

*working together, always learning*

# the Practical Farmer

SUMMER 2017



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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.

**Newsletter Editor:** Tamsyn Jones

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





## Celebrating and Supporting Imperfection



**M**y commute to work on quiet country roads gives me time to myself. I often fill the time by listening to podcasts. A favorite is the "Moth

Radio Hour," featuring extraordinary experiences of everyday people. Two podcasts I heard recently on the way to work resonated with me and how Practical Farmers operates.

### "Deluded in the Desert"

In this story, recent college graduate Andrew Forsthoefel walks across America, listening to peoples' stories along the way. People are grateful to have someone listen to their stories; they thank him, tell them they love him and provide him food and shelter. When he set off on his journey, he thought he was "the one" to offer the service of listening to other people. Along the way he realizes he isn't; rather we all need to listen, to hear and to be heard.

Practical Farmers spends a lot of time listening to and helping people share stories. Listening to others stimulates curiosity, helps us let go of assumptions and encourages us to have empathy. Hearing others informs our life perspectives and decisions. Being heard provides needed validation and compassion.

Imperfections lend authenticity to our stories. Farmer and author Mas Masumoto spoke of the power of stories at MOSES' organic farming conference this past winter. He said: "All of our stories have a type of authenticity and transparency that defines us. We work in real places and deal with real things. That's our strength, that's our story to tell."

### "A Superhero Gets Sick"

Storyteller Tim Manley shared a memory of when he was seriously ill. He went through two hospital stays, a series of tests and a near diagnosis of leukemia. Fortunately, he didn't have leukemia and returned home healthy after treatment. As a 6-year-old, Tim remained strong through this ordeal by pretending he was a superhero. He pulled his superhero strength from his sidekick, his mom.



Kevin Dietzel holds a new calf earlier this year on his farm, Lost Lake Farm, near Jewell.

Tim's parents had recently divorced, and his mom held his family together. She'd often camp out on the floor of the bedroom shared by her three sons, repeating: "Don't worry, whatever happens, we're all in this together."

Practical Farmers' community provides this kind of support. When hardship occurs, many members reach out to each other for support. Here is an excerpt of what Kevin Dietzel – who operates Lost Lake Farm near Jewell – recently wrote on Facebook:

"I'm having one of those low self-esteem days. I am not always joyfully frolicking through the meadows, scratching cows' necks, and snacking on my farm-fresh artisan cheese. I frequently doubt my decisions, doubt that I have what it takes to make this farm a success. I sometimes wonder if I am even on the right path with this whole farm thing . . . I just wanted to post this, because I'm pretty sure other people feel that way frequently too."

Many PFI members responded with support and gratitude:

**Caite Palmer** – "Kevin, I could have written this many times over. It's good for us, our loved ones and our customers to speak up when things aren't going well."

**Ryan Marquardt** – "I live in that same world. Right now the pastures are scorching

out, that hail took out a lot of our standing grass, so I am putting out hay this afternoon. I look at the books and often ask myself how many years will it take me to get to x, y, & z. I am not getting any younger and my body is not what it was 10 years ago when I started. So, I feel you."

**Nicholas Koster** – "Ditto. The struggle is real. If it was as easy as the online appearance, everyone would farm."

**John Gilbert** – "Believe me I have been where you are at and am still there occasionally. The answer I have found is to love everything, love the challenges your day brings, love the things that go wrong especially. We're always here if you need anything."

This newsletter, as usual, is full of authentic experiences. Our newly published podcast series, "On-Farm," featured on page 28, is another way to hear real stories.

Please join us at upcoming field days to hear more stories of imperfection, and to continue to build your community of empathy and support.

We're all in this together. With extreme imperfection,

*Sally Worley*

## Members Weigh In on Scales for Grain Drills

by Stefan Gailans

In May, Wendy Johnson, of Charles City, posted the following question to our field crops email discussion list: "I'd like to know if there is a grain drill out there that can no-till soybeans in 15-in. rows and also have the capability to no-till small grains in 7-inch rows. I'd like the option to have grass seed or small seed boxes on it. Does any manufacturer make one?"

Several members were quick to respond to Wendy's inquiry with their advice. Nearly everyone advocated for a John Deere grain drill (either a model 750 or 1560) with 7.5-inch row spacings. On these drills, half of the seeding units can be raised resulting in 15-inch row spacings ("locking the front rank of units," to use the technical description).

Regardless of a drill's make or model, if it had 7.5-inch row spacings, members commented that plugging every other opening in the seed box with caps or duct tape was the suggested "hack" option. This results in openings every 15 inches in the bottom of the seed box for the seed to flow through to the seeding units.

**Jacob Bolson**, of Hubbard, added this comment: "If you do buy a drill, make sure a scale is in the budget. When we purchased the [John] Deere 750 drill we immediately purchased a scale kit from Scale-Tec; one of the best investments we have ever made."

After **Francis Thicke**, of Fairfield, wondered, "How does the scale work? Can you add it on to an existing drill?" members weighed in with their thoughts and experiences.

Most of the reasons members shared for installing a scale on a grain drill included cost savings, and less time spent calibrating a grain drill for seeding different small grains or cover crop species and varieties.

What follows is a detailed recap of the discussions members had. »



**The Knutson family grain drill:** Jacob Bolson, who farms with his parents-in-law, Roger and Mary Knutson, had a Scale-Tec scale installed on a John Deere 750 grain drill.



**Jacob Bolson**

"There are two advantages to installing scales on a drill. The first advantage is quality of job; specifically, initial calibration and regular rate checks through the field . . . . The next advantage is cost management. When the seeding rate is higher than our target rate, we are wasting dollars on the excess seed."

**Jacob Bolson:** "Our business case for the scale installation on our drill is a combination of quality of job (calibration = right rate), cost management (wrong rate = wasted \$\$\$) and time efficiency (expedite the calibration process). The first advantage is quality of job; specifically, initial calibration and regular rate checks through the field. Because seeding with drills is actually a controlled spill of seeds through the openers, calibration can be a bit of a time-consuming and challenging process. Having scales makes these processes significantly easier.

"The next advantage is cost management. When the seeding rate is higher than our target rate, we are wasting dollars on the excess seed. When we made the decision to move from a Great Plains 1500 drill to a John Deere 750, we made sure that scales were in the budget.

"Our scale kit came from Scale-Tec in Anamosa, by way of our local John Deere dealer, Phelps Implement in Hubbard. The scale kit uses Digi-Star weighing components and an installation kit designed by Scale-Tec specifically for the John Deere box drills. We already had a scale kit on our grain cart, so when we purchased the kit for our JD 750 drill, we did not need to purchase a display-indicator. For someone that does not have a scale kit elsewhere in the operation, the acquisition cost will be a bit higher, as a display-indicator will need





## Wade Dooley

"A scale on a drill is as useful as a seed or flow-rate monitor, and often more useful . . . A good scale would pay for itself in seed savings . . . and definitely pay for itself if you custom-drill."

to be purchased. A recent quote provided to me from Scale-Tec for a scale for a 15-foot JD 750 drill was \$1,829.60 for the kit plus \$770 for the Digi-Star indicator."

**Doug Alert** (Hampton): "With bagged seed, I would plant 5 acres, stop, refill, count bags used, adjust planting rate, repeat. With the scale, I make a pass across the field, read the scale, read the acre counter, calculate, adjust meters, repeat. The scale gives me faster, more accurate feedback. The decision to switch to bulk seed handling forced the issue. I couldn't see any way to get close to the desired rate without the scale."

"Example: I had two lots of Shelby oats. Lot two metered out at 130 percent of lot one. Without the scale, I probably wouldn't have caught this. The cost of the scale, including the display, was \$2,692.16 shipped to Hampton this past March."

**Jack Boyer** (Reinbeck): "I have the scales on my JD1560 also and highly recommend it. It has four scale bars mounted on the frame; the seed box is raised and attached to the opposite end of the weigh bar. It's a pretty simple installation. Scale Tec provides the attachment hardware and brackets."

"The scales permit faster calibration of the drill, both initially and anytime changing seed size, which usually occurs every time you change varieties. This saves seed and time and permits more accurately setting the seeding rate more quickly."

**Dick Sloan** (Rowley): "The suggestions for seed settings provided by the manufacturer on the chart inside the seed box on a grain drill can be off by 20 percent. We mostly put out 50 to 90 pounds of seed per acre depending on the crop, so we know in just a few passes if we need to adjust the rate coming out of the drill [by looking at the scale indicator]. It wouldn't be quite as quick a process if we are putting out a lesser seeding rate – for example, if

frost-seeding clover at 10 pounds per acre. But it will pay with enough use. It can pay to have the right population for small grains. You stand to get the best yield without lodging with the right population. Soybeans, too, I guess. And you save money [by not putting out more seed than you need]."

**Wade Dooley** (Albion): "A scale on a drill is as useful as a seed or flow-rate monitor (and often more useful!). I have the seed monitor on my Landoll seeder, and it's good for monoculture seeding of large seeds (small grains, beans, etc.). But it doesn't tell me anything about my small seeds (alfalfa, clover, rapeseed) out of my small-seed boxes. And it's next to useless when I run diverse mixes."

"A good scale would pay for itself in seed savings on your own farm, and definitely pay for itself if you custom drill (which I do)! I'm looking into retrofitting one on my drill now. I still haven't put scales on my drill. It's on my list of winter projects, just not sure which winter! I believe in them strongly, however. Running multi-species mixes, with really diverse seed sizes, a seed monitor just can't accurately tell me what's happening. A scale would allow me to know how many pounds per acre of product I was seeding, as I was seeding it."

**Brent Larson** (Fort Dodge): "Due to the great feedback from multiple PFI members, we are definitely considering a scale for our soybean drill. I don't know if we'll take the plunge and get a scale soon, but now it's on our list of future upgrades to seriously consider."

**Wendy Johnson** found the depth of information in these responses to be immensely helpful: "I get the digested version of the [discussion list]," she said, "so I read all of your responses at once. Wow! Lots of great info and responses. Thank you for your help!" ■

## Join an Email Discussion Group

The field crops list is our newest email discussion group; it's a venue for conversations about crop rotations, weed management and equipment for conventional and organic row crop farmers.

Email discussion groups are a member benefit and one of the best and simplest ways to stay in touch with and get advice from fellow PFI members. People who use the discussion lists tell us it is one of the most valuable member benefits.

**To join** the field crops email discussion list – or any other email discussion list – contact Debra Boekholder at (515) 232-5661 or [debra@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:debra@practicalfarmers.org)



## Dick Sloan

"The suggestions for seed settings provided by the manufacturer on the chart inside the seed box on a grain drill can be off by 20 percent . . . It can pay to have the right population for small grains. You stand to get the best yield without lodging with the right population."



## Doug Alert

"I had two lots of Shelby oats. Lot two metered out at 130 percent of lot one. Without the scale, I probably wouldn't have caught this."

## Diversity, Priorities and Impact

2017 member survey yields valuable member insights

by Laura Frescoln

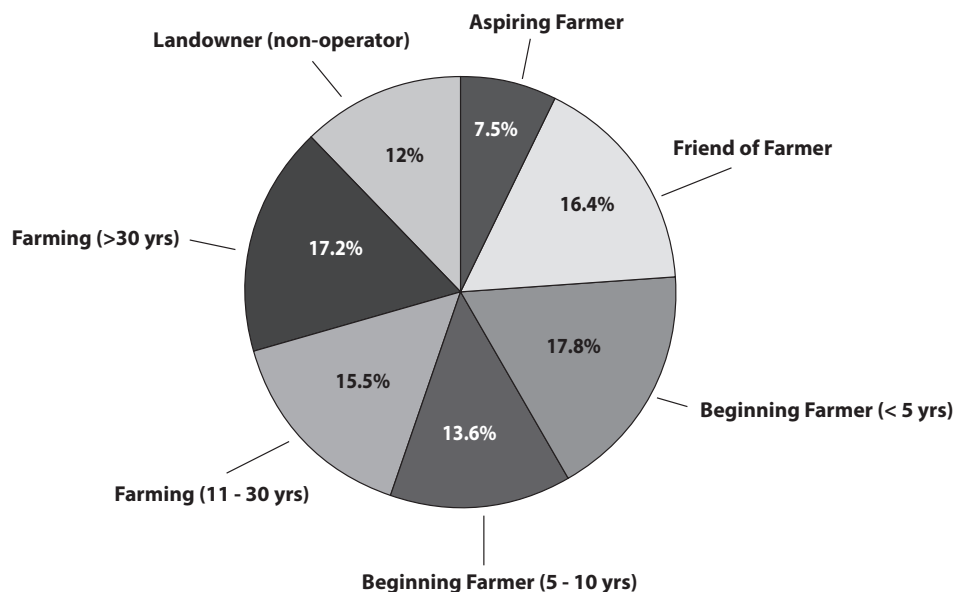
Earlier this year, Practical Farmers launched one of our most important cyclical undertakings: our member survey.

Our goal was for 50 percent of members to respond – and we are pleased to report we met our goal. Thank you to everyone who participated! As we continue to sort through and analyze the data, we are gleaning valuable insights into who our members are, their goals and priorities. Here, we share a few of those findings.

### A Healthy Mix of Member Types

One thing that sets Practical Farmers apart from many other organizations is our member focus. Our work and programming are developed as a direct result of feedback we receive from members. We gather this information several ways: we have conversations, we collect evaluations, we encourage dialogue on our email discussion lists – and every three to four years, we send out a member survey. It is no coincidence that this survey precedes our strategic planning season. The detailed information we gather about our members and their priorities through the member survey has a direct impact on our strategic goals for the next three years.

One vital piece of the membership portrait we are able to paint as a result of the survey is the composition of our membership. Thirty-nine percent of you are aspiring or beginning farmers; 33 percent of you are experienced farmers – and 72 percent of you fall in the farmer category, bringing integral perspectives and expertise to Practical Farmers of Iowa. The remaining 28 percent of members contribute important roles and voices as well: 12 percent of you are landowners, and 16 percent are friends of farmers.



**Figure 1:** Percent of members from the 2017 member survey who identified as belonging to one of seven member categories.

Figure 1 breaks these numbers down a bit more. This solid representation from all member classifications is so important: Not only does it mean we are successfully reaching a broad group of people who care about Practical Farmers' mission, it means we are hearing voices from many points of view.

### Beginning Farmers = Top-Rated Member Priority

To effectively serve this diverse membership, we also need to know the types of programming our members want us to focus on. This can be a tricky question. At Practical Farmers, we take pride in the diversity of our membership. However, that same diversity can lead to a list of priorities too varied for us to effectively tackle. The survey helps us consolidate this input from our members.

One insight we learned is that, even though just one-third of our members classify themselves as beginning farmers, a majority of the membership feels that helping beginning farmers should be PFI's top priority. Other top priorities range from on-farm research to marketing, profitability

to conservation. Here are the top 10 member priorities:

Top 10 Member Priorities	
<b>#1</b> Beginning Farmers	<b>#6</b> Conservation
<b>#2</b> On-Farm Research and Demonstration	<b>#7</b> Profitability
<b>#3</b> Soil Health	<b>#8</b> Business Planning
<b>#4</b> Environmental Health	<b>#9</b> Cover Crops
<b>#5</b> Marketing and Market Development	<b>#10</b> Fruits and Vegetables

### New Discoveries

Through an open-ended comment section we included on many questions in the 2017 member survey, we received some unexpected – but extremely valuable – feedback. When we created the 2017 survey, our "Rotationally Raised" video series was not complete and therefore

was not listed as an option for “most meaningful event or program.” However, many members commented that this series – which explores small grains production in Iowa – was a highlight for them. We also discovered that members are interested in programming on managing farm employees.

## Spurring Conversations

Survey responses guide our priorities at PFI – but we also hope the questions sparked discussions among farm households, such as the questions regarding farm goals. For some farm families, these questions may have been easy to answer. Other families, however, may not have any formal short- or long-term farm goals identified. We hope that, for those members especially, the survey prompted some important discussions around the dinner table.

Erin Wilson, who farms with her family at Seven W Farm near Paullina, shared how the “Map of My Kingdom” play impacted their farm. “While attending the PFI play on transition planning, we sat next to a local lawyer who specializes in this,” Erin wrote in her survey responses. “We have met with him and put together our farm transition and are making changes to the business structure of the farm for better protection, continuation. This was a big deal for us!”

## Big Jump in Third Crop Adoption

The member survey is like a snapshot in time of our member base. As we develop our strategic plan this year, we will look for any shifts in values, attitudes and behaviors since our last member survey in 2013. Are member priorities the same as they were four years ago? If not, what adjustments are needed to align with current member needs? For instance, improving soil health is a big priority within the membership. One way to do this is by adding a third crop to a corn and soybean rotation. Comparing the 2013 and the 2017 member surveys, we can see that this focus on soil health appears to be changing the way some of you are farming.

In 2013, data showed that 8 percent of members either added a third crop to their system or they increased the number of acres that included a third crop. In 2017, that number more than doubled to 19



Erin Wilson, of Seven W Farm, commented on her member survey that PFI's "Map of My Kingdom" play on farmland transition helped her family connect with a lawyer and move forward with farm transition planning.

percent. We still have a lot of research and education to do, but the numbers indicate we are on the right track. The data also reveal that we have exceeded our strategic plan goal of getting 10 percent of farmers to add a third crop to their corn-soybean rotation. That is vital feedback that will guide our goals for the next strategic plan. Some members who have not yet added a third crop are also pondering the possibilities. As one member commented in the survey: “[We] have not incorporated small grains yet, but would like to so we can plant more diverse cover crops.”

## Improving Farms and Communities

Ultimately, we use the results of the survey to track changes in behaviors of our members. This is how we can evaluate the “practical” side of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Are the efforts at research, education and outreach making a tangible difference in our members' lives and on their farms? The answer is a resounding yes. Based on responses to the survey, we can see that real changes are happening on the ground.

Finding practical solutions to on-farm questions, improving stewardship and conservation, and feeling a greater sense of community are three key reasons why many members support and participate in Practical Farmers. In each of these areas,

members indicated that PFI has had a significantly positive impact:

- 70 percent of members made changes in **production practices**
- 63 percent of members made changes in **conservation practices**
- 82 percent of members report feeling **a sense of community** through their association with Practical Farmers.

## What's Ahead

Now that we have the most recent in-depth membership data, we'll see how they compare to our strategic plan goals. Then we'll decide if the goals need to be adjusted in any way during our upcoming strategic planning process. For example, in our last strategic plan, we sought to have 75 percent of members increase their conservation investment, and to have 90 percent of members report an increased sense of community. Because we fell a bit short on these goals, our strategic planning team needs to decide if we should keep those goals the same and work to achieve them, if we should adjust the goals or if the goals are still relevant to measure.

We will continue to evaluate the trove of data we gleaned, so please look for additional survey results in upcoming issues of “Practical News.”

## Didn't Fill Out the Survey? There's Still Time!

We are very thankful to all our members who took the time to give us the feedback we need to better serve you. If you are a PFI member and you have not yet completed the survey, **it is not too late!** We value – and use – feedback from all our members, whether you're a non-farmer, an out-of-state member or a new addition to our community. The survey is still open and available for you to share your feedback. We want to know how we can direct our programming to serve all our members.

If you're a member who hasn't yet filled out the 2017 member survey, and you would like to, please contact Laura Frescoln, (515) 232-5661 or [laura@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:laura@practicalfarmers.org). ■



# Small Grains in the Corn Belt – Cost Share Program and Grower Network

by Alisha Bower

Small grains provide a whole host of ecological and environmental benefits when added to a corn and soybean system. They relieve pest pressure, boost cash crop yields and leave ample time for a nitrogen-fixing legume cover crop to offset fertilizer input needs. With all these positives, why, then, aren't more people growing them?

The answer is two-fold. Iowa has been corn and soybean country for over a generation, so most current farmers haven't worked with small grains crops. Regaining these skills and knowledge is one hurdle to incorporating small grains into our landscape. The second reason follows from the first: As small grains disappeared from Iowa, so did small grains buyers. Farmers today have a hard time profitably selling or using the small grains they grow.

To address these two challenges, Practical Farmers has launched two initiatives to help support farmers growing small grains in the Midwest: a small grains pilot project, and a related small grains peer network. The first initiative – Midwest Small Grains Pilot – is a three-year project we launched in February 2017 with our partner, Sustainable Food Lab, with funding from national and state Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grants.

Each year of the project, we are offering \$40 per acre in cost-share to farmers for planting small grains on their farms – both conventionally raised and transitioning to organic – in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. This first year, we have enrolled 500 acres into the cost-share. In 2018, we will enroll 1,000 acres and we plan to enroll 1,500 acres in the final year of the program. Those participating in the project are required to follow a three-year rotation that includes corn the first year, soybeans the second and a small grains crop followed by a cover crop planting the third year.



**Above-Left:** Close-up of young oat plants in Andy Linder's hand. **Above-Right:** Andy and his son, Cameron, stand in oats planted on the family's farm.



In addition to the cost-share portion of the project, we are offering a complementary network of educational programs on how to grow small grains. Our goal is to allow farmers to build their small grains skills in a financially secure environment so they are prepared to grow profitable, high-quality small grains for the evolving market.

### Meet the Farmers

Andy Linder and Scott Shriver are two of the 18 farmers who enrolled, and who represent the diversity of farmers in our pilot. Scott farms in Iowa, near Jefferson, and has been a PFI member since 2009. He has been certified organic since 1998 and started growing small grains the same year as part of his transitional rotation (he hosted a Practical Farmers field day on small grains in 2012). The oats he has enrolled in our program are planted on a rented field transitioning to organic that Scott is managing for the first time this year.

"I grow small grains because they break up weed cycles in organic and it adds diversity to my farm," Scott says. "The challenge has been making them pay off well. We have double-cropped before, raising a small grains crop followed by buckwheat.

Now, when the wheat or barley is 12 inches tall we forage-chop it and then dry it for pelletized wheat grass and barley grass health products."

Andy farms in southern Minnesota, near Easton, and joined PFI for the first time in May to participate in the cost-share. As a farmer outside of Iowa, he first heard about Practical Farmers through this program. Like Scott, Andy planted oats this year – the third year he has tried small grains on a small scale on his farm. Andy says the added diversity is a big part of the appeal of growing small grains, and he hopes to scale up if he can make the rotation profitable.

Thanks to the cost-share he receives through the pilot program, he says he's able to experiment with making his rotation even more diverse. "I can look into more diverse and expensive green manure mixes that I might not have tried without the cost-share," Andy says. "This program will allow me to continue to experiment with diverse cover mixes."

For many farmers growing small grains – both in the program and more generally – a big challenge is integrating small grains



successfully into their business plans. Both Andy and Scott have had trouble consistently accessing the higher-value food-grade market. "Grain Millers is close, thankfully, but the cash flow isn't always positive," Andy says. "I am going to explore marketing oats for cover crop seed as more farmers get interested in trying cover crops."

"We always try for food-grade," Scott says, "and have only made it two years out of the last 10." The cost-share program will support Andy and Scott as they try other market options, like selling cover crop seed or tweaks to production practices, such as trying a new variety that has consistently higher quality in Iowa's climate.

## Data Collection

**Assessing Environmental Benefits:** To help us better understand the benefits and challenges of this extended rotation system, the farmers in the pilot project will also do some research and data collection. After small grain harvest, which typically occurs in June or July, farmers will record their production practices and costs for the year in a secure online survey created and managed by Practical Farmers.

Staff will then take farmers' production data and input it into three different sustainability tools to assess the environmental benefits farmers gained by adding a year of small

"This program will allow me to continue to experiment with diverse cover mixes."

— ANDY LINDER

grains and cover crops to their rotation. Data will be entered into Field to Market's Fieldprint Calculator; the Cool Farm Tool, created by Cool Farm Alliance; and the NRCS's Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool. These tools have been developed by different companies and public agencies to quantify the environmental benefits of farmers' practices.

Practical Farmers will evaluate the accuracy of the claims these tools make and give feedback to their developers, to ensure that extended rotation systems are evaluated correctly and in a scientifically accurate way.



Scott Shriver looks at oats at the farm of Margaret Smith and Doug Alert in 2015.

By quantifying the environmental benefits of extended rotation systems that include small grains plus cover crops, we also hope to sway companies to create positive market signals – such as longer-term contracts for small grains crops, or offering a higher price. Currently, companies pay about \$2 per pound for oats, which doesn't even cover farmers' production costs. In return for providing these positive market signals and better compensating farmers for the environmental benefits their diverse systems provide, companies would be able to make more robust, meaningful claims about their sustainability efforts and support of these diverse farming systems.

**Assessing Costs and Barriers:** Farmers' production costs will also be used to develop partial budgets so we have a better understanding of the market and business barriers to scaling up small grains. Because farmers in the pilot are growing cereal rye, oats and wheat for cover crop seed, milling and livestock markets, we hope to have a good sample of budgets from various small grains varieties and end uses to compare and contrast the profitability of different approaches to marketing small grains.

## Small Grains Peer Network

The second related initiative – the small grains peer network – focuses on helping farmers connect with their peers, and is meant to complement and support the work farmers are doing with small grains in the pilot project. In January, Practical

Farmers began organizing a series of calls and in-person events focused on the nuts and bolts of small grains production. Through these interactions, we also hope to foster farmer-to-farmer sharing and information exchange so farmers can help one another work through production challenges.

Shared learning calls started in January and take place monthly. Topics have focused on variety selection; identifying and securing small grains markets for both grain and straw; and best management practices for growing small grains, such as creating an appropriate seed bed and the right plant population for success. In April, we discussed the data reporting requirements for the pilot project in a recorded webinar so it would be available for participants over the three years of the program. Taking May off because farmers are busy in the field, we reconvened in June to discuss fungicide applications, harvest and post-harvest handling. Each call lasts one hour and includes 20 to 30 minutes of formal presentation from the speakers; the rest of the call is devoted to farmers asking and answering questions about their challenges and successes.

On Aug. 17, Practical Farmers will host its first small grains conference, "Rotationally Raised – Making Small Grains Work," which will take place in Ames. Farmers, researchers and grain buyers will present on and delve into topics ranging from small grains breeding and production to end uses in food and feed markets. Pilot project members who will have harvested their 2017 small grains by August will have an opportunity to expand their knowledge on any nagging questions that remain after this year's growing season.

Through all these activities, Practical Farmers' goal is to support farmers who want to diversify their rotation. We hope to help farmers gain the confidence and skills needed to successfully grow small grains, and to develop innovative market solutions so that extended rotations not only fit their land, but their business plans too. ■

To access shared learning call notes, blogs and publications visit PFI's small grains page: [practicalfarmers.org/small-grains](http://practicalfarmers.org/small-grains)

### A Beginner's Balancing Act

*Navigating land access, finances, family and farming*

by Greg Van Den Berghe

Access to capital and land rank among the top barriers faced by beginning farmers in Iowa. Jennie Erwin, of Daystar Harvest, can attest to the reality of these challenges – and others. As a graduate of Practical Farmers' 2016 Savings Incentive Program class, Jennie now has a business plan, a network of peers and a little more capital than when she started – but finances remain an issue, land access presents challenges and she struggles to balance a full-time off-farm job with family life and farming duties.

Jennie says she discovered her passion for food on a study abroad trip to India. "My experience in India forever changed how I looked at food," she says. "I wanted my family to eat well, and I couldn't afford to buy what I wanted in the first years after college, so growing it was my solution." Finding a way to source the quality of food she wanted became the impetus for Jennie, an engineer, to add farmer to her resume. By day you will find Jennie behind a computer automating systems we use everyday – such as heating and cooling processes for schools, libraries and other buildings. But in the off-hours, you will find farmer-Jennie with her family growing the fresh food she sought after that trip to India.

Jennie has been operating Daystar Harvest with her best friend, Becky Kipper, since 2015. The farm team raises vegetables at three locations – two in Windsor Heights, where Jennie and her family live, and one near Boone, on land Becky owns – and market products through CSA and individual sales. Becky's land is perfect for growing vegetables – but it's also located about 50 minutes away from Windsor Heights. There are pros and cons to this land arrangement, but Jennie says the land access issue is one of her biggest barriers.



**Potato Pride:** Jennie Erwin poses by some of her recently planted potatoes. To plot – located on land near Boone owned by her farm partner – is 50 minutes away from where Jennie and her family live.

To make the distance work, she has to be strategic about how and what she grows in each location. The plots in the city are less prone to deer damage and can be maintained with a closer eye. But in Boone she has space to grow staple crops, such as potatoes, tomatoes and garlic – and Jennie envisions the garlic crop as the one that will let her grow her business, as it works in her growing system and she sees a need in the market for more garlic.

***"Most of the time I feel like I'm dragging my family along for this crazy ride, and they put up with it because I make them amazing salads and spaghetti sauces."***

Beyond the production challenges of her land situation, it also presents challenges to her family life. Having two young children at home requires a balance to keep everything running smoothly. While Jennie says she "sometimes can escape to the farm to take care of work alone," at other times she packs up the family and takes them with her to the Boone plot. "Most of the time I feel like I'm dragging my family along for this crazy ride, and they put up with it because I make them amazing salads and spaghetti sauces." In the peak of summer, she says it's

not uncommon to pitch a tent, blow up the air mattress and spend the night.

To keep her income steady, Jennie has kept her full-time job. After graduating with an engineering degree, she accumulated a large amount of school debt. Carrying this much debt restricts the money she has available for capital. Jennie has been afraid to seek a loan because she's sure "the banker will look at my current debt and laugh me out the door." This is a fear shared by many beginning farmers looking to farm. Jennie admits the lack of capital has slowed down her ability to grow her farm.

To seek more capital, Jennie applied to the Savings Incentive Program and used the anticipated money match as motivation to help her complete the program. Between her trips to the farm and deliveries of CSA shares, Jennie found it very important to attend events. She never missed a learning or networking opportunity, and exceeded her four-event requirement each year while in the program.

"Even though I've graduated from SIP, I'm probably not going anywhere," Jennie says. "Practical Farmers still has a lot to teach me." She used her savings match to purchase a BCS two-wheel tractor, and is enjoying the boost to efficiency this season. ■



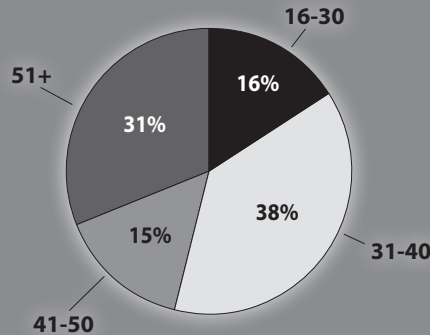
# PFI BEGINNING & ASPIRING FARMERS

The member survey we conducted earlier this year revealed that helping beginning farmers is a top priority of Practical Farmers members. That same survey provided us with good information about our beginning and aspiring farmer members, which will help guide our programming moving forward.

## Beginners = All Ages

**BEGINNING & ASPIRING FARMERS come from all age groups.** In fact, the majority of beginning farmers – 84 percent – are over 30 years old. Many are changing careers or pursuing farming after retiring. This data defies the commonly held image that new farmers are mostly younger.

AGE RANGES OF BEGINNING FARMERS



**43**

The average age of a PFI beginning farmer.

**37**

The average age of a PFI aspiring farmer.

**VS**

**40**

The median age of a PFI beginning farmer.

**32**

The median age of a PFI aspiring farmer.

**VS**

## Barriers to Farming

Beginning and aspiring farmers in our network both say their two biggest barriers are **access to land and capital**. Other barriers include lack of expertise and lack of time due to an off-farm job, family or other factors.

### #1. Capital



### #2. Land



### #3. Expertise



### #4. Time



**THE DILEMMA:** Start-up costs are prohibitive – especially for land – and relying on an off-farm job to fund the start-up takes away valuable time.

## How PFI Is Helping

Practical Farmers helps connect beginning and aspiring farmers to each other and to experienced farmers. This networking **provides the supportive community and source of expertise** new farmers need to improve their production, knowledge and confidence.

We also offer programs to help new farmers access land, money and business planning resources.

*As a result of participating in PFI:*

### PRODUCTION

**76%**

of beginning farmers have changed production practices

**49%**

of aspiring farmers have looked to PFI for production support

### COMMUNITY

**73%**

of beginning farmers have formed friendships or relationships

**70%**

of aspiring farmers have formed friendships or relationships

### CONSERVATION

**62%**

of beginning farmers have changed conservation practices

**61%**

of aspiring farmers have sought PFI's help with conservation practices

### FINANCIALS

**58%**

of beginning farmers have changed business management practices

**68%**

of aspiring farmers look to PFI for help with business and financial planning

## 3 Bees, More Buzz

*A new start blossoms into a thriving family endeavor*

by Liz Kolbe

3 Bee Farms began in 2009 when Steve Brahms needed a new beginning. He was a recent divorcee with custody of two small children, and wanted a job that would let him see them on and off the school bus every day. Working for other farmers and as a pesticide applicator, that wasn't possible.

Donna and Mike Brahms, Steve's parents, had started growing a little produce to supplement their honey sales at farmers market. A long-time honey producer, Donna was president of the Iowa Honey Producers Association for nine years, and ran the organization's Iowa State Fair booth on the 2nd floor of the Agriculture Building for 13 years. Selling honey at farmers markets, she had noticed the produce vendors aging out – retiring or dying. "I've always had gardens," she says, and decided to expand the gardens to sell at market. By the time Steve needed a new work schedule, Donna and Mike had maxed out their garden space. The time was right. "An orchard was for sale, so we decided to expand in a huge way," Donna says. In 2009 Mike and Donna moved to the orchard in Griswold, and with Steve, began 3 Bee Farms.

Today, 3 Bee Farms produces vegetables on 9 acres, with a hydroponic greenhouse for tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. The family also has 1,100 apple trees that came with the farm; a few turkeys, hogs, and chickens for themselves and for the enjoyment of visitors – they attract several hundred each weekend in the fall; and they continue the family tradition of raising bees for honey. More family members have also joined the farm: Steve's older brother, Shawn, who retired from a career in the Army; and Steve's wife, Diane (he remarried a couple of years ago). Donna and Mike's youngest son, Mitchell, farms the family's corn and soybean land.

The farm has proved to be a good fit for Steve. He was a "vegetable-producing



**Above: (left)** Steve Brahms loads the family's indispensable Earthway seeder (at the back of the truck bed). **(right):** Steve's brother, Shawn, tends to tomatoes in the family's hydroponic greenhouse. **Opposite: (left)** Tomatoes are stored in foam grape boxes in the family's multi-purpose apple house. **(right)** Donna, Steve, Diane and Shawn Brahms pose in their orchard.

prodigy" from an early age, he says, and the new career reconnects him with that childhood pastime. "Mom and Dad built a house in 1987, and left a huge, huge dirt pile. I terraced it, took Mom's old seeds and had a garden of my own," remembers Steve. Donna confirmed this story, and that the garden was as impressive as it sounds.

### Rooted in Southwest Iowa

The Brahmses' roots are deep in the small towns of rural Cass County (though the orchard itself is in Pottawattamie County, where Mike and Donna now live). Mike and Donna grew up around Cumberland and Messena. In small towns, being well-connected makes a big difference, and the Brahmses know everyone, largely thanks to Donna. Prior to her life as a farmer, Donna taught preschool, ran the senior center for many years and still plays the organ in two churches every week – a job she's had since she was 15.

An easy communicator, Donna is also the president of the Iowa Farmers Market Association, and the family attends eight weekly farmers markets in Anita, Creston, Atlantic, Avoca, Waukee and Council Bluffs. On a Tuesday morning in June, the crew at 3 Bee Farms was relaxed; only having one market that day meant they could catch

up on some of the weeds and mowing and still have plenty of harvest time.

Standing by the back of the pickup, Steve, Shawn, Diane and Donna chatted while Steve finished trimming some turnips. A well-used Earthway seeder was in the bed. "Everything we direct-seed is planted with the Earthway," Steve explains, "and all the transplanting is by hand." Laughing, Donna says that one year Steve even planted a corn maze with the Earthway. "We're low-tech – not by choice but by budget!" Steve adds.

### Key Farm Buildings

The apple house is truly a multi-purpose building for the family. Throughout the summer, the retail space is used to store tomatoes and for the children to take a break in; it's the only air-conditioned space on the farm. They store tomatoes in foam grape boxes with bubble wrap on the bottom, and use a variety called Trust for all their hydroponic production. A three-door retail cooler serves as the farm's main cooler, which gets a lot of use during sweet corn season. The apple house has a large walk-in cooler, but the family typically doesn't need that much space; they choose instead to harvest more often. In the fall, the apple house retail space transforms from tomato storage to a farm store with





produce, jams and fall décor. Donna notes that the clean-up for fall agritourism is a bit of work, but it's worth it to get more use out of the space.

Complementing their vegetable field production is a hydroponic greenhouse with 630 tomato plants in the center, plus cucumbers and peppers on each side. "When we bought the greenhouse it was an existing business in Marne – set up and ready to go," Steve says. "We worked in Marne with the previous owner the first year and he taught us how to work in it." The next year, the Brahmses brought the greenhouse to the farm. There has been a learning curve – the hard water at the farm plugged water emitters early on, so the Brahmses have been more watchful and do more frequent maintenance and system flushes.

Shawn is the "greenhouse junkie" now, freeing Steve to take care of the outdoor production. Shawn works with the hydroponic plants, lowering, clipping and de-leafing. To make the plants more accessible as they grow taller, they are lowered and snake horizontally along the trellis – the plants at the end wrap around the corner. This allows for easy harvest of new fruit. By the time they are done producing, they will be 30 to 40 feet long. Diane and Shawn have experimented with cocoa core as media for some plants, but Diane prefers planting into the more traditional perlite. The greenhouse is heated with an oil heater, propane and a wood burner. There is a jet-tube fan that

helps circulate the air, and in the high summer a wet-wall is installed, which acts as a swamp cooler for the greenhouse. Steve notes that while the greenhouse looks small in the scale of the farm, the expenses are about equal to all of the outdoor production.

## Orchard and Livestock

The orchard is another long-term project. While the family continues to plant new trees, they are working with what they inherited when they bought the orchard. The orchard was planted in the 1930s, Donna says, froze out on Armistice Day in 1940 and trees were all top-grafted through the 1960s. "The previous owners showed us around the orchard, but harvest is tricky because there are several varieties in each row; we're getting better at learning the varieties."

Though not a critical component of their weekly labor, the farm orchard and animals provide fun for visitors, which the Brahmses capitalize on during the fall. Every weekend in September and October they hold a festival, beginning with the Honey Festival Sept. 9-10 and concluding with the Pumpkin Festival on Oct. 28-29. Donna and Steve are making plans to improve infrastructure on the farm to better accommodate the growing number of guests, but in the meantime they have a variety of activities, including hayrides, bingo scavenger hunts, a corn maze and educational stations that keep children and parents engaged.

## A Family Affair

Aside from fall weekend events on the farm, all the vegetables produced at 3 Bees Farm is sold at farmers markets. Typically, family members go to markets alone or in pairs, but Thursday seems to be their favorite market day. The whole family – including Steve's children – attends the Council Bluffs farmers market.

"JoAnn is really good help on the farm, and especially good help at the Thursday market," says Steve of his 14-year-old daughter. "I think she sees what we're doing here and is starting to get more interested in it." She is also doing an FFA project at the farm, raising dahlias, gladiolas and zinnias. Steve's son, Jack, who is a few years younger, makes a few sales at the market, but mostly enjoys entertaining his newest sister, Nora (2 years old). To cultivate his entertainment skills, Jack rides all the hayrides with visitors on fall weekends. "For better or worse, he's answering all their questions," says Steve with a laugh. "I have no idea what he's telling people." Jack is also raising broilers at the farm for his 4-H project.

The Brahmses seem pleased that JoAnn and Jack have caught the farming bug. Perhaps someday they'll add their own enterprises to the farm, further building southwest Iowa's agricultural economy and community. ■



## Growing Local in Japan

### *Reflections on food and farming from a former PFI staffer*

by Tomoko Ogawa

When I came back to Japan in March 2015, I jumped into and immersed myself in the culinary world in Kyoto. I enrolled in a 1.5-year program at a culinary school in the evenings and worked at a restaurant during the day. The restaurant, called Mokube, serves a traditional Japanese multi-course meal, a style called *kaiseki* cuisine.

There are many details that together constitute a *kaiseki* meal, but the most important attribute is its seasonality. The menu at Mokube changes every month, and everything served during a meal – from the ingredients to the types of plates used, and even the methods of cooking – expresses the season.

At the restaurant, we received many questions from customers about where we get our vegetables – a rather new trend, our chef told me. Before this, the only question he says he used to get was “where is this fish from?” Kyoto is known for protecting and doing a good job of branding certain varieties of vegetables, and this locally raised produce is becoming increasingly popular. During my time at Mokube, many customers – especially those from outside Kyoto – looked forward to tasting some of the Kyoto-specific varieties of vegetables.

#### Meeting Local Kyoto Farmers

Through Mokube and the culinary school, I also had the chance to meet some farmers. One day, after the busy cherry blossom season, our chef took us to visit a bamboo farmer. The restaurant had started purchasing from this farmer through a third-party aggregation company called Agri Japan, which works with farms from all over Japan – though mainly from Kyoto – to distribute its produce. Farmers get better prices for their produce compared with selling them to the conventional market through Japan Agricultural Cooperative.




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**On-Farm Visit:** Tomoko Ogawa poses during a visit she made to an organic farm while working at the Kyoto restaurant Mokube. Her basket is filled with a pepper variety she helped harvest during the visit called *manganji togarashi*.

“This is a popular Kyoto variety of sweet pepper,” Tomoko says. “According to a quick Web search, it seems it’s a cross between Fushimi pepper, a Kyoto variety, and American capsicum.”

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*Although the situations around food and farming are different between Iowa and Japan, two commonalities struck me: the importance of community, and the generosity I sense from farmers.*

Agri Japan is a for-profit company and it takes a margin of the profits from the farmers it works with. But farmers seeking to sell to restaurants or high-end supermarkets, where they can get better prices, can save time by working with Agri Japan. The company also offers production supports: It has agronomists on staff who help answer production questions and provide other assistance, such as conducting soil tests.

#### Universal Farming Realities

The bamboo farmer we visited, Yasushi Isozumi, is a fourth-generation farmer in a region near Kyoto that is famous for its bamboo shoots. Now in his mid-40s, he decided to farm with his parents several years ago after working different jobs. What

I found most interesting after talking to him was his explanation of the social aspect of farming – and how some of the realities in Japan are the same as in Iowa and the U.S. One of the most difficult aspects of farming, Yasushi told me, is the feeling of isolation. On his farm, his parents are more in charge of vegetables while he manages the bamboo shoots – which aren’t raised in a field on farmers’ land, but must be tended in the forests in which they grow.

As a result, he usually spends all day in the bamboo forest alone. And despite the fact that the region he farms in has for centuries been renowned for its bamboo shoots, he says housing developments are constantly creeping in on the famed bamboo forests. Today, they are dispersed in increasingly smaller patches – and so too





**Above (left):** A recently harvested bamboo shoot. **(center):** An assortment of seasonal appetizers plated together at Mokube in June 2016, when Tomoko was working there. **(right):** A lacto-fermented turnip variety called suguki. "The seeds of suguki are very much protected," Tomoko says. "They are not allowed to go outside of a small farming community within Kyoto city."

are the farmers, who are not just dispersed but disconnected from each other, too.

When Yasushi returned to farming, this observation prompted him to start making rounds to visit other farmers in different forests simply to chat. Through those efforts, he has now cultivated an informal network of farmers who share and discuss their production or marketing issues together, and are a source of support for one another. This year, for example, the bamboo shoot harvest was not good. When some farmers had trouble harvesting enough to meet the quantity they had contracted to supply to restaurants or stores at the beginning of the season, other farmers from this informal network helped make up the difference.

### Joy in Sharing

This story, as well as many others I heard from farmers I got to know in Japan, reminded me of Practical Farmers' community, field days, retreats, workshops and annual conference. Although the situations around farming and food are different between Iowa and Japan, two commonalities struck me: the importance of community, and the generosity I sense from farmers. A young farming couple that produces organic vegetables in north Kyoto City told me that one of the joys of being a farmer is the ability to share the abundance of what they grow with families, friends, people in the community and beyond.

They are also very open about sharing their sales numbers or production techniques because they are not interested in or trying to compete with other farmers. Instead, they want to help others in their farming communities to produce more quality vegetables so that, together, they can help grow the local and organic farming movement. Through this openness and spirit of cooperation, these farmers hope to both create greater consumer demand for locally raised produce, and to be capable of meeting that demand.

### "Dancing in the Kitchen"

I love working in the kitchen because of the close communications I have with my colleagues, not just by talking but paying close attention to my colleagues and my own movements so that nobody gets hurt in the middle of all the knives and fires. PFI member Donna Prizgintas describes working in the kitchen as akin to dancing.

After work, I'm exhausted – but at the same time, the work is fulfilling and reenergizing. Visiting farmers on my days off energizes me in different way. I realize that, wherever I am, I love being around and supporting farmers, and I want to continue doing that wherever I go. ■

*Tomoko is a former PFI staff member who used to work on local foods, among other things, until late 2014, when she left to return to Japan. The delicious meals she used to cook are still fondly remembered by the staff.*

## Cooking in Spain

Tomoko worked at Mokube through the end of March, then worked briefly at a farm retreat in the mountains near Takayama as she prepared for yet another adventure: a move to Spain. She's staying close to food, however. Since mid-May, Tomoko has been living in Cadiz and working at a restaurant there, Aponiente, helping to process the fish the restaurant serves.

"I first learned about this restaurant in Dan Barber's book 'Third Plate.' I'm doing what is called a stage, non-paid training in exchange for housing, food and other necessities."

Tomoko plans to finish her three months of training in September, then do some travel in Europe before returning home.



Tomoko poses with her cat, Tama, at her parents' house near Tokyo. Like her owner, Tama is a world traveler: She lived with Tomoko in Ames, Iowa, before moving to Japan.





## Field Day Photos

1) ▸ Jeff Lauber (right) demonstrates a range of two-wheel tractors at Jill Beebout's May 21 field day near Chariton.

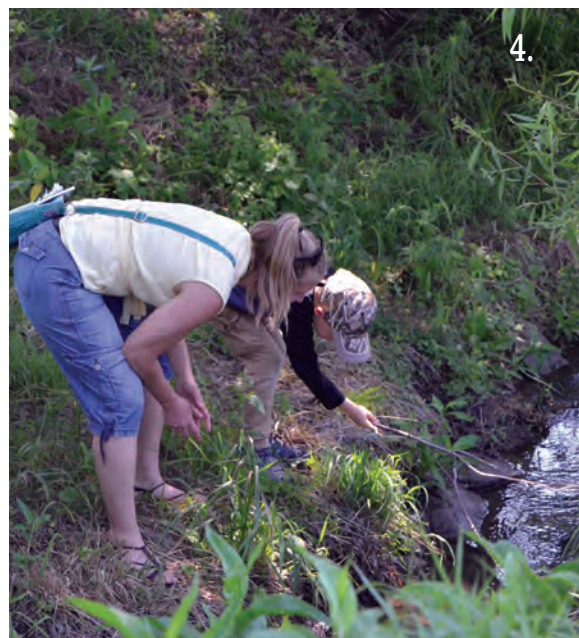
2) ▸ Dennis Kruger (left) and Allen Kadolph converse during Fred Abels' June 8 field day near Holland, held in partnership with Iowa Learning Farms (*photo courtesy of ILF*).

3) ▸ Guests at Matt Schuiteman's May 30 field day in Sioux Center look at soil structure in a field Matt had planted with rye, which he chopped to bale as livestock feed.

4) ▸ Anderson Bakehouse (right) and Jenny Horner explore a stream on Resilient Farms during Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman's June 15 field day near Red Oak.

5) ▸ From left to right: PFI members Kent Morris, Carmen Black and Susan Jutz look at an Earthway seeder during T.D. Holub's June 9 field day near Coggon.

6) ▸ PFI member Kathy Dice (center, in straw hat) and other guests examine some of Dean and Judy Henry's black currant bushes during the Henrys' June 14 field day near Nevada.





**1) ▶** A big crowd turned out to hear Jon Yagla (right) explain his urban farming system in Iowa City on June 24.

**2) ▶** From left to right: Bruce Carney, Russ Wischover and Mary Damm look at pasture species during the field day Mary held with Phil Specht near McGregor on June 22.

**3) ▶** Homemade kimchi, sauerkraut and pesto were among the tasty snacks guests got to sample at Jon Yagla and Wren Almitra's field day.

**4) ▶** Bird watchers at Mary and Phil's field day look at bobolinks in Phil's field. Mary and Phil each use grazing practices intended to help grassland birds thrive.

**5) ▶** Deb Finch (left) demonstrates the FAMACHA technique for identifying anemia in goats during a pre-field day workshop she held near State Center on June 27.



**6) ▶** Attendees at Craig Fleishman's June 28 field day near Minburn learn about Craig's crop rotation that includes oats.

**7) ▶** A small perennial stream running through Craig's land is a scenic image as guests ride the wagon at his field day. Craig employs various conservation practices to help protect water quality.







## Field Day Photos

**1) ▶** More than 60 people came to Scott Ausborn's (left) family farm near Ida Grove on July 11 to learn about their organic transition process. Here, the group is standing in the Ausborns' oat field.

**2) ▶** Two attendees walk toward the Ausborn family's oat field.

**3) ▶** Guests at the field day hosted by Tom, Irene and James Frantzen on June 29 learn about the family's grow-to-finish organic pigs. More than 100 people came to learn from the Frantzens.

**4) ▶** One of Marty and Mary Schnicker's farm cats dozes in the mid-summer heat during the Schnickers' field day on July 15, near Mt. Pleasant.







1.



2.



6.

1) > Jeff Olson and Margaret Smith chat during the Frantzen field day.

2) > Marty Schnicker points at one of the giant pumpkins his family raises – one of several giant vegetables the family specializes in.

3) > Eric Madsen (right) chats with Darrin Schmidt at the Ausborn field day.

4) > David Weisberger examines some of Tom and Irene Frantzen's Brasetto hybrid rye.

5) > Alan Wedemeyer (left) and Doug Petersen show guests some soil at the Grundy County Fair cover crops workshop on July 19.

6) > Maggie McQuown (right) shows guests an area on her land where she and Steve have planted native perennials for pollinators and other conservation benefits.



3.



5.



4.



## Grass-Fed Meat and Climate Change

*Members share resources, insights on a controversial topic*

by Meghan Filbert

Last year, Caite Palmer, who grazes cattle and sheep near Castalia, posed the following question to fellow members on Practical Farmers' livestock email discussion list: "Can anyone point me toward some hard data on how pasture-raising livestock changes their impact on climate change? I'm finding a lot of anecdotal articles in both directions, but nothing approaching actual science."

Other members were quick to second what Caite asked – they were also looking for hard science after reading articles on both sides of the issue. What resulted was a robust discussion with many shared sources of information, insights and a consensus among farmers: Properly managed livestock can sequester carbon. What follows is a recap of the discussion.

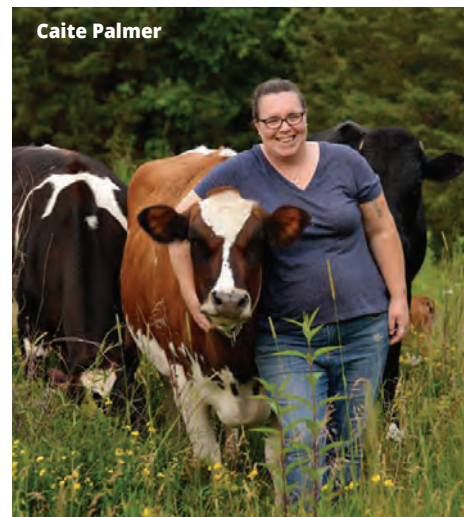
### Properly Managed Livestock

**Drake Larsen**, of Aylmer, Ontario, was the first to suggest an outside source of information. Drake recommended checking out Sheldon Frith's Holistic Agriculture blog ([regenerateland.info](http://regenerateland.info)), which claims that properly managed livestock are the key to stopping climate change as they are the only viable tool to increase organic matter on a large scale over the vast rural lands of the world. Sheldon provides reasoning on why increasing soil organic matter is the same as decreasing atmospheric carbon dioxide.

**Chad Hensley**, of Lamoni, suggested that the impact cattle have on climate depends on how they are raised. "If a cow defecates and urinates on bare ground or cement, of course that is going to send a lot of gas into the atmosphere. But if they are grazing on forage-covered pastures, those gases are going to be absorbed. From my perspective, cattle and other animals on healthy pastures

are a major part of the solution, not the problem."

**Joe Sellers**, of Chariton, shared a paper titled "Implications of Grazing Management on Soil Health and Environmental Quality" by Dr. Jim Russell at Iowa State University ([www.iowabeefcenter.org/proceedings/ImplicationsGrazingRussell.pdf](http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/proceedings/ImplicationsGrazingRussell.pdf)). Joe, a beef specialist with ISU Extension added, "There are lots of benefits to grazing and improved grazing management, and the stocking rate, adequate grass height and adequate recovery period for regrowth are more important than the actual system. There is no real, sound evidence I know of to prove high-density grazing is any better than a well-managed management intensive grazing (MIG) system with proper recovery periods and adequate residual grass height in carbon sequestration. There is evidence both of these management systems (high-density grazing or MIG) are much better for soil carbon and other attributes compared

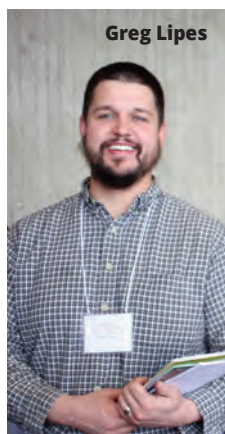


to continuous grazing and to row crop production."

### Carbon Sequestration

**Sally Gran**, of Nevada, referenced data on silvopasturing presented at an agroforestry symposium at University of Missouri ([www.centerforagroforestry.org/events/sym2015.php](http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/events/sym2015.php)). "During a presentation I watched on silvopasturing by Dr. Robert Kallenbach, I heard that a savanna system, which can be replicated by silvopasture, sequesters slightly more carbon than grassland, which in turn sequesters more than a forest."

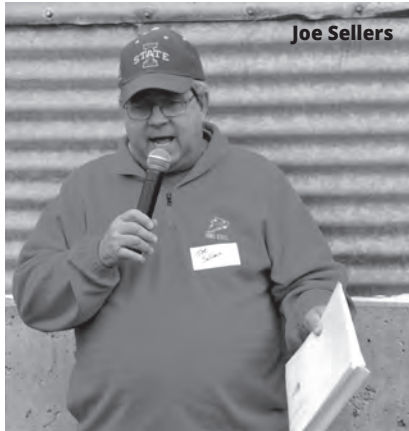
Sally's comment sparked lots of responses on carbon sequestration rates in different ecosystems. **Greg Lipes**, of West Branch, believes that well-managed pasture has the greatest potential to sequester carbon over other ecosystems and explained why.







**Chad and Katie Hensley**



**Joe Sellers**

"When cattle take a bite of grass, the grass plant sloughs off an equal amount of root mass below ground," Greg said. "This dead root material is full of carbon. The soil life ingest it, turn it into a soil-stable substance and now that carbon is safely sequestered below ground. That is just one cycle. With well-managed Iowa pasture, we are able to do that over and over throughout the growing season, continually pulsing the pasture and sequestering more and more carbon with each pass. This is the best hope I have read about anywhere for sequestering large amounts of carbon."

**Dave Schmidt**, of Exira, who worked as a wildfire ecologist before he started farming, provided numbers from a literature review he did on forest carbon. "A Minnesota oak savanna sequesters 1.8 tons of carbon per hectare per year; well-managed pastures sequester roughly 1 ton of carbon per hectare per year; and mid-latitude forests sequester about 4 tons of carbon per hectare per year. With the management that Greg described, pastures may be able to sequester more than 1 ton per year." Dave asked if anyone has any better numbers for sequestration rates in savannas or intensively managed pastures and suggested that the target to beat is 4 tons – the capacity of a forest.

**Drake** shared several reasons why he believes grasslands likely equal or rival the carbon sequestration of forests, including a link to research comparing the long-term effect of forest and grassland restoration on carbon sequestration in China ([journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0040123](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0040123)). "The short version is: grasslands store their carbon deeper, due to deep and active roots. Lots of carbon is turning over in forests, but not a lot of it is being 'sunk.' Litter that degrades on the

surface – in either biome – often results in carbon lost to the atmosphere, not held in the soil. People tend to think, oh look at all the trees, there's a lot of carbon. But if that tree dies and rots on the surface, or burns, that carbon is lost back to the atmosphere.

"This is where grazing can be such a powerful tool for carbon sequestration. When an animal munches a shoot, an equal amount of root is sloughed off below the soil, every time. Then we have manure. And, perhaps surprisingly, manure is largely made up digested microbes, whose bodies contain carbon and nitrogen in the best ratios contributing to the formation of soil organic matter, one step along the way of carbon being sequestered."

**Sally** referenced the book "The Soil Will Save Us" by Kristin Ohlson, as well as the Paris climate summit held in November 2015, saying she learned that "a soil carbon increase at a rate of .4 percent per year would track with fossil fuel emissions to significantly mitigate climate change, and also improve soil and crop health so we can also adapt better to extreme weather events. Ruminants are one way to get there and don't require the fossil fuel output that most present carbon-sequestering row cropping and vegetable producing systems are dependent on."

## Emissions from Livestock

**Kerri Leach**, of West Branch, shared an email she received from Rob Avis of Verge Permaculture. In the email, Rob summarized a presentation given by Dr. Richard Teague which addressed cattle emissions. Rob said: "A lot of media are talking about the emissions of cattle but ignoring the carbon that is stored as the result of cattle grazing. Emission studies cited in movies like

'Cowspiracy' were conducted by bringing cattle into enclosed rooms and then measuring CO<sub>2</sub>. However, this is completely flawed as it ignores how their interaction with pasture encourages positive shifts in the pasture through carbon storage, water infiltration and nutrient cycling. Remember, nature functions in wholes. What surprised me from [Dr. Teague's] research was that even on poorly managed pastures, cattle encourage net positive carbon storage."

**Drake** added, "For those wanting to dig into the heavy data, there's no better reference list than the one used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)." This 2006 publication, "Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories" ([www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/2006gl/pdf/4\\_Volume4/V4\\_10\\_Ch10\\_Livestock.pdf](http://www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/2006gl/pdf/4_Volume4/V4_10_Ch10_Livestock.pdf)), catalogs emissions from livestock breeds and manure management.

**Joe** noted that, when it comes to total emissions, livestock in conventional systems actually emit less compared with cattle in grazing systems. He said it's important to "acknowledge that cattle fed a concentrated ration in feedlots or hoop barns emit less methane per pound of beef or per head than grazing cattle." This is attributed to diet and fewer days required to get to market weight, which create a smaller footprint. However, he added that "well-managed grasslands can sequester carbon to help make up some ground on that emission balance."

**Caite Palmer**, who posed the initial question, was appreciative of fellow farmers' thoughts. "Thank you all for the great discussion! We've attracted a troll on our farm social media; it appears that 'Cowspiracy' and 'environmental concerns' are the new cover for 'animal rights' groups. I do think it's good to be challenged by the public on our actions and methods, but it's awfully nice to be backed by some science that's more than 'because I said so.' I don't know that grass-based production is the perfect solution, but it's – at least to me – a lot better than the alternative of feedlot production." ■

*To join Practical Farmers' livestock email discussion list, contact Debra Boekholder at [debra@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:debra@practicalfarmers.org) or (515) 232-5661.*

## A Farmland Legacy Started Anew

*From the fields of Iowa to the Finger Lakes of New York*

by Dirk Mol  
with Teresa Opheim

Dirk Mol's family had a 100-year history in northwest Iowa. But for this farmland owner, legacy involved letting go – and starting again 1,000 miles away.

### A Gift and a Burden

Dirk is descended from Dutch stock, people who came to America “to have religious freedom, to escape the king who wanted to draft their sons into the army, but above all for the land.” In 1946, about 70 years after his great-grandfather homesteaded and a year after his father returned from World War II, he was born into the tight-knit Dutch community of Hull, in Iowa.

Dirk only lived on the land for five years – his father became a clergyman, and the family moved to Michigan – but Iowa cornfields became “branded on my visual cortex as the template for how the world is supposed to be,” Dirk says. He did return to the farm in the summers, “when the landscape was lush with new growth in the fields, the birds and jackrabbits abundant in the groves and hedgerows.” During those visits, he helped stack hay bales, painted the barn, hacked weeds out of the fields, chatted with family at reunions in the city park and took late-afternoon swims at Sandy Hollow, an old gravel pit that became the town swimming hole.

The buildings and 40 acres were eventually sold to the tenants, but for the rest of his parents' lives, his parents held onto 120 acres they had inherited. “My parents' land became the family bank, producing income that augmented earnings and often supported the luxury of education, travel and living well,” Dirk says. “Everyone returned home regularly to visit the land, but they never stayed. The land labored on under summer sun and winter snows, faithfully producing good fruits and wealth for the family.”

As it is for many families, the farmland they owned was “sacred and any thought of parting with it was a betrayal of the hard



**Above:** Dirk Mol (right) and his partner, Jerry Wray, stand in their garden at Lake Devonshire in Champaign, Illinois. **Opposite:** Gregory, Michelle and new baby Faye pose on their farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York State.

work their ancestors had invested in it.” But Dirk, who would inherit the ground with his brother, began to “sense that someday I would betray the family tradition and part with the land when it became mine, because I could see the way it also tied the family's hands holding onto it.”

Case in point: Dirk's aunt had made a career as a librarian around the country. When she retired, she wanted to buy a

beneficiaries of her will,” Dirk says. “When she died, I resolved that the land would never own me.”

By the time his mother died in 2011, the diverse landscape he remembered growing up had become a bastion of industrial agriculture. “The economy was in recession, land prices were skyrocketing, fueled by the race to grow more and more corn to feed the ethanol craze,” Dirk says. “The tenants couldn't afford the appraised value – and they weren't really working the land themselves, just contracting the work out to others and taking a cut before paying the rent. So we decided to go to auction.”

“On a cool, sunny day in October 2011, I stood under the autumn sky on a piece of land that had been in my family for almost 100 years and watched as first three, then two bidders voraciously drove up the price per acre. Twice the auctioneer took a break so they could consult with their bankers on how high to go. The third round ended with a new record for sale of agricultural land in Iowa. The land had once again been good for my family. And I was out from under the burden of the legacy, free to use the wealth as I saw fit.”

### Investing in the Future

Soon after, the opportunity to use this land legacy for a good end came through his 30-year-old son, Greg. Complete with a degree from Cornell University in New York and a lot of experience working on organic and community supported agriculture operations, Greg and two pioneering

***“I watched as first three, then two bidders voraciously drove up the price of land that had been in my family for almost 100 years.”***

house in Washington, D.C. in which to enjoy her remaining years. To do that, she would have had to sell her share of the land. Her siblings talked her out of it. “Her dreams withered and she lived her last years in the lonely isolation of an urban apartment while the land continued to grow wealth for her tenants and the

organic grain farmers rented space in rural New York, found a used stone mill, plugged it in and taught themselves how to produce flour.

“When I sold the land in Iowa, Greg had outgrown the rented space and was also hankering to get back into the fields,” Dirk says. “We agreed to look for land to farm



We shall not cease from exploration,  
and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started  
and know the place for the first time. – T. S. Eliot

where he could build a new mill on-site. Seven months after that momentous October day in Iowa, I closed on 37 acres. By fall, 20 Amish carpenters had put up the 30-by-60-foot pole barn that would house the new mill. We were reinventing the family farm 1,000 miles from its original home and I felt the family karma calling me back to my roots.”

Six months later, Dirk acquired another 123 acres just a mile from the first purchase for Greg to eventually expand his farm and milling business. “The land in the Finger Lakes region is not the black gold of the Midwest prairies, but it’s still high quality and produces well. It’s also more affordable: I got 4 acres there for every acre sold in Iowa. And the topography and landscape make it difficult for industrial-scale operators to take over. Using the small parcels that dot the landscape and capitalizing on the rising tide of interest in organics, an extensive small-farm organic culture is taking root in central New York State. When I visit, I hang out with a lot of young farmers, mostly couples with infants and toddlers, who live simply on the land, work hard, sometimes use horses for cultivation, all the while dreaming of a healthier future for their world.”

## Coming Full-Circle

Dirk hopes his New York land will stay with his descendants for generations. And while it has not yet attained the hallowed quality of the Iowa farm that so firmly imprinted itself on Dirk’s memory, he says the new land is momentous in its own way – in its physical presence, its embodiment of past and present, and in what it signifies for the future.

“It’s not home the way the land in Iowa was in my childhood, at least not yet. It’s less vast, more intimate – but dramatic in its own. Between each of the Finger Lakes, the land rises up to ridges a thousand feet or more above the surface of the lakes, only to drop off again to the next lake. The hills are covered with old-growth forests,

and always there are hedgerows between the small fields, laid out two centuries ago when the trees had to be cleared by hand to get a place to till. It hasn’t changed that much since then.

“As I’ve watched Greg and his wife, Michelle – and now baby Faye – make a life in the one-room cabin, with running

***“People put down roots and live close to the land no matter the time or place.”***

water in the kitchen but no other indoor plumbing, a composting toilet out back, I see the 21st-century version of homesteading in sod huts. This is not farming as my grandparents knew it; yet

there is continuity. And I have come back to the land and know it, in some deep way, as a place where I belong. I dream of the future in relation to that land, a dream of fields blossoming green and healthy in harmony with the people who love them, the way I knew it to be once long ago.”

Dirk sees this renewed land connection as a kind of homecoming after a long absence. “After starting out on the land and then living away from it for so long, my relationship to a farm in New York is a kind of homecoming. Arriving full-circle, finding oneself back at the starting point but in a different place, is the stuff of poetry. The landscapes are different, yet the kinship to them is the same. The way people put down roots and live close to the land is similar no matter the time or place.” ■

*Dirk Mol is an Illinois resident and a lifetime member of Practical Farmers of Iowa. To read his complete farmland story, visit [practicalfarmers.org/blog](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog) and search for “Mol.”*



## Cooking Adventurously to Support Local Food and Farmers

by Nick Ohde

For many members of Practical Farmers of Iowa, growing food is about finding a balance between producing healthy, delicious food while protecting and improving the land it comes from. Consumers can help by buying local and using the products farmers need to raise in order to accomplish those goals. However, this kind of support requires a commitment to trying new things and experimenting with cooking techniques to discover what will bring out the best in those products.

Jamie Hostetler, owner and operator of Rolling Meadows Farm near Bellevue in eastern Iowa, raises 100 percent grass-fed cattle. Yet he was once a reluctant consumer of grass-fed beef himself. Years ago, when Jamie first read about the health benefits of grass-fed beef, he bought some, brought it home and threw it on the grill. "I bit into it, turned to my wife and said, 'I hope I don't have to put up with this the rest of my life,'" he says.

Jamie has come a long way from that first grass-fed piece of meat. "With the right forages, right breed and right management, you can have an exceptional eating experience with grass-fed beef." He notes that, while there are a range of soil and environmental benefits to raising cows entirely on grass, he has converted a lot of people to grass-fed beef who weren't interested in the human health or ecosystem benefits of it – they just thought it tasted better.

### Getting More Mileage Out of Beef

Jamie currently sells beef in wholes, halves and quarters. Even the smallest option yields a lot of beef – anywhere from around

100 pounds of meat for a quarter of an animal to 400 pounds, give or take, for a whole. While customers who purchase in these quantities typically do so to stock their freezers, using all this meat nonetheless requires a strong commitment to cooking – and a big up-front investment. But the advantage is you can get your beef processed however you like. And if you know your way around the kitchen, or are willing to spend a little more time preparing various cuts, you can stretch the value of the meat, according to Bobbie Gustafson.

Bobbie owns Story City Locker with her husband Ty. The bulk of their business is custom processing of locally raised animals for consumers, so they get to see how people like their beef broken down. She says most people want steaks and roasts, and depending on how much time they have for cooking, they might have more or less of the animal ground for burger. Opting for less burger, she says, can save money because they're not paying for the extra labor it takes Bobbie and Ty to grind the meat up.

"If you can find ways in your kitchen to get enjoyment out of some of the cuts



**Above:** Bobbie Gustafson (left) with her husband, Ty, operates Story City Locker. **Below:** Jamie Hostetler's cows graze in one of his pastures. The animals are 100 percent grass-fed.

that would usually go to grind, your local harvest will be a bit less expensive," Bobbie says, though she adds you have to be willing to spend some extra time working with those cuts. "If you're not going to cook it, it doesn't have any value for you because it's just going to sit in the back of your freezer. In that case, it's better to go with grind for those cuts that are a little more labor-intensive to prepare."

### The Fava Bean – A Lesser-Known Iowa Veggie

Increasing local food consumption by eating more underused foods isn't just a meat matter; the same applies to vegetables. Jordan Clasen worked for several years as the produce manager at Gateway Market in Des Moines and



"With the right forages, right breed and right management, you can have an exceptional eating experience with grass-fed beef."

– JAMIE HOSTETLER



began growing some garlic on the side. Eventually, that blossomed into Grade A Gardens, a 6-acre vegetable farm that he has run for the past five years. As he has learned more about farming, he's been trying to come up with creative ways to manage the ecosystem of his small farm.

Enter the fava bean. Because Grade A Gardens is certified organic, maintaining soil fertility is always a challenge. While Jordan also raises chickens, whose manure helps with fertility, he has added more nitrogen-fixing crops – like fava beans – to help enrich his soil. The bonus with such crops is that he can sell them.

"Some of these crops, like fava beans, may be a bit unfamiliar to Iowa palates," he says. Though maybe not in high demand, fava beans are a giver and not a taker, he says, and they fit well into a farm with limited space. "They're in early and out early, and good for soil fertility," Jordan says. In addition to being nitrogen-fixers like other beans, the plants themselves are big – several feet tall – which results in plenty of plant biomass to add to the soil after the bean is harvested in early June.

Growing fava beans does present some challenges, however – most notably, Iowa's weather. Like peas, fava beans don't like the heat. But unlike peas, they take a while to grow and need slightly warmer soil temperatures to germinate. This year, Jordan tried to get around the plant's persnickety preferences by sprouting the beans first in a bucket of water to give them a head start, then planting them in little trenches. The strategy appears to have worked this year, but even if it hadn't, Jordan says the plant is still a good investment. "They say if all else fails, favas make a good cover crop and green manure."

## Short Ribs, Favas and Plenty of Garlic

As part of this story, I wanted to demonstrate how it's possible to cook with less familiar products – and in so doing, more fully support locally raised food – by featuring the ingredients I discussed with Jamie and Jordan. For Jamie, I wanted to include a lesser-used cut of grass-fed beef, and for Jordan, a tasty way of eating favas.

**FOR THE BEEF,** I chose beef short ribs, because Bobbie Gustafson told me it's one cut that commonly goes to grind. The short rib comes from a little farther down



**Above (left):** Jordan Clasen crouches in his garlic field. **(right):** Two sets of grass-fed short ribs author Nick Ohde prepared as part of this story. The thicker English-cut ribs are in the back, the thinner flanken style ribs are in front.



the rib than the more sought-after steaks and roasts, such as the ribeye. There are two ways short ribs can be cut: flanken-style, which are cut thinly (about a half-inch thick) across several sections of rib so each cut contains several small cross sections of rib bones; or English-cut, a longer section of rib with a 1.5- to 2-inch-thick piece of meat attached. Of course, if you're buying a quarter of beef from a local farmer (or you're sending one of your own cows to the butcher), you can have it cut however you want.

I tried both the flanken and English styles. I happened to find the English-style, bone-in version, which was delicious. But if you are planning to grill, I think the best bet would be to get a boneless cut. The trick with cooking the ribs is to aim for medium-rare (an internal temperature of about 130 degrees). With the thinly cut flanken style, that won't take long – perhaps a few minutes. For the thicker-cut English-style or boneless ribs, sear first over high heat, then move to the cooler part of the grill until the ribs reach the right internal temperature. In either case, after you take the ribs off the grill, put a piece of foil over them for 5 to 10 minutes to help keep the juices in.

In Argentina, a country that knows a thing or two about grass-fed beef, short ribs are known as "tira de asado" – where they're grilled and served with a garlicky sauce called chimichurri. Chimichurri is basically garlic, parsley, oregano, oil, vinegar and a few red pepper flakes, but if you have cilantro instead of parsley, that works too.

**FOR THE FAVA BEANS,** they're best fresh and in the pod. Finding them could be challenging unless you live near Jordan, because they're a tough crop to grow in Iowa. First, you need to shell the fava beans – they come out of the pod pretty easily. Then, bring a large pot of water to boil and get a bowl of ice water ready. Put the shelled beans into the boiling water for about 3 minutes (less for younger, smaller beans). Drain, and plunge in the ice water for a minute or so. Drain again, then pop the beans out of their tough, white protective coatings. They'll be a brilliant green.

They're delicious with just a little salt, but, in a nod to the roots of Grade A Gardens, I decided to add some garlic. I peeled and thinly sliced a big pile of garlic, then cooked it in olive oil over low heat for a half-hour (you can roast it too, but the garlic-infused oil is delicious). Then, I tossed the whole thing together and let it cool in the fridge.

You can find links to recipes for beef short ribs, chimichurri and fava beans on our blog at [practicalfarmers.org/blog](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog). ■

## Learn More

■ Jamie will host a PFI field day on **Saturday, Sept. 16, from noon to 4 p.m.** Learn more about his farm and how he produces his beef – and taste the results over a lunch of Rolling Meadows grass-fed burgers. Visit [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org) for full details.

## Wielding the Power of Story

*Speaking up for conservation; continuing a family tradition*

by David Rosmann

Twenty-five years ago, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. My dad, Ron Rosmann, took me to Washington D.C. to accompany him as he testified, by invitation, before the Senate Agriculture Committee about the necessity and importance of funding sustainable farming programs and research.

The political climate has changed since that first trip, but one thing has certainly stayed the same: the importance of fully funding sustainable agriculture and conservation programs like Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), as well as the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program.

This past June, it was my turn to advocate for these programs in the nation's capital. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) organized a fly-in of farmers and others from around the country who are or have been associated with these programs. The main purpose of the fly-in was to ask for full mandatory funding of these programs. It was wonderful to meet other farmers doing amazing things from Oregon to Mississippi, and from Wisconsin to Georgia. We first worked together as a group, practicing our "sales pitch" in which we emphasized our stories and how these programs have positively affected our land and our lives. Afterwards, we split into small groups and spent most of an entire day being shuttled from one meeting to another. NSAC staff did an excellent job of organizing all our meetings with various members of Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and staff from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

My first meeting was with Nora Stein, program examiner at the OMB. I shared my story of how our farm has used EQIP and CSP, and how important the SARE program is to farmers everywhere. We also talked at length about the Value-Added Producer Grant program and how I have been a grant reviewer for a number of years reviewing many worthy projects. This was an effective meeting – particularly when she said this information really opened her eyes about these programs.

We then met with Rob Hedburg, the director of SARE, and Wesley Dean of NIFA along with William Hoffman, chief of staff at NIFA. We again shared our stories and had a productive conversation



**The Power of Story:** David Rosmann, right, shows Rep. David Young an aerial photo of Rosmann Family Farms to help emphasize the importance of conservation programs on his family's farm. (Photo courtesy of NSAC)

about the positives and negatives of these programs and the importance of constantly improving these programs.

My last meeting was with my congressman – Republican Rep. David Young, who represents Iowa's third district. Throughout the day, I had been lugging around a framed aerial photo of our farm and using it as a way to grab people's attention to begin my story. After speaking with David's staffer, Christine Downey, while he was at a vote, I was able to spend a few minutes with the congressman. I pulled out the photo, along with a couple of photos of my daughter, Maggie, and told him the main reason why we farm the way we do: so Maggie and perhaps future grandchildren will find this land in excellent shape and continue the tradition of further improvements to leave the land better than we found it. David gave us a warm reception and pledged his support to the full funding of these sustainable agriculture and conservation programs.

**"I pulled out the [framed aerial photo of our farm], along with a couple of photos of my daughter, Maggie, and told [Rep. Young] the main reason why we farm the way we do . . ."**

As a second-generation PFI board member, I have now become a second-generation farmer-lobbyist like my Dad and brother, Daniel. My youngest brother, Mark, skipped the lobbying and went right to the source, working in the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service in Washington D.C. I gained some great experience from this trip, and saw firsthand just how important it is for those of us who actually work in the fields to share our stories with those who labor behind desks, crafting legislation that will affect farms hundreds of miles away. Real-world, firsthand knowledge, wisdom – and our stories – can make all the difference. ■



## "The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape"

by Maren Beard

James Rebanks' "The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape" tells of the complex web of farms, flocks and families on the landscape of the Lake District in Northern England. Through the lens of this shepherd, we get a glimpse into the history of the place and both the challenges and joys that accompany his work.

While I could relate to his life as a shepherd, what I found most compelling is how the overall themes of community, place and agricultural heritage are woven so intricately throughout the memoir and give shape to his own life and story.

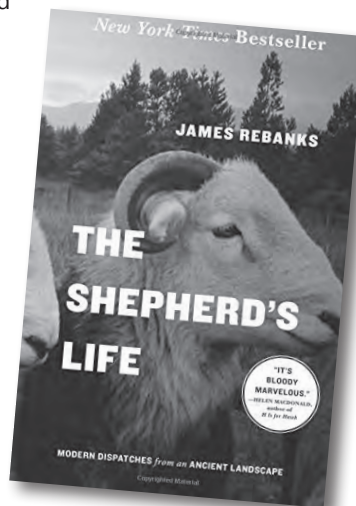
James' description of drives in the countryside with his father and grandfather, who knew the history of every farm they passed, reminds me of rides with my father-in-law, Dan Beard, and the animated stories he tells of people and places as we traverse the dusty gravel roads of northeastern Iowa. It is the passing down of these stories that instills in us a sense of place and our role within the context of history. James speaks of the devastation caused by foot-and-mouth disease and the generations of genetics that were lost when they had to put the flock to rest. With farming comes life and death, but I can't even begin to imagine the sense of loss that would come from an experience like the one he describes.

He speaks of the idea some hold that shepherds and farmers live in isolation with nature, but through his stories the reader comes to understand that shepherds do not exist alone. We know this well on our farm, where we rely on family and friends to help move our sheep up and down the road to fresh pasture; to help tag and castrate, wean and help sort and load when it is time to take lambs to market. For James – and for us – the concepts of farming and community go hand-in-hand.

In his book, James describes the tension that many young people and their parents feel about settling down in a city versus coming home to the family farm. An Oxford education would have landed James a high-paying job in London, but in his mind and heart he had no choice but to return home to the landscape that had shaped him. He listened to his family's stories of the challenges they faced and made the conscious choice to invest in the future he wanted on a farm. Growing up experiencing the seasons, shearing sheep with the neighbors, watching the sheep excitedly move to new pasture and feeling a part of something is what called James home.



My husband, Tom, grew up experiencing similar things with his family on their dairy farm a half-mile from where we now farm near Decorah – and he is now living his dream as a farmer. I grew up in rural Wisconsin, but without much intimate knowledge of what it meant to live on a farm. Having been born and raised a vegetarian with dreams of a high-powered job involving lots of international travel, I would have laughed if someone had told me 10 years ago that I would fall in love with a sheep farmer and live happily ever after on a farm in northeastern Iowa. Today, I'll echo James in saying, "This is my life. I want for no other."



In these days of fast-paced living and even faster technology, this book calls us to embrace a different way of life, a way of life filled with honest work, fireflies, dinner parties with neighbors and diverse agricultural landscapes. This is what we are working to create at Luna Valley Farm in Decorah – and we invite you to come visit us for wood-fired pizza on the farm when we open this fall. We look forward to hearing your stories and having you be a part of ours. We are excited to hear James Rebanks tell his story at Practical Farmers' annual conference in January, and hope to see you there! In the meantime, if you can sneak in time for a summer read, we highly recommend "A Shepherd's Life." ■

**Maren Beard and her husband, Tom, operate Luna Valley Farm near Decorah, where they raise organic crops and graze sheep and cattle on pasture. This September, they are launching their newest enterprise: an on-farm, wood-fired pizzeria that will feature their farm's products. Learn more at [lunavalleyfarm.com](http://lunavalleyfarm.com).**

## "Map of My Kingdom" Continues to Reach Audiences

Three years after "Map of My Kingdom" debuted to an audience in West Branch, Iowa in May 2014, the PFI-commissioned play that tackles the critical issue of farmland transfer continues to reach audiences. The play, written by Iowa Poet Laureate Mary Swander, has now been performed 60 times – and more performances are scheduled for this fall in Minnesota, Ohio and Indiana. An average of 50 people have attended each performance, bringing the number of people who have seen this important work to more than 3,000.

"Map of My Kingdom" covers the tough questions involved in farmland transitions. Teresa Opheim, senior fellow with Practical Farmers who helped inform the content of the play, says she and Mary "thought there would be a handful of performances around the state. And then the kudos

started and the crowds came, leading to more kudos and more crowds."

"We've performed in farmers' barns and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago," Mary says. "We've performed in church basements and New York University. We've made a video that is being used by both Women, Land and Legacy groups and the University of Missouri Extension, as well as individual families, to begin their farmland transition conversations. And we've begun a conversation about our vision for our land, who's going to get the farm and how we're going to handle that succession in a positive way within our own families."

In the play, Angela Martin, a lawyer and mediator in land transition disputes, shares stories of how farmers and landowners she has worked with over the years approached their land successions. "Some people literally killed each other over this issue,"



Angela says. Some almost came to blows, struggling to resolve the sale or transfer of their land, dissolving relationships. Others found peacefully rational solutions that focused not only on the viability of the family, but also of the land. To book a performance of "Map of My Kingdom" (or Mary's other plays), or to order a copy of the DVD of "Map of My Kingdom," see [www.maryswander.com](http://www.maryswander.com). ■

## Applications for Savings Incentive Program Open in September

Are you a beginning or aspiring farmer who would like more help crafting your business plan or refining your farm goals and knowledge? Consider applying to Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program. The two-year program helps beginning and aspiring farmers be successful with their farm start-ups by helping enrollees draft a business plan, save money, learn from experienced farm mentors – and more! **Applications for the next SIP class will open on Sept. 22.**

"PFI provides an opportunity for us to engage with a robust network of peers and mentors," say Peter Kerns and Natasha Hegmann, who are currently in the Savings Incentive Program Class of 2017. "Through our participation with Practical Farmers programs and events, we have developed important relationships that will benefit our farm business for years to come."



Peter Kerns and Natasha Hegmann

**Applications will be accepted through Nov. 10.** Those enrolled will start in January 2018, and will be part of the Savings Incentive Program Class of 2019. Applications will be available in September at [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org).

**Questions?** Contact Greg Van Den Berghe, [greg@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:greg@practicalfarmers.org) or (515) 232-5661. ■

## New Podcast Features Conversations With Farmers

In May, we launched our newest multimedia series: "On-Farm: Conversations with Practical Farmers," a weekly podcast featuring in-depth interviews with PFI farmers. Each week, PFI staff member Nick Ohde interviews a different farmer from across our diverse membership.



Conversations are as varied as the farmers, but each episode explores the issues most relevant to the farming community, from the nitty-gritty of growing and raising crops and livestock, to on-farm research; protecting soil and water quality to farm profitability; the challenges facing beginning farmers to building community in rural areas – and more.

Podcasts are available on iTunes, Stitcher and Google Play Music. Find all episodes at [practicalfarmers.org/blog](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog), and watch "Practical News" for announcements about the latest episode. ■

## Beginning Farmer Retreat Set for Dec. 1-2

For the 10th consecutive year, Practical Farmers will host a weekend retreat for beginning farmers to network and build their farm businesses. **Note:** Past events have been held in February, but this year's event is scheduled for Dec. 1-2, at Wesley Woods Retreat Center near Indianola, Iowa.

In addition to sharing good food and conversation, attendees will learn about farm financials and make progress on their business plans. Registration will be available at [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org) this fall.





## Don't Miss These Upcoming PFI Field Days!

Field day season isn't over yet – there are still plenty of late-summer and early-autumn events where you can meet, learn from and connect with your farming peers! For more information or to RSVP, call (515) 232-5661 or visit [practicafarmers.org](http://practicafarmers.org).

### Grazing Heritage Cattle & Sheep on Converted Crop Ground and Prairie

**August 21 • Bedford • Russ Wischover**

Learn about raising heritage-beed livestock, low-input infrastructure, the process of seeding former crop fields to pasture species and how grazing former Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land has helped bring native prairie species back. **This field day falls on the same day as a total solar eclipse, and Russ will have solar-viewing glasses on hand to see it!**

### Farmland Owner Legacy Award Celebration

**August 25 • Des Moines • Practical Farmers of Iowa**

Join us at the Botanical Gardens in Des Moines to celebrate Angela and John Tedesco, Practical Farmers' 2017 Farmland Owner Legacy Award recipients. After 17 years operating Turtle Farm, Angela retired and began renting her farm to beginning farmer Ben Saunders. She and John wanted to see this land remain a farm and in 2016, donated 13 of their 20 acres in Granger to Practical Farmers.

### A Look at Soil Regeneration With Jill Clapperton

**August 29 • Shenandoah • Chris and Janenne Teachout**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GREEN COVER SEED

The Teachouts welcome internationally renowned soil scientist Jill Clapperton to their farm to talk about soil regeneration and soil health. See what soil health looks like in several soil pits on the farm, and hear from Chris as he discusses "Cover Crops 201," sharing advanced cover cropping techniques he has tried.

### Profitability of Farming Prairie Potholes

**August 31 • Jefferson • Jerry Peckum**

Many farmers have low-lying areas that pool water during heavy rains. Learn ways to manage these in-field potholes, including what research from Team Pothole at ISU reveals about what farmers can do with these areas that don't yield much during wet years. You'll also learn about other farm conservation techniques that benefit the soil, including in-field prairie plantings for erosion control and native bee habitat.

### Oat, Hay and Feed Production and Direct-Marketing

**September 7 • Dunkerton • Canfield family**

Come and learn about adding small grains to your farm from the Canfield family, which has spent the last two years relearning how to grow small grains in Iowa. They have researched machinery, production strategies and varieties, in addition to seeking potential market streams. One opportunity is to direct-market small grains to small-scale livestock owners as either whole grains or as part of complete mixed feeds.

### Organic Crop and Hog Production + Water Quality Practices

**September 9 • Harlan • Rosmann family**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IOWA ORGANIC ASSOCIATION

This field day will focus on organic crop and swine production, and will be of special interest to farmers hoping to transition to organic. The

Rosmanns have tried various housing options for farrowing pigs in their organic and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)-certified farrow-to-finish swine operation. They will also discuss water quality and edge-of-field practices, such as field borders, buffer strips and agroforestry practices.

### A Little Bit of Everything in Everly

**September 14 • Everly • Darla and Michael Eeten**

Come enjoy some produce talk in northwest Iowa! Join Michael and Darla for a tour of their high tunnels, outdoor rotational vegetable fields and strawberry beds on their small farm. In their established production beds, the Eetens experiment with no-till, maintaining permanent walkways and mulching heavily. They also keep guinea hogs and chickens for weed management and manure.

### Regenerative Grazing to Produce Gourmet Grass-Fed Beef

**September 16 • Bellevue • Jamie Hostetler**

Jamie's primary goal for this field day is to educate attendees on regenerative grazing and grass-efficient beef genetics. Enjoy a hayride through his pastures; see annuals seeded into perennial pastures; learn about grass-fed beef genetics; watch Jamie demonstrate a "five-minute move" into a fresh paddock –and more.

### 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.

### Looking Back at the First Year of Farming With Experienced Eyes

**October 21 • Hancock • Jayme Fowler**

Join beginning farmer Jayme Fowler as she wraps up her first season at Wild Furrow Farm. During a tour of the farm, Jayme and retired CSA vegetable farmer Susan Jutz will discuss production and management, the farm's layout, and harvesting and packing. Jayme will also share the experience of converting a tractor-based vegetable farm to draft power.

### Hand Tools and Implements for Small Vegetable Farms

**November 5 • Iowa City • Jason Grimm**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GROW JOHNSON COUNTY

At this "try before you buy" field day, join farmer Jason Grimm and Scott Koepke, of Grow Johnson County, to see various hand tools and small implements, including wheel hoes, stirrup hoes, a BCS tiller and more. You'll have an opportunity to try them out. Jason will show how he sharpens tools and adjusts the raised bed maker, and will discuss how they manage irrigation water pressure from a city hydrant. You can also check out the farm's cold storage (Cool-Bot). ■

# New Members & Upcoming Events

## Welcome, New Members!

### District 1–Northwest

- Noel Deering, Peterson
- Chad Halbur, Carroll
- Brian Lantz, Lytton
- David Lantz, Inwood
- Randy Riediger, Riediger Farms, LLC, Hinton
- Mark Sikora, Ruthven
- Chuck White, Spencer

### District 2–North Central

- Caleb Akin, Cambridge
- Amercian National Insurance, Mike Grandgeorge, Ames
- Alisha Bower, Ames
- Kristten Buttermore, Uncle G's Farm, Ogden

- Emily Coll, Boone
- Aaron Davis, Boone
- Mark Fehr, J & S Farms, West Bend
- Eric and Deb Finch, State Center
- Laura Greig, Ames
- Charles Larson, Boone
- Gail Thompson, Iowa Falls
- Troy and Shannon Thorpe, Jefferson

### District 3–Northeast

- Noah Wendt, Huxley
- Mark and Kim Diemer, Hawkeye
- Jon Kruse, Monona
- Clara Muggli-Toyloy, Decorah

- Amber Pambin, Fort Atkinson
- Helen Rowell, Edgewood
- Kimberly Sittig, Waterloo
- Margaret Wolter, Cedar Rapids

### District 4–Southwest

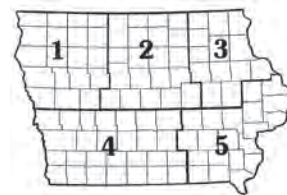
- Jen Berger, Norwalk
- Fred and Diana Fraiser, Copper Leaf Farm, Newton
- Matthew Hackwell, Hackwell Farms, Exira
- Fred Howell, Cumming
- Paul McGarvey, Des Moines
- Leland Shelton, Chariton
- Alan Spencer, Stanton
- Dan Taylor, Bouton
- Steve and Megan Wright, Wright 5 Farms, New Market

### District 5–Southeast

- Tyson Allchin, Allchin Acres, LLC, Columbus Junction
- Eric Franje, New Sharon
- Miranda and John Haes, New London
- Joe Hetrick, Oxford
- Sustainable Living, David Fisher, Fairfield
- Dhuha Tawil, Coralville
- Shea Velez-Westphal, Cedar Rapids
- Anna Vymetal, Grinnell
- Natalie Yoder, West Branch

### District 6–Out of State

- Dayna Burtness, Spring Grove, MN



- Mark Ditlevson, Owatonna, MN
- Philip Green, Dothan, AL
- Jen Griffin, Harmony, MN
- Jeff and Sheila Koester, Koester Organic Farm Scales, Mound, IL
- Andrew Linder, Easton, MN
- Jason Stravers, FPO, AP
- Luke Zaiger, Edger, WI

## UPCOMING EVENTS ~ MID-AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER

### AUGUST

#### Aug. 17 – Webinar: Biodynamic Beekeeping – Winter Preparation | 6:30-8 p.m. (CDT)

Join Alex Tuchman, of the Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary, and learn about the signs of health and illness in relation to honeybees at this time of year, which will help determine methods for the best possible overwintering success. Learn how to consolidate hive space and resources, as well as methods of feeding, wrapping, care of illnesses and other overwintering considerations. This webinar will also touch on the seasonal tasks from August to April. To learn more, visit: [biodynamics.com/webinars](http://biodynamics.com/webinars)

#### Aug. 18 – 20 – Seed Savers Exchange Seed School | Decorah

This annual event draws seed savers, gardeners, orchardists and scholars from around the country. Learn how to grow, harvest, store and save seed while discussing the importance of preserving crop diversity in your own backyard. Discover how to engage your community in seed stewardship through seed libraries, seed swaps and community gardens. To learn more, call (563) 382-5990 or visit: [seedsavers.org/seed-school](http://seedsavers.org/seed-school)

#### Aug. 29 – 31 – Farm Progress Show 2017 | Decatur, IL

For 64 years, the Farm Progress Show has brought tradition and business together. This is where producers from all over gather, meet and learn; where major manufacturers choose to roll out their newest offerings; and where ag families take a break from their

daily routine to immerse themselves in the wider ag community. To learn more, visit: [farmprogressshow.com](http://farmprogressshow.com)

### SEPTEMBER

#### Sept. 2 – Fall Field Day at Middle Way Farm | Grinnell

Join Jordan Scheibel, of Middle Way Farm, at his annual open house for a free farm tour and learn how he raises produce. The tour will cover all aspects of his operation, from greenhouse and field production, to washing, packing and cooler areas. You will see produce in the field, learn about the farm's growing methods, hear about the season's successes and challenges, and find out about new techniques the farm is using. To learn more, visit: [facebook.com/middlewayfarmer](https://facebook.com/middlewayfarmer)

#### Sept. 7 – Ag Technologies for Max Yield in Organic & Conventional Systems | Luther

Join Alex and Mary Jane Paez, of Genetic Enterprises International (GEI), for this two-part field day. Part 1 will include presentations and discussions related to maximizing yield of specialty corns in organic and conventional systems. Part 2 will involve field observations of GEI specialty and conventional hybrids used for both production systems. To learn more, visit: [geicornseed.com](http://geicornseed.com)

#### Sept. 16 – Farm Cruise | Polk and Story Counties

Farm Cruise is a self-guided tour of farms in Polk and Story counties. Enjoy a hayrack ride through an orchard and pick apples; visit a high tunnel vegetable farm with a commercial kitchen; and learn about grass-fed livestock

production. Guest vendors at some farms will offer locally crafted goods for sale and demonstrate their methods. To learn more, visit: [farmcruise.com](http://farmcruise.com)

#### Sept. 20 – Prairie on Farms Field Day | Cedar Falls

This field day will address how to successfully establish native prairie plantings in agricultural fields. Learn site preparation and planting techniques, the benefits of first-year establishment mowing, how to decide the proper seed mix for your site – and more. To learn more, visit: [tallgrassprairiecenter.org/prairie-farms/events](http://tallgrassprairiecenter.org/prairie-farms/events)

#### Sept. 20 – SILT Showcase Day: Red Fern Farm | Wapello

Designed for landowners who want to learn more about protecting their land to grow healthy food, every showcase includes a farm tour, meal and presentations by the host, an attorney and an appraiser. Come with your questions or just listen to others. To learn more, visit: [silt.org](http://silt.org)

### OCTOBER

#### Oct. 7 – Harvest Spoon Tour | Harrison and Pottawattamie Counties

Learn about locally grown businesses and organizations that promote, enhance and increase the awareness of and passion for local foods and its culture in Harrison and Pottawattamie counties. Enjoy tours, samples, and local foods and products to purchase and experience. To learn more, visit: [sites.google.com/site/harvestspoonstour](http://sites.google.com/site/harvestspoonstour)

For more events, visit [practicalfarmers.org](http://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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### *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.

### Visit Us on Social Media



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### *Vibrant Communities*

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.