angela and John Tedesco)

Farmland Owner Award Celebration

AUGUST 29 – SHENANDOAH

(Chris and Janenne Teachout)

A Look at Soil Regeneration With Jill Clapperton

AUGUST 31 – JEFFERSON

(Jerry Peckum)

Profitability of Farming Prairie Potholes

SEPTEMBER 7 – DUNKERTON

(Earl and Jane Canfield and family)

Oat, Hay and Feed Production and Direct-Marketing

SEPTEMBER 9 – HARLAN

(Rosmann Family)

Organic Crop and Hog Production + Water Quality Practices – *In partnership with Iowa Organic Association*

SEPTEMBER 14 – EVERLY

(Darla and Michael Eeten)

A Little Bit of Everything in Everly

SEPTEMBER 16 – BELLEVUE

(Jamie Hostetler)

Regenerative Grazing to Produce Gourmet Grass-Fed Beef

SEPTEMBER 23 – CUMMING

(Fred Howell)

Dried Flower Production

OCTOBER 21 – HANCOCK

(Jayme Fowler)

The First Year of Vegetable Farming . . . With Experienced Eyes

NOVEMBER 5 – IOWA CITY

(Jason Grimm)

Hand Tools and Implements for Small Vegetable Farms – *In partnership with Grow Johnson County*



Strip-Till and Cover Crops

June 8 • Holland • Fred Abels

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IOWA LEARNING FARMS AND
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY OUTREACH AND EXTENSION

Cover crops and strip-tillage are two important tools for helping protect soil and reduce the movement of nutrients from the landscape. Learn how Fred has adapted his operation to use the practices together while maintaining yields. In addition to Fred, hear from Mark Hanna, ISU Extension engineer, and Sarah Carlson, of Practical Farmers.



Tractors and Tools With T.D.

June 9 • Coggon • T.D. Holub

Growing up on a farm, T.D. knew about farm equipment but wasn't familiar with vegetable implements and machinery. As a beginning farmer, machinery was his first big investment. It was important to get right, but he didn't have a way to see or try what he thought he needed. For this field day, T.D.'s goal is to help other beginning farmers expedite their machinery research. He'll bring out all his machinery and tools (he now has what he wants!) for people to see – and try – in the field. He'll also discuss the cost and process of building his walk-in coolers.



Two New Grains and Their Uses: Hybrid Rye and Kernza

June 29 • New Hampton • Tom and Iren Frantzen; and James Frantzen and Amanda Luna

Can hybrid rye and Kernza be used for weed control and pig feed? Join the Frantzens to learn about two new grain crops they have introduced on their farm over the last few years: Brasetto, a hybrid rye with disease resistance and the potential for higher yields, and Kernza, a perennial grain developed by the Land Institute. They hope both crops will help combat giant ragweed on their farm by smothering and disrupting the weed's life cycle. The crops could also provide bedding and feed for their organically raised pigs.



Growing the Giants . . . And for Farmers Market

July 15 • Mt. Pleasant • Marty and Mary Schnicker

Have you seen the giant fruits and vegetables at the Iowa State Fair and thought, "how do they do that?" This is your chance to find out! Marty and Mary raise some of the largest produce in the state and will discuss the intensive management required for growing giant vegetables – which can gain up to 50 pounds per day. You'll get to tour their "giant" high tunnel and their outdoor fruit and vegetable beds. Marty and Mary will share tips on production and management, answer your questions and also discuss producing regular-sized produce for farmers market.



Grass-Based Dairying and Value-Added Production

August 14 • Jewell • Kevin and Ranae Dietzel



Join Kevin and Ranae to learn about their on-farm cheesery and milking facilities, and their grass-based, biodynamically raised herd of milk cows. Kevin and Ranae will discuss the challenges of starting a new business, from designing and building facilities, to navigating regulations and developing marketing strategies. Take a pasture walk and learn about the Dietzels' cattle genetics and breeding philosophy, and their management practices – including how biodynamic practices influence the flavor of their cheeses.

Dried Flower Production

September 23 • Cumming • Fred Howell

Join Fred for a lively tour through the dried flower process, from field to finished arrangements used at Howell's Greenhouse and Floral. Fred will discuss perennial and annual flower production in the field and the greenhouse, and his preferred ways to harvest and store different types of flowers. You will also see how the flowers are dried and how the family creates its beautiful dried arrangements.



Get More Details Online and in the Forthcoming 2017 Field Day Guide!

Read more about these – and all of PFI's late-spring through early-autumn field days and events – in the 2017 Field Day Guide, which will be mailed to all members by early June and will also be available online.

And watch for more detailed announcements online and in our weekly e-newsletter closer to the events.





Partnering to Put More Cover Crops on the Landscape

by Alisha Bower

“Farmers, farms and food systems are viable.” This is one of the goals outlined in Practical Farmers' 2014-2017 strategic plan. The goal was created based on responses to our 2013 member survey, in which many members expressed a desire to increase the viability of farms and businesses that employ conservation measures and best practices for sustainability.

One way PFI has been addressing this goal is by strategically partnering on projects that can amplify our impact across the state and region. Two of these projects have kept the field crops staff particularly busy this year.

The first is a cover crop cost-share pilot project with Unilever and the Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), a major soybean buyer for central Iowa. The second partnership is with the Environmental Working Group (EWG). Practical Farmers worked with EWG to ground-truth and co-author a report on cover crop adoption, using satellite data to estimate the number of corn and soybean acres using cover crops in Iowa, Illinois and Indiana.

Sustainable Soy Continuous Improvement Program

In 2015, Unilever and Archer Daniels Midland partnered with Practical Farmers on the launch of a cost-share program designed to help farmers participating in ADM's Sustainable Soy Program put more of their corn and soybean acres into cover crops between cash crop plantings.

Our role is a supporting one: Practical Farmers provides each farmer who signs up for the cost-share with an agronomic consultation where he or she can ask questions and air concerns about managing cover crops. The goal is to increase the chances that these farmers will have a positive experience with cover crops and continue to use them in the future. Sarah Carlson held consultations with 29 farmers in 2015, with 79 farmers in 2016 – and she plans to provide 160 consultations this year. On these calls, Sarah discusses cover crop variety selection within the context of farmers' rotations, and their goals for cover crops in their operation. Often, questions related to spring management generate the most concern because those decisions

can impact cash crop yields – for better or worse.

Once farmers complete the consultation, they are eligible to enroll and receive cost-share for up to 160 acres of land they manage. The maximum payout through the cost-share is \$25 per acre – but to receive this rate, farmers must experiment with a new cover crop practice on their farm. For instance, they could qualify for the maximum rate if they planted new ground into cover crops, tested a new variety or planted via aerial-seeding or a highboy for the first time. The aim of this requirement is to give farmers an incentive to learn more about and improve their comfort level with a wide variety of cover crop management strategies.

Other PFI staff involved in the project include Steve Carlson and Alisha Bower, who work with program participants to collect their information and process their cost-share payments. In 2015, 2,346 acres were enrolled in the cost-share program. This rose to 11,246 acres enrolled in 2016. This year, with 160 participants, we hope to enroll 25,000 acres in the program.

Reaching New Farmers

Some of the participating farmers are also active in Practical Farmers' community. Jack Boyer and Ward Van Dyke, for instance, both hosted spring cover crop field days in March. Other PFI members participating include Fred Abels and Jerry Peckumn, both members since 2004. But for many farmers in the program, their consultation with Sarah is the first exposure they have to Practical Farmers of Iowa – and a handful have joined PFI after this initial contact.



New PFI member Michael Jackson, of Oskaloosa, holds a cereal rye plant this spring that was seeded in his field last fall through the ADM cover crop cost-share program.

“It was a cost-effective way to start implementing cover crops at a large scale on my farm.”

– MICHAEL JACKSON, describing how participating in ADM's Sustainable Soy Program helped accelerate his use of cover crops.

Michael Jackson, of Oskaloosa, joined Practical Farmers last year after participating in the ADM program in 2015 and 2016. “It [the ADM program] was a cost-effective way to start implementing cover crops at a large scale on my farm,” Michael says. “I am in my second year now, going into corn for the first time this spring. I hope to continue using cover crops. But being a young farmer with margins getting tighter, I hope I start seeing a yield return for my efforts.” Michael says he decided to join Practical Farmers “to keep up on the different studies PFI is working on, maybe implement them on my own acres.”

Practical Farmers hopes more farmers who sell soybeans to ADM will look to our farmer-leaders when they need advice on cover crops in the future.



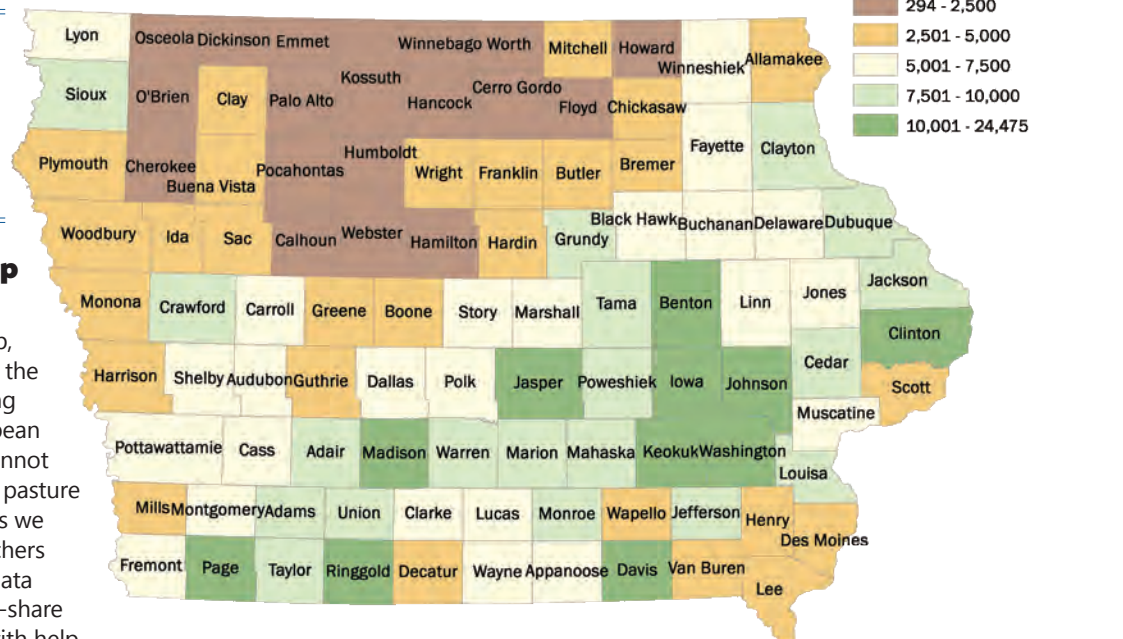
→ **Visualizing Cover Crops:** A map of cover crop acres in Iowa counties, published in the March 2017 report by Environmental Working Group and Practical Farmers of Iowa, reveals areas of high and low adoption.

Using Satellite Data to Map Cover Crop Progress

With Environmental Working Group, we used satellite images to catalog the number of cover crop acres covering the ground between corn and soybean crops. Because a satellite picture cannot distinguish between the green of a pasture or wetland and the cover crop acres we were trying to measure, the researchers cross-referenced the images with data on farm participation in public cost-share programs. Practical Farmers staff, with help from some of our members, then hit the road, county maps in hand, to ground-truth the satellite data and determine if the so-called “cover crop signature” in the images accurately reflected a cover crop field. The imaging team at EWG was then able to precisely identify the green of cover crop fields in October 2015 through April 2016 to distinguish it from other kinds of green fields across the state.

Partnering on this project has given us deeper insights into progress we've made with cover crops in Iowa – and work we still need to do to increase cover crops on the landscape. The first step in tracking progress is to establish a benchmark, which we have done with this study. Now that the process of using satellite images paired with ground-truthing has been established, it will be easier to continue tracking cover crop acres. Analyzing the resulting data will tell us where we need to invest more time and resources to improve cover crop adoption, and which areas are already high-adopters. We can also look more closely at those areas to find out why we see higher adoption rates, potentially leading to case studies of strategies that may be effective at increasing cover crop adoption.

As an example, if we look at current cover crop adoption rates in Iowa (see map), we can see there is a dearth of cover crops in the north-central area (also known as the the Des Moines Lobe), an area dominated by farmers who use tillage. Knowing this,



we can design research and programming in the future to make cover crops more accessible and beneficial in tillage systems.

The sobering conclusion of this report is that cover crops are only used on a tiny fraction of corn and soybean acres in Iowa – just 2.6 percent, according to the 2016 data. By contrast, the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy indicates that bringing nitrogen and phosphorous loss down to an acceptable level will require cover crops on 56 percent – or 12.6 million acres – of Iowa's row-crop ground. We have a long way to go, but the report's conclusions about retention rates and farmer-financed cover crops suggest we can reach this goal with a concerted effort.

Cost-Share Cultivates Adopters

To determine retention rates, we used the data gathered during the study to measure the number of sections or fields that continued to have cover crops planted on them after a public cost-share program on that land had expired. We found that 40 percent of farmers continued planting cover crops in this scenario. A separate Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship survey, cited in the report, found that 75 percent of farmers participating in a cover crop cost-share program through the Water Quality Initiative planned to continue using cover crops on their farm – but possibly outside of the same section that was previously cost-shared.

These results show that cost-share is an effective means of cultivating cover crop adopters. If all farmers were to participate in a cover crop incentive program, we would be close to reaching the state's goal of getting cover crops on 56 percent of Iowa's corn and soybean acres – and thus, meeting one of the scenarios in the state's Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

Other maps in the report also show that half of the cover crop acres in Iowa are planted without public cost-share, demonstrating there is real potential for cover crops to work in farmers' businesses without a subsidy. And while it's daunting to think of the effort that lies ahead to get cover crops on 12.6 million acres, the research in this report has provided a critical starting point to track our progress. It will also help us design more effective strategies, and the findings reassure us that cover crops are a natural fit in corn and soybean rotations – if we can get the practice out into fields in the first place.

Through these two partnerships, Practical Farmers is working to create landscape-level change that pushes the market and public agencies to reward farmers who are doing right by the land. ■

Learn More

➔ Read the full report by EWG and PFI at ewg.org/research/mapping-cover-crops-corn-and-soybeans-illinois-indiana-and-iowa-2015-2016

Beyond Profit and Loss: Anthropological Reflections on Beginning Farms' Longevity

by Andrea Rissing

One morning last winter, I got up before dawn to meet a beginning farmer at a small-town diner in eastern Iowa. Over steaming mugs of black coffee, we talked about her first years of farming – the challenges of finding land, the joys of teaching children about vegetables.

After I turned off the recorder, she asked me more about the research questions I was trying to answer through conversations with farmers like her. I mentioned that one thing I was trying to understand are the factors that lead some beginning farmers to decide to quit while others with apparently similar operations continue farming.

She nodded slowly, and mentioned seeing a Civil Eats article called “Quitting Season: Why Farmers Walk Away From Their Farms.” The next time I logged into Facebook, I saw that article had made it to my news feed as well. In the piece, Debbie Weingarten tells the stories of two farm couples in Arizona and Virginia, both of whom decided to stop farming when they couldn’t make it financially. These stories make an intuitive sort of sense in farming circles: Perhaps consumers aren’t willing to pay the real cost of good food, or, alternatively, perhaps a farmer didn’t become fluent enough in business finances to recognize which enterprises were losing money. These stories and explanations echoed what I had been hearing in Iowa – but they also didn’t tell the whole story.



Andrea harvesting onions at Wild Woods Farm in 2016.

Exploring the Link Between Farm Profits and Longevity

The original impetus for this component of my doctoral research came during my pilot study in 2014, when I spent two months volunteering and talking with beginning farmers across Iowa. Reflecting national trends, I met people who had struggled to secure access to capital, find a stable land situation and break into markets already flooded with similar products. Yet all the farmers I spoke to had, ultimately, been able to start – and continue – farming. I realized I was never going to learn about insurmountable challenges in agriculture if I only talked with people who were still farming, so I decided to add a research objective to address this gap.

Between 2015 and 2016, with support from a graduate student grant from North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE), I met with and interviewed 14 people from 12 farms who had decided to stop farming within their first several years. These farms were scattered in all regions of the state, weighted somewhat towards central and eastern Iowa – and like the beginning farms in my broader project, they had primarily been small-scale, diversified enterprises targeting local markets.

As an anthropologist, one of the things I try to pay attention to are phrases that people repeat – the sayings that turn up across different contexts; the words people return to over and over again to explain a range of ideas. Throughout my fieldwork, whether I was talking with beginning

farmers, established farmers, bankers, Farm Services Agency staff or people with only tenuous ties to agriculture, I kept hearing two phrases: “Farming is a business” and “farming is a lifestyle.” At the surface, these definitions seem diametrically opposed. Reconciling them seems, to me, to be at the heart of many challenges farmers face, including why some beginning farmers decide to stop farming.

To better understand how such divergent definitions fit together, I was particularly interested in the relationship between farm finances and farm longevity. On one hand, it seems painfully obvious to say that farms must make money to survive. But the implication of those two phrases was that profitable farms automatically keep going while unprofitable farms automatically don’t. I was curious to learn if this was actually reflected on Iowa’s landscape. As so often happens, reality turned out to be more complicated.

Farm Finances Only Part of the Story

A new farm’s ability to make money is unquestionably a vital part of whether it will last beyond its first several years. Indeed, several former farmers I interviewed did point to their struggles to break into markets or make enough profit to pay themselves as part of why they decided to pursue a different livelihood. One farmer who decided to stop growing organic direct-marketed vegetables said “we would have had to hire somebody, and we didn’t have the financial capability . . . We hadn’t even really broke even after the third year and that was a big stressor.” This theme was echoed by another farmer who decided to get out of niche livestock: “Financially, it’s very hard . . . especially, having [had to buy] health insurance is such a big thing.”

And yet none of those I spoke with described their farm’s finances as the sole, or even primary, driver behind their decision to stop farming. More typical, people described finances as one part of a complex constellation of circumstances that added up to the decision to pursue other work.

Over the course of our interview, another former vegetable farmer told me, “I think I was getting burnt out with agriculture. My body was really weak. Also, just financially, it was really hard for me to sustain myself . . . I needed to do something that I could save a little bit more and be a little bit more supportive of myself. And, I needed to give my body a break. I was mentally and physically exhausted . . . As the years went on, my body was like, I don’t know if this is for you. I had to listen to that. That was a major part of it.”

For this person, needing to find a more reliable source of income was part of the decision-making process. But this person equally emphasized the exhaustion and burnout felt after years of physically intense labor. Burnout came up frequently in my conversations with individuals who had decided to stop farming, as did personal relationships. Whether with one’s partner, siblings or parents, a farm’s future is just as impacted by the human relationships that surround it as by its profit and loss statements. I talked with one couple that used to love the buzz of running a farm together for the first years, but eventually decided to stop: “Our marriage got in trouble. We were just working so hard and we lost touch with the joy . . . It was hard on us. We started to realize we were growing apart and we sat down and said this is not worth it. I am committed to the marriage first, any business endeavor second.” Other former farmers talked about irreconcilable differences of opinion with their parents, quitting farming as a side effect of divorce or honoring a partner’s desire for a non-farming way of life.

Social Context is Vital Part

Something that struck me from these conversations was that several former farmers had, in fact, been running quite profitable farms – in some cases, even able to pay themselves and their employees respectable wages. On the flipside, I also talked with many beginning farmers who were barely breaking even – and even more who were not yet able to pay



↑ From left to right: Sally Gran, Andrea Rissing, Sabina Peters-Daywater and Wendy Johnson take part in a cooperative workday at Jóia Food Farm, operated by Wendy, in 2016.

themselves fairly – but who were sticking with it. Their stories were as diverse as the group of former farmers. Some had partners who believed in their vision and worked an off-farm job; some were willing to make lifestyle sacrifices to stay on the farm; some had families, neighbors or friends who supported them.

A farm’s ability to meet its owner’s financial goals is a piece of the early-years puzzle, but boiling down discussions of success and longevity to a “black or red” question of profitability belies the complexity of a farm’s economics. Not all profitable farms make it, and not all unprofitable farms close. Although the “farming is a business” and “farming is a lifestyle” narratives exist in tension with each other, I think most people in farming communities understand them both to be true. American culture doesn’t have many models for endeavors that are simultaneously a money-making enterprise and a way of life; that are governed by both business logic and personal value systems, and that rely on a

physical location to produce commodities while also nurturing children. It’s always tricky to talk about economics without also considering the surrounding social context. Studying the inner workings of farms throws this fact into sharp relief. Part of what’s involved with starting a farm, then, would seem to be remembering this fact – that farm economics include variables not easily represented on paper, and that a farm’s social world is an integral element of its ability to thrive. ■

Andrea graduated from Grinnell College in 2009. After working with the Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership for two years, she moved to Atlanta in 2012 to pursue her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at Emory University. Her dissertation is on the livelihood strategies of beginning farmers in Iowa.

The Making of “Rotationally Raised” *Knowledge is power*

by Nick Ohde

Over the past few years, more and more farmers have been talking about small grains. At Practical Farmers of Iowa, we’ve been trying to keep that conversation going. And that’s why, over the last few months, we have rolled out a video series focused on small grains production – “Rotationally Raised” – on YouTube.

“**R**otationally Raised” is the first full-length series filmed and produced by Practical Farmers. Like everything else we do, the series is farmer-led. The videos are a result of extensive interviews I conducted with members over the last year-and-a-half – young and old, organic and conventional, and from every corner of the state.

At the outset of this project, I had what you might call an “academic” understanding of why diversified crop rotations are good for Iowa. I had read Iowa State University agronomy professor Matt Liebman’s research showing that three- and four-year crop rotations can improve soil and water quality; reduce manufactured fertilizer and herbicide usage; and help with the battle

rotationally RAISED

on weed resistance and disease pressure – all while generating similar economic returns. And after talking to farmers around the state, I learned these are all reasons why farmers grow small grains. But I also learned that maybe an even bigger reason why farmers grow small grains is because it builds what Nathan Anderson of Aurelia calls “knowledge capital.”

Diverse crop and livestock operations can let farmers decrease manufactured inputs and save money. However, it is undoubtedly more difficult and takes more skills to add a third (or fourth or fifth) crop to a farm operation than to grow only corn and soybeans. “When you’re selling a product, you’re selling both your labor and your skills,” says John Gilbert, of Gibraltar Farms near Iowa Falls. “And when you look at a lot of the things people are spending money on today, they’re not spending cash to

replace labor as much as they are to replace skills. I think that’s one of those things that’s kind of scary for people – that they might have to develop their skillset again to help control their costs.”

Despite the challenges of gaining (or regaining) this skillset, farmers gain insights and knowledge during the process of learning how to diversify. This deep knowledge base is what Practical Farmers of Iowa co-founder Dick Thompson was talking about when he said “you can’t buy it in a bag, you have to have a system.”

“The diversity is a challenge, but it’s also very rewarding,” says Darren Fehr, of Scatterseed Farms near Mallard, who is featured in several of the videos. “We can get kind of caught in this whole corn and soybean paradigm, and that’s all we believe we can do. The reality is that there are lots of other opportunities out there if we ask the right questions.”

Building Knowledge Capital

Once farmers know how to successfully grow small grains and reduce their inputs, they can do it again and again. That knowledge is a tool that can help them improve stewardship and save money on their farms, and they own it. Knowledge



Above: John Gilbert, of Gibraltar Farms, was one of the PFI farmers featured in “Rotationally Raised.”

Right: Oats lie in a swath after being cut by Craig Fleishman of Minburn – another farmer featured in the series – on July 14, 2017.



doesn't depreciate. No bank can ever take it away and no input supplier can ever hike its cost. "We don't know what we don't know," Darren says. "That's kind of how I look at it, so that prompts me to seek out people and knowledge from a lot of different sources of information." The goal of Practical Farmers has always been to help foster that knowledge; seeking and sharing information via online videos seemed to be a logical step for the digital age.

"Rotationally Raised" spans 12 episodes. Each runs about 20 minutes and begins with an overview of many of the benefits of growing small grains. The series explores, episode by episode, a year of production, from planting to harvest to marketing. You can find the videos on our YouTube channel at youtube.com/pfivideos.

Tom Wind farms near Jefferson in west-central Iowa, where he grows corn, soybeans and forage, and plans to start incorporating small grains onto his farm. He has watched a few of the "Rotationally Raised" episodes and says it has given him the courage to go to a three- or four-year rotation. "I have made a commitment to improve the soils on my farm and increase the organic matter so that I can pass the farm on to the next generation in better shape than it was," Tom says. He thinks adding small grains and livestock to his row-crop ground is the way to do that.

Tom also says he wants to phase out pesticides on his farm, and that he believes a diverse rotation is one of the tools to reduce weed and pest pressure without chemicals. "Hearing other farmers talk about how they tackle the various challenges of growing small grains gives me the confidence to go ahead with my plans."

Tom regularly attends Practical Farmers field days, conference sessions and farminars, but says the videos are convenient because they're available on-demand. "Using PFI's video and online resources lets me learn from other members when I just don't have enough time to go to all of the field days I am interested in."

Darren adds that videos are especially important to young people: "YouTube is a very important access point for the next

Special Thanks

To All the Members Who Participated in the Making of "Rotationally Raised"

Paul Ackley	Matt Liebman
Nathan Anderson	Vic Madsen
Jon Bakehouse	Paul Mugge
Earl Canfield	Jeff Olson
Wade Dooley	Ron Rosmann
Darren Fehr	Tim Sieren
Craig Fleishman	Mark Tjelmeland
John Gilbert and family	David Weisberger
Earl Hafner	Dan Wilson and family
Wendy Johnson	Matt Woods
Aaron Heley Lehman	

generation as they seek out knowledge and information," he says. "I think there's nuggets of information that exist out there in people's minds, so if there's a way

Small grains are a connector between crops and livestock, winter and summer, grass and grain. They are important because they represent diversity.

to bring that more into the mainstream audience, that's going to help a lot of people."

Why "Rotationally Raised"?

We had many discussions on what to name this series. Should we try to come up with a catchy slogan, like "Don't Farm Naked" has been for cover crops? The series is primarily about how to grow small grains successfully, so we thought about "Growing Good Small Grains" or "Small Grains, Large Gains" – both suggested by members. But none of the names we initially considered seemed to fully express why small grains are so important.

Small grains are not crops the Iowa farm economy will ever be based on like corn or hogs. But for many, they are an integral and irreplaceable part of a whole farm. Small grains are a connector between crops and livestock, winter and summer, grass and grain. They are important because they represent diversity. Time and again, farmers I interviewed repeated the adage: "Don't put all your eggs in one

basket." Like cover crops, small grains are a next step to making a corn and soybean operation more resilient.

Thus, the benefits of small grains – in Iowa – only exist within the context of growing them as part of a diverse rotation. They enable all the crops on a farm to be *rotationally raised*.

Next Step: Consumer Support for Diversity

When consumers purchase rotationally raised products, they are creating markets for farmers who employ diverse rotations on their farms and helping to make those systems more viable. So for many farmers, one answer to making a diversified farm work is by directly seeking out customers who support the type of agriculture they practice. Many of the farmers I interviewed for this series direct-market some or all of their meat to consumers. But for many farmers (and consumers), that approach is not practical. There are, however, a growing number of consumers who want to support farming practices that are good for communities and the environment.

To help target that group and make more sustainably raised products available to it, Practical Farmers has, for the last couple of years, been working with Sustainable Food Lab, an association of food and beverage retailers, on an initiative to build the retail markets for small grains. Working with companies up and down the feed, food and beverage supply chains, the initiative is trying to help those companies come up with creative ways to increase small grains markets in Iowa. ■

Get Involved

➔ View the entire "Rotationally Raised" series at youtube.com/pfivideos.

➔ To learn more about our efforts with Sustainable Food Lab to get more small grains growing in the Corn Belt, contact Sarah Carlson at sarah@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661

➔ Take part in a pilot project by growing small grains for the first time on your farm – contact Sarah Carlson at (515) 232-5661 or sarah@practicalfarmers.org

Advocating for Conservation Programs in the Nation's Capital

by Steve Carlson

In mid-March, beginning farmer Dustin Farnsworth took time away from his farm in Adair to meet with his legislators in Washington D.C. The trip was part of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's "farmer fly-in," and Dustin took the opportunity to chat with them about conservation programs and some road blocks for beginning farmers.

Staff members at NSAC organize this annual trip to coincide with the spring appropriations process, when Congress sets the federal budget that takes effect Oct. 1. As a member of the national coalition, Practical Farmers of Iowa is occasionally asked if any of our farmer-members would like to speak to their representatives about the programs and issues that are important to them. Dustin joined producers and advocates from Oregon, Mississippi, North Dakota, Alabama and Georgia.

Prior to the farmer fly-in, a presidential budget request was released that included a 21 percent cut to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (that would amount to a \$4.7 billion funding decrease). Needless to say, this loss of funding would be detrimental to programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – both of which are helping Dustin and other farmers implement conservation practices on their farms. While congressional appropriators like Republican Rep. David Young, who represents Iowa's third district, are planning for fiscal year 2018, Dustin's trip to Washington was timely.

Dustin and his wife, Jennifer, rent farmland from his family near Adair, where they raise corn, soybeans, small grains, farrow-to-finish hogs and cow-calf pairs. It hasn't been easy starting a farm and staying profitable, but Dustin says assistance through EQIP and CSP has helped.



Dustin Farnsworth (left) stands with Republican Rep. David Young and Anna Johnson, policy program associate for the Center for Rural Affairs.

Dustin was able to meet with staff members to Republican Senator Joni Ernst, as well as directly with David Young, who serves on the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. His conversations were focused on the programs that have helped him implement conservation practices without taking a financial hit. "USDA programs provide some financial support and help us get the most from the land through conservation activities," Dustin says.

Through the Conservation Stewardship Program, Dustin explained to David how he was able to take poor-quality pieces of his farm and seed it to pollinator habitat. Using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, he improved his farm's pastures

by installing watering systems and fencing. EQIP is also helping him transition to organic; about a third of the family's land is now partway through the transition process. "I really think organic is going to be where the bright spot in farming is for the foreseeable future."

Fortunately, David has advocated for conservation programs in the past. He included the request from Practical Farmers to not cut working lands conservation funding in his appropriations request in 2017, one of just a few conservative legislators to do so. Providing David with first-hand stories from constituents in his district who use the conservation programs is important reinforcement to continue this support, especially in what is a more difficult political environment than in the past. "They were very receptive to my concerns," said Dustin about his meetings in D.C., "and they'd like to keep conservation funding."

"Meeting with Representative Young and Senator Ernst's office was a great learning experience," Dustin says. "It actually gives me a more positive view of our political system now that I've had the opportunity to speak directly with these folks." ■

"Meeting with Representative Young and Senator Ernst's office was a great learning experience. It actually gives me a more positive view of our political system now that I've had the opportunity to speak directly with these folks."

Exercising Democracy on a Daily Basis

"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in."

– Author Unknown

In 2016 Practical Farmers of Iowa had at least 532 members voting about what kind of community they want to live in by serving in leadership positions for the organization. Seventy-six of these leaders provided guidance to Practical Farmers by serving in governance positions and on committees. These people set policies, guidelines and priorities for our work.

Practical Farmers strives for committees to represent a cross-section of the membership – from beginning to experienced farmers, conventional to organic producers, western to eastern Iowa – and everything in between. By including a diversity of members in our guidance, Practical Farmers endeavors to be welcoming to all.

THANK YOU to these leaders. If you are interested in serving in a governance or committee role for Practical Farmers, contact Sally Worley, sally@practicalfarmers.org, (515) 232-5661. ■



George Schaefer

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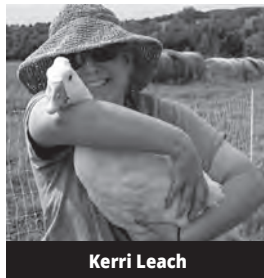
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Debra Boekholder Is New Member and Events Assistant

I was born and raised in the beautiful river town of Iowa Falls and was surrounded by extended family. Both of my grandparents were farmers, and we spent many weekends visiting my mom's parents' farm in Greenville. I have many positive memories of childhood, including family activities and adventures on the farm. In 1996, I moved to Ames, to earn a bachelor's degree from Iowa State University in child development and family studies. After working a few years in direct-care social service organizations, I had the opportunity to work for Burgie's Coffee and Tea Company in Ames.

It was during my time at Burgie's that I began to be involved in the agricultural world through coffee. I had many opportunities to learn and travel. Two high points were traveling to Costa Rica and Uganda to visit coffee producers, processors and exporters. Through



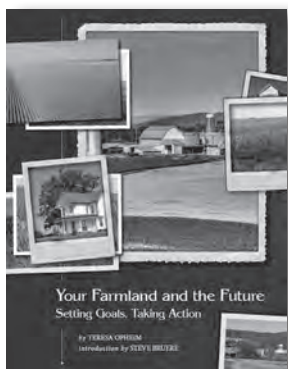
Burgie's, I became involved with the Ames High Uganda Project and had the chance to roast raw coffee imported for this project to help raise funds for the high school's annual construction trip. I was

able to go on two of its trips, and while there, visit with coffee farmers. These trips were life-changing, as I got to see and hear firsthand some of the struggles and successes they experienced.

In 2012, I became a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa, and after attending the annual conference, I was hooked! I was inspired by PFI's mission and values, and knew I wanted to be a part of what the organization is doing. When the opportunity arose to join the staff, it truly felt like a dream come true. My heart's desire is to help facilitate the work that is happening through Practical Farmers, and to support local farmers in their pursuit of learning, producing, connecting and growing. I have always known that farming is in my blood, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to deepen my connections within this organization and with all of its member farmers. ■

New Guide Helps Farmland Owners With Succession

A new guide full of tips from farmland owners and other experts about how to tackle farmland succession is now available to order. The guide – "Your Farmland and the Future: Setting Goals, Taking Action" – was released by Peoples Company in March and authored by Teresa Opheim, senior fellow with Practical Farmers and editor of the book "The Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers' Legacy Letter Project."



Many PFI farmland owners offer advice in the guide, including Rick and Jane Juchems of Plainfield, who communicate often with their son and daughter about their legacy plans. Bob and Linda Lynch of Gilmore City share their strategies, such as life insurance and gifting of land, designed to ensure that their son Jay will be able to stay on the land and continue as the fifth generation of LYNCHES to farm.

Susan and Rob Fleming of Carlisle and Philadelphia share how they have used their farmland for income, for conservation

and to provide land for beginning farmers.

Other farmland owners share their advice, including:

- Write a Farm Legacy Letter to document where your farm has been and your hopes for its future
- Join with other farmland owners to talk to and learn from each other
- Start early in the legacy planning for your farmland
- Put together a good team to help you with the transition – the process is often too complicated to go it alone

Attorney Gordon Fischer is a contributor to the guide and discusses the documents that should be part of most estate plans (estate planning questionnaire, last will and testament, power of attorney for healthcare, power of attorney for finances, disposition of personal property, and disposition of personal remains).

Other contributors are the consulting and accounting firm K-Coe Isom, the Beginning

Farmer Center at Iowa State University and Home State Bank.

To request a copy of the guide, contact Greg Van Den Berghe at (515) 232-5661 or greg@practicalfarmers.org. ■

Build Community By Hosting a Social in Your Area!

Do you want to meet other members or neighbors in your area? Do you want to help build a stronger community of friends and supporters in your part of Iowa? Let us know!

We help you get started and promote the event by sending invitations to all members in your region and providing you with sign-up sheets so you can share your information with other attendees.

If you'd like to host a social – or have questions – contact Debra Boekholder at debra@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.



A Look Back at

2016 Field Days

91 

Average miles traveled one-way to attend a field day.



54 **Percent of all attendees** were PFI members



Attendees at the roller crimper field day hosted by Billy Sammons and George Naylor.

The Impact

IMPROVING FARMS

98 **Percent of attendees who reported an increase in knowledge**

↳ **34** percent rated their knowledge change as "large" or "very large"

↳ **51** percent rated their knowledge change as "moderate"



98 **Percent who plan to share** what they learned

81 Percent thinking of changes to **production** practices



62 Percent thinking of changes to **business management** practices



73 Percent thinking of changes to **conservation** practices



51 Percent thinking of changes to **food purchasing** practices



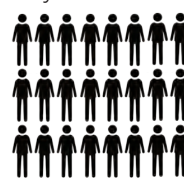
The Season

AT A GLANCE

25 **Number of field days** we organized between June and November



1,469 **Total number of people** who attended these field days in 2016.



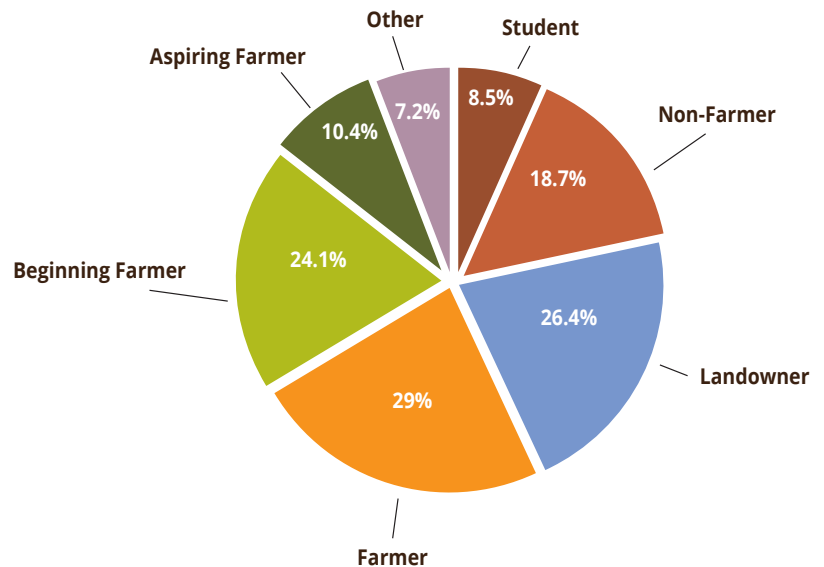
59 **Average attendance** per field day

5% **↑** **Over 2015** field day attendance

110 **Number at the highest-attended event** – EFFECTS OF A CUSTOM-MADE ROLLER CRIMPER ON RYE COVER – hosted by Billy Sammons & George Naylor

Who Attended?

A DIVERSE AUDIENCE



New Members & Upcoming Events

Welcome, New Members!

District 1–Northwest

- Jenna and Adam Cook, Newell
- Heath DeYoung, Pocahontas
- Dennis Lippon, Okoboji
- Jeff True, Farnhamville

District 2–North Central

- Joyce and Conner Allender, Jefferson
- Sue Blaisdell, Marshalltown
- Jay Burgardt, Britt
- Tom Christian, Christian Farms, Roland
- Adam and Colleen Denker, Fenton

- Norma Dinnes, Eldora
- Todd Gourley, New Providence
- Joe Gregoricka, Ames
- Matthew Nowatzke, Ankeny
- Dallas Wessels, Parkersburg
- Jodi Williamson, Duncombe

District 3–Northeast

- Bill Matus, Matus Farms, Central City
- Jesse Piehl, Readlyn
- Jason Recker, Manchester
- Paul Trafelet, Hawkeye
- Dan Voss, Atkins

District 4–Southwest

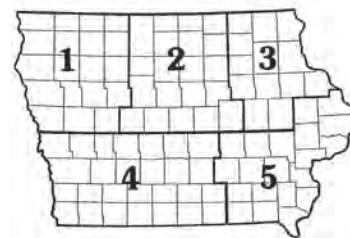
- David Shawoer, Knoxville
- April Ziskovsky, Des Moines

District 5–Southeast

- Kyle and Julie Birky, Parnell
- David Burmahl, Baldwin
- Mark Gingerich, Iowa City
- Rita and Richard Nelson, Bettendorf

District 6–Out of State

- Jessica Blair, Fire Rock Farm, Starbuck, ME



- Chad Christianson, CDC Farms, Hooper, NE
- James Dyreby, Dyreby Family Organic Farm, Rhinelander, WI
- Kenneth Headings, Deer Grove, IL
- Casey Madson, Hartland, MN

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ MID-MAY | JUNE | JULY

MAY

May 17 – Growing Your Livestock Farm Business With an FSA Loan | Dodgeville, WI | 6 p.m.

This 2.5-hour workshop is for livestock farmers interested in learning more about Farm Service Agency loan programs and services. FSA offers farm loan assistance to farmers who have some experience and want to own or operate a farm, but who don't yet meet the qualifications to get financing from a traditional lender. The workshop will cover practical steps you can take to prepare for meeting with a lender, and a diverse panel of livestock producers will describe their experience with FSA programs and farm funding opportunities. To learn more and register, visit: estore.learngrowconnect.org/home/Adult-Workshops/Growing-Farm-Business-FSA-Loan.html

May 30 – Grazing Cover Crops Field Day | Sioux Center, IA | Noon – 3 p.m.

This field day is the last event in Practical Farmers' "Cover Crop Caravan" field day series. Join PFI member Matt Schuiteman to learn about grazing rye and hairy vetch; baling rye; growing cover crops for seed; and water quality. Learn more at practicalfarmers.org

JUNE

June 3 – Cheesemaking Workshop | Caledonia, IL | 10 a.m.

This hands-on workshop in a farm setting will introduce the process of cheesemaking from start to finish. You'll get real experience making ricotta, mozzarella and more, and you'll get to sample your own handcrafted cheese. To register, visit: estore.learngrowconnect.org/home/Adult-Workshops/Cheesemaking_2.html

June 7 – 9 – 2017 Annual World Pork Expo | Des Moines, IA

The World Pork Expo is the largest pork-specific trade show and brings 20,000 pork producers and others to Des Moines every June. The expo includes educational business seminars, an extensive trade show featuring hundreds of exhibitors, the World Pork Expo Junior National with over 900 youth participants, breed shows and sales, pre-expo tours and more. For more details, visit: www.worldpork.org

June 13 – 14 – 2017 Midwest Farm Energy Conference | Morris, MN

This conference will showcase optimized and cost-effective energy systems for dairy, swine and crop production. Hear practical information about energy technologies for dairy production and swine facilities; network with farming peers and energy experts; go on renewable energy tours; and more. For more details or to register, visit: wcroc.cfans.umn.edu/events-education/2017-midwest-farm-energy-conference

June 22 – Fifth Annual Iowa Women's Landowner Conference | Brooklyn, IA

Women farmland owners have the potential to transform Iowa's landscape and farm communities in significant and positive ways, given that women own or co-own nearly half of Iowa's farmland. Women, Land and Legacy has partnered with Iowa Land Sales & Farm Management to provide information to women who want to learn more about caring for and passing on the land. The goal of the conference is to target the educational needs of women in Iowa, focusing on their empowerment and encouraging local relationships. To register, visit: iowalandsales.com/iowa-womens-landowner-conference/

JULY

July 7 – Composting With Purpose Field Day | Curtes Farm | West Bend, WI | 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

During this field day, you will explore the steps involved in choosing a compost site location and learn about resources, tools and machinery, as well as how to best design, manage and implement a windrow compost system for small to large farm operations. The field day will also explore how integrating biodynamic compost preparations can aid in the fermentation process, and how high-quality compost can reclaim damaged soils, build natural humus structure and alleviate environmental impacts of less ideal manure management styles. To register, visit: eventbrite.com/e/composting-with-purpose-hot-controlled-compost-for-improved-soil-fertility-tickets-31068219882

July 23 – Farm Dreams Class | Minneapolis

Farm Dreams is a four-hour workshop designed by Land Stewardship Project to help people clarify what motivates them to farm, get their vision on paper, inventory their strengths and training needs, and get perspective from an experienced farmer. The cost is \$20 for LSP members and \$40 for non-members. Each registration fee covers up to two people per family or farm. To register, contact Dori Eder at dori@landstewardshipproject.org or (612) 578-4497. For more details on Farm Dreams workshops, visit landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmdreams.

For more events, visit practicalfarmers.org



Grow Your Farm with Practical Farmers. Join or Renew Today!

JOIN or RENEW

< This annual membership is a:

- ☐ New Membership
☐ Renewal

< I am joining at the level of:

- ☐ Student – \$20
☐ Individual – \$50
☐ Farm or Household – \$60

☐ Organization – \$110

☐ Lifetime Member* – \$1,000

* See details at <http://bit.ly/PFI-lifetime>

< I am joining or renewing as:

- ☐ An Aspiring Farmer ☐ A Farmer or Grower ☐ Non-Farmer

< How did you hear about PFI?

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS with an ADDITIONAL DONATION!

For the sake of the long-term health and vitality of Practical Farmers of Iowa, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee.

I would like to make a one-time, tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

☐ \$1,000 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$_____

Or, make a recurring monthly or quarterly donation.

☐ Yes, I would like to give \$_____ ☐ per month ☐ per quarter

(This will be automatically charged to your credit card on the first day of each month or quarter).

Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c)3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank You!

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____ County: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____ Email 2: _____

* For Farm or Household membership, please list names of all persons included. For Organization membership, please list one or two contact persons.

EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUP SIGN-UP

When you join our email discussion groups, you can network, build community and exchange ideas from anywhere, at any time. **Sign up for as many groups as you'd like (be sure to include your email address above)!**

☐ Cover Crops ☐ Field Crops ☐ General ☐ Horticulture ☐ Livestock ☐ Policy

PAYMENT

Membership level \$ _____ per year, for _____ year(s) = \$ _____

Additional donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

☐ Check or money order is enclosed. (Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")

☐ Credit card (Visa, MasterCard or Discover only).

Name on card _____ Number _____ Exp. _____

☐ Please automatically charge this credit card each year for membership



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Farms that are prized for their diversity of crops and livestock; their wildlife, healthy soils, innovations, beauty and productivity; their connection to a rich past and a fulfilling present; where individuals and families are earning a good living.



Healthy Food

Food that is celebrated for its connections to local farmers, to seasons, to hard work and good stewardship. Communities alive with diverse connections between farmers and friends of farmers.

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Places where commerce, cooperation, creativity and spirituality are thriving. Places where the working landscape, the fresh air and the clean water remind us of all that is good about Iowa.