

*working together, always learning*

# the Practical Farmer

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Susan and Rob Fleming, of Danamere Farms, pose by their restored prairie in Carlisle. The Flemings received the 2016 Farmland Owner Award from Practical Farmers.

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

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



## Generosity

Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson co-authored "The Paradox of Generosity," a book compiling results of Christian's research through the Science of Generosity Initiative. In an interview, Christian remarks on his surprise at how ungenerous Americans are as a society. Through Practical Farmers of Iowa's network, we are all fortunate to work together in a community where generosity is abundant. Christian reports those who are generous are happier. PFI members back this up: Being generous with your knowledge and time seems as natural to you as drinking water. You inspire good in others as you accomplish self-rewarding behaviors: **It feels good to do good.**

Just a few recent examples of generosity I have been fortunate to experience:

### \* At the Petersen family field day:

» Charlotte Shivers and Martha Skillman shared their lifelong experiences with farm transfer – from challenging their mom to "put her money where her mouth is" when approached by family for a loan to keep their farm in business, to working for years with the same family's descendants, the Petersen family. Charlotte and Martha first rented – and then sold – their farmland to the Petersens (and in the near future, their beloved farm house).

» I heard how Jim Petersen's sister, Mary Reeves, and her husband, Charles, purchased farmland and rented it to Jim so he and his children could farm next to one another.

» I witnessed how the generosity of these families has resulted in keeping and bringing more people back to the farm, and has increased farm diversity and conservation. The willingness of these families to share their heartfelt stories about their long journeys to reach goals that foster conservation and family farms helps so many others who are still on their own journeys figuring out how to navigate the intricate paths toward conservation, land access and farm transfer.

### \* Recently, on our online discussion list:

» Margaret Smith asked for help finding new bulls for her and Doug Alert's



**Left to right:** Ashley Sherrets, Erica Andorf, Roxanne Fuller, Joe Olsen, T.D. Holub and Sally Worley. See page 26 to read about the wealth of generosity Joe Olsen has provided his community through extensive volunteerism.

farming operation. Here is what she wrote after receiving a wealth of help:

"All, thank you, so very much, for your contacts and suggestions as we were looking for bulls. We found them! It's great to be part of this electronic community with so many helpful and caring people! Thanks, again. Love our PFI community!"

### \* Visiting Bruce Carney's farm with co-workers Meghan Filbert and Laura Frescoln, and Julia Olmstead, our grant officer from McKnight Foundation:

» Bruce shared with us projects he is participating in to improve his farm. These projects include: 1). Measuring the impacts grazing cover crops in crop fields has on soil health; 2). Measuring carcass quality through in-field ultrasound to determine when a grass-fed animal is prime for processing (you can learn more about this during our two-part field day: Part I is at Bruce's farm on Sept. 28; Part II is at Mingo Locker on Oct. 15); 3). Measuring soil health, biomass and species diversity in perennial pastures compared with perennial pastures interseeded with annual species; 4). Bird monitoring to determine diversity of bird habitat in his pastures; and 5). Tile water quality monitoring (Bruce's water quality scored best out of 250 farms in 2015). Data is still coming in for 2016, but so far,

Bruce is again scoring lowest in nitrate concentration.

» Bruce relayed to us the deep responsibility he feels for the quality of water coming off his farm, for the products he is selling to his customers and for habitat he is providing for wildlife. While touring future sites of swales he plans to install on his farm, Bruce said: "I probably won't experience the rewards of this work, but my children and their children will."

### Now I am going to ask for your generosity.

We hope to raise, as of the writing of this letter, **\$20,000 more** in unrestricted donations to meet our annual fundraising goal. Your donations are **so important** to Practical Farmers of Iowa – they provide funding that allows us to implement programming directly tied to what you, our members and supporters, are asking for.

So please, be generous and contribute to Practical Farmers of Iowa today. It will help us greatly, and according to "The Paradox of Giving," will improve your happiness as well!

Thank you for the opportunity to exist within a community of great generosity,

*Sally Worley*

## Harvest Time in July

Talking small grains with Aaron Heley Lehman

by Nick Ohde

Amidst the calls of red-winged blackbirds, meadowlarks, dickcissels and the occasional bobolink, a crowd of over 80 people gathered at the farm of Aaron and Nicole Heley Lehman on June 20 to learn about growing small grains in an organic crop rotation. In preparation for the field day, I visited Aaron to learn more about his operation, and we discussed the benefits and challenges of growing small grains in Iowa, and how the crops fit into an organic rotation. (Read a recap and see photos of the field day at [practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/06/23/field-day-recap-reintegrating-small-grains-organic-crop-rotation](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/06/23/field-day-recap-reintegrating-small-grains-organic-crop-rotation))

### How does growing small grains help with soil fertility?

Small grains are really good at scavenging nutrients left over from previous crops, so that's one way we can improve fertility. In addition to that, they allow us to have an undergrowth of clover or alfalfa. In our three-year rotation, clover will be used as a green manure crop. We won't be harvesting it for forage, we'll be simply working it back into the ground to take advantage of the nitrogen fixed by the clover: much of that nitrogen will be available for the corn crop that we'll plant in the same field next year.

### How do small grains help with weed management?

They are essential. Weeds are very adaptable, and having the small grains in there really breaks up the weed cycle. They provide early-season competition to weeds, and corn and soybeans just don't have that ability. So that's been very good for us.

### How does growing small grains affect your workload?

The labor for small grains is much different than for our corn and soybeans. That definitely helps spread our [total farm] workload over the entire year. We'll be harvesting in the middle of the summer, whereas everything else will be a couple of months later. We can use that to our advantage in determining our storage, transportation and marketing.

### What are some of the biggest challenges with growing small grains in Iowa and how do you address them?

To be honest, we just haven't been learning much about small grains over the last 40 years. We've been learning a lot about corn and soybeans, and how to grow them more profitably. But we have quite a bit to learn about how to grow small grains profitably.

As with corn and beans, weather is always a challenge. A lot of [the learning] is just about making sure we have the proper methods and machinery on the farm so we're ready when the time is right to plant or prepare the ground for small grains.

We also have to make sure we have good soil-to-seed contact at planting. That really hasn't been an issue with corn and soybeans for quite a while, because our planters have been adapted to optimize that. Our seeders for small grains have not. So we need to do a better job of trying to make sure our seed bed conditions are as close to ideal as possible when we get the chance to plant.

### Speaking of machinery, the oat harvest is coming up soon. Can you talk a little about harvesting oats?

Oats are harvested one of two ways on commercial farms. The older way is to use a swather, which cuts the oats into windrows,



↑ Clover grows in the shade of oat plants on Aaron's farm.



↑ Aaron Heley Lehman poses by a field of oats in June.



**Left:** Field day visitors walk through a field of oats – once a common experience in Iowa. **Right:** Aaron (far right) shows visitors land he has enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

**“We think conservation is the best thing for the land and for our community. If we can do what’s good for our land, use the nutrients that are here and keep them on the farm, it’s a win-win for us all.”**

– AARON LEHMAN

where they lay to dry, like how hay is harvested. After a few days of drying, the oats are combined with a pick-up or dummy head on the combine. The other method is to combine the oats while they are still standing, like corn and soybeans.

In the past, we’ve always combined them standing with our small grains head – which is our soybean head, adapted a little – but some years it works better than others. Our organic fields have plenty of green material coming up under the ripened oats, whether that be clover or weeds. Running that material through the combine is a challenge, so to compensate, we end up cutting

our oats kind of high, which sends less material through the combine. But when the oats lodge, we can’t really do that.

This year, we purchased a swather (windrower), and we’re going to explore swathing our oats and using a pick-up head on our combine to harvest the grain. That might allow us to deal with some adverse conditions a little better by letting the green material dry down more, making it easier to go through the combine. ■

*Read more of Nick’s discussion with Aaron about harvesting small grains in the July issue of *Wallaces Farmer* at [magissues.farmprogress.com/wal/wf07jul16/wal010.pdf](http://magissues.farmprogress.com/wal/wf07jul16/wal010.pdf).*

## Back to the Future on the Lehman Farm: A Return to Diversity

Until relatively recently in its history, the Lehman farm was much more diverse: “Dad had the most productive Brown Swiss herd in the state for many years,” Aaron says. “But the farm has changed a lot over the years. By the time I was growing up, it was largely a grain farm.”

Now, the family raises corn, soybeans, oats and hay near Polk City. Conserving natural resources is a top priority: The family has grass waterways, a wetland, pollinator strips, cover crops, land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and they limit tillage as much as possible. But the organic crop rotation – which includes small grains – is what ties these efforts together.

“We think conservation is the best thing for the land and for our community, Aaron says. “If we can do what’s good for our land, use the nutrients that are here and keep them on the farm, it’s a win-win for us all.”

About 10 years ago, the Lehmans planted their first field of organic crops. Since then, they’ve transitioned a new field every year or two. This modest pace has been intentional, Aaron explains. “When we started to convert our fields into some organic

acres, the people who converted all of their farm into organic at one time said they barely lived to tell the tale. So we chose not to do that, but rather to go field by field.”

The Lehmans made the decision to move towards organic for a number of reasons. First, Aaron says the family identifies with the systematic approach to farming that’s necessary to produce crops without herbicides and commercial fertilizers. They also feel strongly about the tenets of organic agriculture. In addition, there are economic advantages of growing a premium crop.

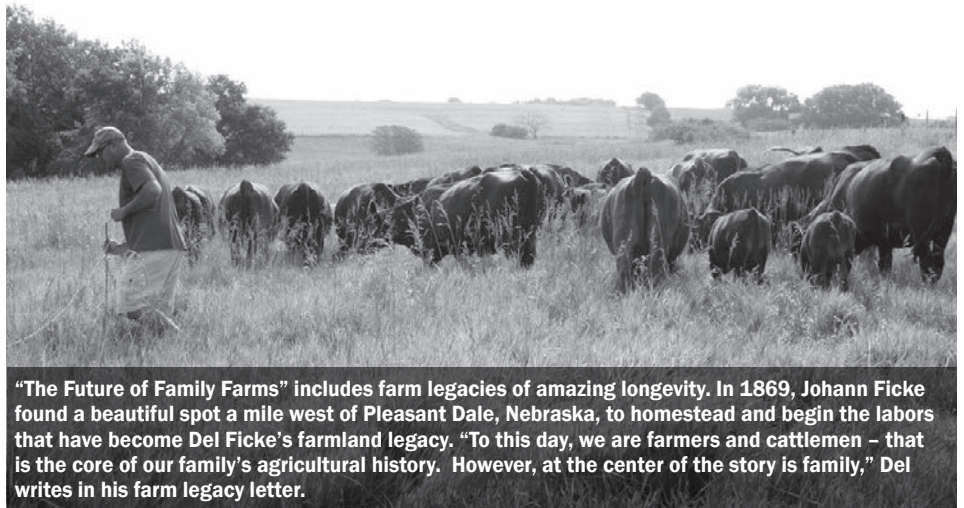
While the decision to go organic certainly came with a learning curve, Aaron adds that, in some ways, he was merely picking up where the farm had left off. “We knew we would be tackling some new and different ways of doing things, but lots of those practices had been used on the farm many years ago.” Bringing a small grains crop back to the rotation is perhaps the most important of those tools.

“Small grains fit well into the entire systematic approach to sustainable farming,” Aaron says. ■

## 25 PFI Members Featured in Farm Legacy Book

by Teresa Opheim

This fall, the leadership of Practical Farmers members will be prominently on display when the University of Iowa Press publishes “The Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers’ Legacy Letter Project.” The book features the farm legacy stories of 25 PFI members, from Del Ficke, whose grandchild is the seventh generation on the farm; to Mary Damm, who just purchased farmland in 2013. The book even features former farmland owners like Dale Nimrod, who chose to sell to help get a new generation on the farm.



“The Future of Family Farms” includes farm legacies of amazing longevity. In 1869, Johann Ficke found a beautiful spot a mile west of Pleasant Dale, Nebraska, to homestead and begin the labors that have become Del Ficke’s farmland legacy. “To this day, we are farmers and cattlemen – that is the core of our family’s agricultural history. However, at the center of the story is family,” Del writes in his farm legacy letter.

As I worked with University of Iowa Press to pull the book together, I was struck by the security that farmland ownership provides. My family is an example. In the 1920s, my grandparents, Carl and Selma Opheim, were busy working the family’s northwest Iowa farm and raising eight children when their world fell apart. In 1929, the stock market crashed, the Bode State Bank failed and the family lost the farm.

“They lost so much,” my dad, Wayne Opheim, reports, “and my family became so poor. I always wondered about the psychological effect of losing so much.” Wayne was born later that year, and the family moved into town. “My dad then worked as a janitor at the Lutheran Church. I think the church felt sorry for him having all those kids and no job. In 1939, he applied for a job at the Bode schools. He came home one day and said, ‘I got the job!’ We all cheered. And he was a school janitor for the rest of his life.”

Twenty miles away, my mother’s farming family thrived, and it is on this farm that my grandparents spoiled me when I was young. As with so many families, no one in the next generation wanted to farm, and my grandparents eventually moved into town. Over the years, I watched the

farmstead I knew disappear – the house, the chicken coop, the flower beds, the gardens, the apple trees (one for each grandchild) and the extensive windbreak we dubbed “Fisher Woods.” About five years ago, all that was left were two trees in the ditches. Now there are none.

The book reveals a theme of loss, as happened in my family. There are other themes as well: gratitude for what the land has provided; commitment to family and stewardship; and revitalized visions for the land and agriculture.

Many of the stories illustrate the march from more crops to fewer over the years, a journey away from self-reliance and toward convenience. There is, however, a theme of increased diversity and decreased chemical use in the book as well. Angela

Tedesco and her husband, John, for instance, purchased bare ground in central Iowa and raised hundreds of varieties of more than 30 types of vegetables and fruit for Angela’s vegetable CSA. In her story of providing food to 180 families, she describes the perks in sensory detail:

*Dew drops on leaf margins and spiderwebs. Birds of all kinds – from bluebirds and barn swallows to white pelicans and raptors – overhead. . . . The sounds of the meadowlarks and killdeer in the spring and the hawks screeching overhead, raindrops on the hoop-house plastic, and the clicking of the stirrup or wheel hoe as it moves through the soil. . . . The aroma of basil if brushed and other herbs from rosemary to lavender, a barn full of freshly harvested garlic and ripe strawberries in the heat of the day.*



— Mary Damm (at right, next to Phil Specht) is the newest farmland owner in the book. She purchased her friend Dan Specht’s farm on the bluffs of the Mississippi River after his death in 2013. “My Brother’s Hands,” a poem from Dan’s brother, Phil, is also included in the book. Phil writes: “They touched seed/ that embraced earth/love given birth/in circles/within circles. . . .”



↑ Several of the letter writers want more than anything to see a new farmer living and working the land. Says one of the authors, Neil Hamilton, “Historically this nation’s preference was not for tenancy but to convert tenants into owners. In the 1940s, tenancy was almost seen as an evil. There was the ladder you moved up from being a hired employee, to tenant, to being an owner. Ownership was the goal for a lot of reasons. For security. For wealth creation. For stewardship. Not many people would choose to always be a tenant if they could own the land.”

↑ Some farmland owners in the book, such as Margaret McQuown and Steve Turman of Red Oak, Iowa, predict extremely challenging times for our future. As Steve writes: “One way or another, our future will include occupying this landscape differently than we have for the past few centuries.” On their farm, Margaret and Steve have planted trees and shrubs to help restore a riparian buffer. They have restored a pond, fought invasive species, and plan to add grassed waterways rather than build or rebuild terraces.

While “The Future of Family Farms” is meant to honor the past, its goal is not to evoke nostalgia. Instead, I hope it leads farmland owners to examine what we want to keep, to change and to let go with American agriculture. Many of the farmland owners in this book discovered they had thrown away too much that is valuable about agriculture, and they made amends. They hope to leave a legacy that continues those changes.

“The Future of Family Farms” features the following PFI members: Jon Bakehouse, Mary Damm, Del Ficke, Tom and Irene Frantzen, Jim and Lisa French, John Gilbert, Neil Hamilton, Leon and Marilyn Isakson, Fred Kirschenmann, Jeff Klinge, Cindy and Vic Madsen, Margaret McQuown, Barb Opheim, the late Dan Specht, Phil Specht, Angela Tedesco, Deb Tidwell, and Steve Turman. The book also features PFI Farmland Owner Award recipients

Charlotte Shivers, Martha Skillman and Marietta Carr; Dale Nimrod, Faith Sherman and Vance Nimrod; and Helen Gunderson. It includes essays from Mike Duffy, professor emeritus at Iowa State University; Iowa’s Poet Laureate Mary Swander;

and Kathryn Ruhf, from the non-profit organization Land for Good.

To order “The Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers’ Legacy Letter Project,” see [www.uiowapress.org/books/2016-fall/future-family-farms.html](http://www.uiowapress.org/books/2016-fall/future-family-farms.html). ■

## A Book About and for Practical Farmers of Iowa

“The Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers’ Legacy Letters Project” is dedicated to the members of Practical Farmers of Iowa, and all proceeds will go back to the organization. Here is an excerpt from Teresa’s opening chapter in the book:

*How much I have learned from the members of Practical Farmers of Iowa! In so many ways, so many times. While I served as the executive director of this organization . . . from 2006 to 2016, I learned how complex farming with nature can be. I learned what it takes to produce food with the attributes I want. I learned patience and commitment to family, to farmland, to continuity, to community, and more.*

*I am still learning, and in no area more than farmland transfer.*

*About five years ago, a farmer stopped me at a field day and confided he worried whether his son would be able to continue farming. The farmer’s land-owning mother had just died, and her farmland was being divided among her children. At other field days since, farmers without farming children reported being sad they hadn’t found the right young people to continue their operations. Many confided about rancor among siblings once their parents passed, even though the family had always gotten along well before. One particularly reticent farmer muttered to me: “All the things I could tell you. . . . All the things I could tell you . . .” And he drifted off, shaking his head.... ■*

## Celebrating 50 Years of Strawberries

*Growing fruit has been a life calling for Dean and Judy Henry*

by Liz Kolbe

For 50 years, Dean and Judy Henry have lived the maxim "do what you love, love what you do," cultivating a range of berries and other fruits at Berry Patch Farm near Nevada. Many PFI members know Dean and Judy from field days and conferences, and those in the fruit world know them as earnest learners, educators and hard workers. They hold an annual pruning workshop, and hosted their most recent Practical Farmers field day in 2013. In 2015 they received the Distinguished Service Award from the North American Raspberry and Blackberry Association.

In honor of Dean and Judy's 50th strawberry-growing season, this farm profile looks back at the building of Berry Patch Farm.

### The Origins

Judy grew up in suburbia; Dean grew up in Ames. He recalls learning to garden from his mother, "picking pear-shaped yellow tomatoes when I was just a little dabbler," he says. His interest in horticulture grew as he got older, Judy recollects. "When Dean was in high school, he rented some ground and grew tomatoes," she says. "He really liked it and dreamed ahead, thinking someday he would have a garden and an orchard." Dean and Judy met at Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago, where he first shared his farming dreams with her. "Dean said he wanted to do something with apples, maybe grow some fruit. And that didn't bother me; I was happy with that."

They got married in 1959 and continued their education at Iowa State University. By the mid-1960s, they had three boys, had bought a house in Ames and rented land north of town by Ada Hayden Park, where they started growing strawberries. But they were on the hunt for an acreage. When they found the land where Berry Patch Farm is today, they started making plans. "We looked around and thought: 'This flat area will work for strawberries. On the hillsides we can have trees,'" Judy says. As soon as the deed was signed (it was March, Judy recalls), the family planted trees, with strawberries close on their heels that spring. They were living in Ames, fruiting in North Ames and planting on their new

ground near Nevada. They were busy. "And that was before we built the house!" Dean adds with a laugh.

"We built our little house out here in the summer of 1970," Judy says. "We also built a hoophouse with plastic on it that Dean used as a shop in the summer. And



**A YOUNG FAMILY:** Dean and Judy with sons Dave (left) and Mike (right) in 1970, shortly after buying their farm near Nevada.

oh, was it hot for him. I learned from that experience that you always build the shop first! After we built the shop the second year, I felt we could function as a farm."

The family worked together and the farm grew. Farm work was plentiful, and Judy says it was a perfect way to teach their boys how "to be resourceful. We did our own work – weeding, harvesting, building ponds, irrigation." "We did everything the hard way," Dean adds, "and educated a few bankers along the way when we needed loans for our capital projects." In addition to growing their farm during the summer,

they both had off-farm work. Dean worked for the Iowa Department of Transportation, then taught diesel mechanics at Des Moines Area Community College for 30 years. Judy ran a pre-school at Berry Patch for 35 years. "We had a mentor who said, 'don't give up your day job.'" Judy says. "Some years that was very important."

The Henrys started with 6 acres of pick-your-own strawberries, increasing to around 20 acres at one point. They quickly cut back to 12 to 15 acres, and now have about 10 acres of pick-your-own strawberries (in addition to apples, blueberries, blackberries, gooseberries, currants, cherries, peas, raspberries, rhubarb and pumpkins).

When the Henrys started farming, not many resources were available in the state. They met Oris and Jean Hinegardner of Hinegardner Orchard, in Montour, Iowa, at a conference in Wisconsin in the early 1960s. The Hinegardners were a source of guidance to the Henrys in those early years, and the Henrys remain close friends and colleagues of Oris and Jean's son, David, who now runs Hinegardner Orchard. This early support inspired Dean and Judy to help others: For many years, they have helped farmers across the state get strawberries in the ground. As they gained experience, they continued to travel and learn from other growers and researchers around the country and internationally.

### Managing Hard Times

Not everything has gone according to plan. Like other farmers, Dean and Judy experienced hardships: drought, frost, poor-selling apple varieties. Once, they lost all their strawberries when the straw mulch caught fire. Brokers selling Michigan produce at Iowa farmers markets wrecked their 10-acre asparagus market and currently threaten their blueberry market. They gave up melons because the ones shipped from Texas were cheaper ("and tasted just as good," admits Dean). They've



***“We've had a lot of failures, a lot of times where we didn't know what to do . . . . You have to love it, or you won't make it through the hard times.”***

— DEAN and JUDY HENRY

tried things that haven't worked, and, says Dean, “have made every possible mistake” with plasticulture for strawberries. “Plasticulture is a great way to grow berries, and is important for most growers. It just won't work for us.” Most of the failure with plastic Dean ascribes to not having a deer fence at Berry Patch, which would cost \$40,000 to install. One year, deer ate 3,000 row-feet of strawberries that were lying on the plastic, but didn't bother the strawberries next to them on the ground. “They really like them when they're served up on a plastic plate!” Dean jokes.

Other practices simply haven't fit with their stewardship ethic to protect pollinators.



**Left to right:** Judy and Dean Henry, son Mike and farm manager Matt Howieson.

At one time, Dean used fumigation on the strawberries, and even owned the equipment for it. “We had a fantastic crop and very few weeds,” he says, “but I just felt it was not the proper thing to do.” They stopped fumigating, opting instead for crop rotations, including mustard, radish, black oats and many other species. Once, they had 3 acres of marigolds in rotation.

cherish memories with families and friends they've worked and travelled with over the years. As we sat on the porch talking, Dean and Judy greeted mothers with their children, chatted with trusted employees and delighted in seeing old friends out picking berries (Lonna Nachtigal and Joe Lynch, on this particular day).

Dean and Judy want to see more berry growers in Iowa. When they find people who are serious about learning and doing the work, they are more than willing to provide consulting. But they also warn beginners that it isn't easy. “There are a lot of reasons why [a farm] is not going to make you money,” Dean says. “We've had a lot of failures, a lot of times where we didn't know what to do.” Judy worries that some people just see the dollar signs when everything goes well. “You have to love it, or you won't make it through the hard times,” she says. This morning on the porch, however, stories about the hard times come with a nostalgic chuckle, as they remember hoping for something better, and making it to where they are. ■

### **Memories with Families and Loyal Customers**

The 1970s through the mid-80s were the heyday of pick-your-own. “People wanted quantity in the beginning,” Judy says. “In the early days, people were lined up down the gravel road. I couldn't hand out buckets fast enough!” The popularity of pick-your-own waned in the 1990s, and later with high gas prices, but always seemed to recover when people realized they were getting a better deal on good food. They've come to terms with “gate-crashers” seeking the king berries (the largest, central berry) and watch with equal parts concern, frustration and amusement as the new era of pick-your-own customers wander off course, mistakenly picking currants instead of blueberries (or other such meanderings).

Dean and Judy express gratitude for what they have: good soil and water, and loyal farm and farmers market customers. They



#### **A MEMORABLE CUSTOMER:**

“Mervin, from Webster City, would always overfill his boxes, and took everything he picked to the nursing home,” Judy recalls. “Every time he came to pick, he brought us a trunk-full of garden vegetables.”

# Visualizing Farm Sustainability

*Fieldprint Calculator lets you assess impact of farm practices*

by Steve Carlson

When it comes to assessing the environmental impact of farming practices, some evidence is easy to see – ephemeral gullies, for instance, or ditches full of topsoil after rain or wind events. The difference planting cover crops makes can be striking, and can make a strong visual impression – especially if a neighbor's field has been tilled and left “naked.” Other impacts, both good and bad, are harder to see: Effects on wildlife, nearby waterways, soil microbes or greenhouse gas emissions, for instance, can be less obvious or altogether invisible.

**E**nter the Fieldprint Calculator. This free, web-based tool lets alfalfa, corn, cotton, potato, rice, soybean and wheat farmers explore how their management decisions relate to these – and other – sustainability indicators. Want to see how your current management practices stack up, sustainability-wise, against past, current or potential practices? This tool lets you do that. Curious how your farm compares to others? Check. The calculator anonymously compares your results to county, state and national averages.

The Fieldprint Calculator was developed by an alliance of producers, agribusinesses, retail companies, conservation groups, universities and other organizations known as Field to Market in an effort to help producers measure and encourage the sustainable production of food, fiber and fuel. It uses datasets developed by a range of sources, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to help farmers estimate their performance on seven sustainability indicators: land use, soil erosion, soil carbon, irrigation water use, water quality, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Management details entered into the calculator are analyzed and transformed into a “Fieldprint score,” which graphically depicts the farmer's results for each sustainability indicator.

### Big Potential for Iowa Farmers

Some farmers, such as PFI members Ward Van Dyke and Jack Boyer, were introduced to the Fieldprint Calculator through Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), their soybean processor; ADM, in turn, uses the data to track the benefits of its cover crop cost-share program. Practical Farmers member Tim Smith first used the Fieldprint

Calculator as part of the Boone River Watershed Project, which seeks to promote nitrogen efficiency and reduction practices to help meet water quality standards for Des Moines and the Gulf of Mexico.

Many farmers, however, are unaware of the Fieldprint Calculator and how it can help their operations. For Iowa's corn and soybean farmers, many of whom are working on ways to comply with Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, the tool offers enormous potential: With a few clicks, they easily visualize the impact of current or future management practices. “For someone who is not on board with cover crops, Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy and conservation practices, [the Fieldprint Calculator] is another tool that can help them visualize what might be possible if they were to implement some of these practices,” explains Jack, of Grundy County. “It lets you put in what you're doing and uses a model to evaluate how that contributes to sustainability. Tillage, cover crops, nutrient management – it weighs all those practices.”

Another nice feature is that users can save their data, so they can track their operation over multiple years. “As you fill it out each year, you see what changed that year,” says Ward, of Jasper County. Besides seeing the impact of current farming practices, the calculator lets users explore how hypothetical changes, from minor tweaks to major adjustments, affect the system. Interested in improving your on-farm energy-use? The calculator considers issues like fuel use, drying and irrigation systems and reveals British thermal units (Btu) used per bushel. You can then play with the data to see how more efficient transportation from the field or less drying time would affect your farm's energy use. Curious



**Visualizing Farm Management:** “[The Fieldprint Calculator] lets you put in what you're doing and uses a model to evaluate how that contributes to sustainability. Tillage, cover crops, nutrient management – it weighs all those practices.” – JACK BOYER

about how reducing chemical inputs or adding a rye cover crop after corn affects the quality of water leaving your field? The calculator rates your field using NRCS's water quality index, and updates the rating after you enter potential practice changes.

### What it Calculates

Five of the seven indicators – land use, soil erosion, irrigation water use, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions – are calculated on an efficiency, or per unit of production, basis. For instance, you'll see an estimate of how many tons of soil you're losing per acre each year from water erosion, wind erosion and total soil erosion. Soil carbon and water quality are calculated using qualitative indices that reveal the relative direction and impact of farming practices. Together, these indicators provide a general snapshot of a field's overall efficiency and environmental footprint – and how those fluctuate based on management decisions.

There are some limits to the tool, as Tim points out: Because the calculator uses a field's crop yield to help analyze efficiency, which influences the sustainability score, a drought year could show poor results even if conservation practices were used. “Last year [2015], for example, we had excellent yields, and that makes everything look really good,” says Tim, who farms near Eagle Grove. “But you take a drought year



like 2012, where yields weren't quite as good, and efficiencies drop. What makes [your Fieldprint score] more efficient is the yield, and we don't always have control over that because weather is the biggest factor in our area, where we don't irrigate."

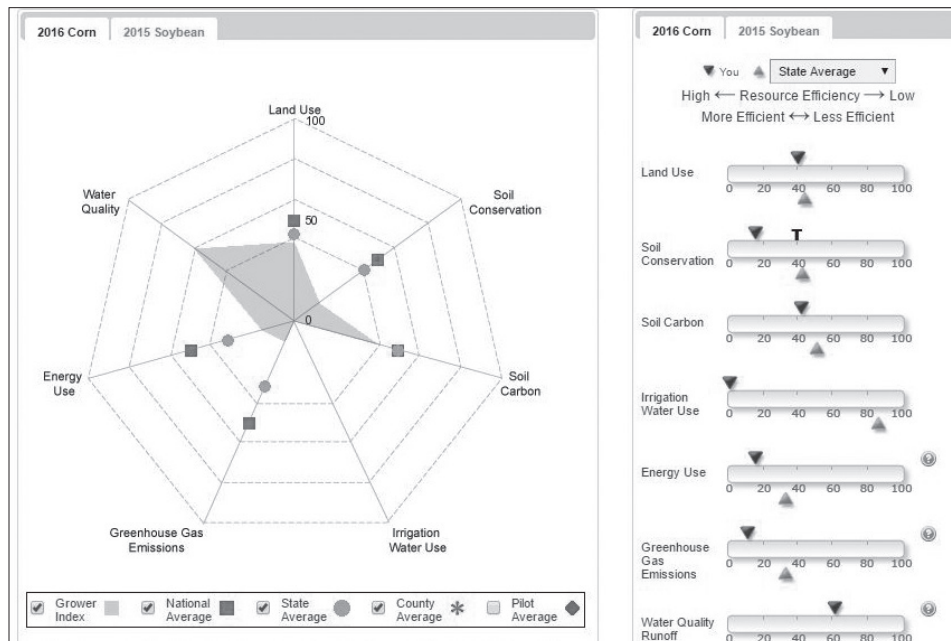
## Using the Calculator: Your Farm Data is Key

To access the Fieldprint Calculator, visit [fieldtomarket.org/fieldprint-calculator](http://fieldtomarket.org/fieldprint-calculator). You may choose to create an account, or to log in as a guest. However, creating an account lets you save your results and track changes over time. In order to get the most useful results, it's helpful to have as much data on hand as possible, Ward says. Not only will the results be more accurate, but "the better data you put in on the front end, the better off you'll be five years down the road when you can see your history."

Once logged in, follow these steps:

**1). Enter in the location for each field** by using the legal land description, GPS coordinates or by selecting an area on the map. Naming each field and saving the data you enter will ensure you can come back anytime to build on the history for that field. (Note: Once the location is selected, the calculator auto-populates with information on the soil characteristics, though you can edit that data if you're aware of any differences.)

**2). For each field, enter details on crop rotation, tillage system and management system.** The latter includes all the operations to prepare the seedbed, plant and harvest, and control weeds. Options for cover crops are included under "management system" as well. The form includes helpful links throughout the process that you can click for further instructions, if needed.



A sample of what the Fieldprint Calculator's results look like: The spider graph, on the left, shows the user's Fieldprint compared to the national, state and county averages, where available.

**3). Answer questions on vegetative cover, residue and cover crops.** The calculator then asks you to estimate the percentage of vegetative cover in that field for each month of the year; whether crop residue was removed; and the pounds per acre of nitrogen credit from any cover crops planted.

**4). Following this is a series of questions on other management practices and operational details,** including pest management strategies; nutrient application rate and timing; your system for drying the crop; and the distance from that field to the point of sale.

**5). Enter edge-of-field conservation practices.** To finish the process, the calculator asks you to check boxes next to any edge-of-field conservation practices you use, such as filter strips, grass waterways and contour strip cropping, to name a few.

Assembling all this information in advance will save you the trouble of having to stop and start again. "It's not difficult data, it's not data that you don't have in your head or close by," Tim says. "But using the calculator does require data." Ensuring you have all the necessary data on hand might mean talking to your Farm Services Agency office to get maps or calling your seed supplier for a refresher on the past year. And remember, hit the "save" button often!

## What the Results Look Like

Once you've entered your data, the Fieldprint Calculator analyzes it and presents the results in two formats: broken out by each indicator, and as a summary projected on a spider graph. In the latter, each indicator is on its own axis; the axes connect at the center, and a shaded area overlays the resulting "spider web." The further this shaded area extends from the center of the graph in each sustainability sector, the greater the environmental impact. This visual image is your Fieldprint score for that field. The smaller the total area of the Fieldprint, the greater the efficiency for that field – though the efficiency could be higher for some indicators and lower for others (for instance, you could be highly energy-efficient, but less efficient with soil conservation).

In the panel showing individual sustainability indicators, results are shown on a sliding scale for both efficiency of production and efficiency of natural resource use. Both ways of depicting the results show the national, state and county averages for each sustainability indicator, if known. To learn more about the Fieldprint Calculator, or to try it out, visit [fieldtomarket.org/fieldprint-calculator](http://fieldtomarket.org/fieldprint-calculator). ■

## Roller-Crimping Cover Crops

Two PFI members share insights into this mechanical method

by Stefan Gailans

Cover crops are typically terminated by herbicides or tillage. However, the roller-crimper, pioneered by the Rodale Institute in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, presents farmers the opportunity to mechanically terminate cover crops without chemicals or tillage.

A roller-crimper is a large, metal cylinder with chevron-patterned blades that simultaneously lays the cover crop flat on the ground while crushing the stem in several places. When done correctly, this results in a cover crop mulch that cannot stand back up. This technique is especially appealing to organic farmers who wish to reduce tillage but also use cover crops in their crop production systems. While more popular elsewhere in the country, the roller-crimper is gaining attention among Practical Farmers members as interest in cover crops has soared in recent years.

This past winter, Billy Sammons and neighbor George Naylor, both of Churdan, had a roller-crimper constructed by a local manufacturer that was loosely based on design plans made publicly available by Rodale. With their new piece of equipment, the two farmers rolled a cereal rye cover crop ahead of a soybean crop this spring. Intrigued by what Billy and George were doing, Francis Thicke, of Fairfield, asked to borrow the roller-crimper to use on his cereal rye cover crop preceding soybeans this spring. "Francis was so impressed with the roller-crimper that instead of returning it to us, he bought it from us!" Billy says. "We sold it to him for the same price it cost us to have it manufactured. So we'll just have another one made for us this winter."

In this Q&A, Billy and Francis share their thoughts on using a roller-crimper, and offer some tips for those thinking about giving it a try.



← The roller-crimper Billy and George Naylor had built adopted a double-chevron blade configuration.

### Why did you want to try rolling cover crops?

**BILLY:** A few years ago, I attended an organic field day at the Neely-Kinyon Farm in Greenfield and got to see a Rodale model roller-crimper. Dr. Kathleen Delate of Iowa State University was the speaker, and she shared some advantages and disadvantages. After attending, I started searching for relevant articles and read everything I could find about using the roller-crimper. For me, the benefits seemed to outweigh the risks.

**FRANCIS:** I heard about it years ago, but only recently had enough land to try it out. It has the promise of providing multiple benefits to the soil, and still allows growing high-value annual crops. The benefits to soils include reduced soil erosion, reduced nutrient leaching and runoff, and retaining soil moisture through the mulching effect. Over time, this system should also increase soil organic matter, improve soil structure, increase soil water-holding capacity and improve soil health. In my case, I have found this system protects and enhances the soil on hilly ground that I would not otherwise consider planting to row crops.

### What advantages do you see to this technique over other forms of cover crop termination?

**BILLY:** Since spraying is not an option – we're transitioning to organic – I wanted to use an implement specifically designed

to terminate a cover crop. The chevron blade design offers a smooth ride for the operator. It is also fuel-efficient and crimps the stalk of the plant in several places. This action prevents the continued flow of nutrients, while keeping the stalk connected to the root system. All other mechanical termination techniques dismember the stalks and create a less uniform mulch system that decomposes more quickly. For longer-term weed suppression, there needs to be a thick mat of uniform mulch. With enough biomass and optimum timing, the terminating action of the roller-crimper meets this goal.

**FRANCIS:** It can be used in certified organic production because it doesn't require the use of synthetic herbicides. It is faster, easier, better for the soil and requires less energy than incorporating a cover crop with tillage. It allows the cover crop to develop much more biomass before termination, providing multiple soil benefits.

### How did you decide when to terminate the cover crop?

**BILLY:** The optimum termination date is when the rye is in total anthesis, or pollen-shedding. Depending on the cultivar and weather, this typically happens between late May and mid-June. A series of late-May rainstorms forecast this year prompted us to roll before total anthesis. We drilled the soybeans into the standing



↑ Soybeans at Billy's with rye "mulch" between the rows. The soybeans were drilled on May 20; the rye was rolled on May 22 and subsequently mowed (above soybean canopy) on June 20. Photo taken on July 3.



↑ Francis Thicke (right) and Billy Sammons (left) describe how they used a roller-crimper to terminate a cereal rye cover crop at Billy's field day on June 15.

rye on May 20 and crimped the next day. Since our fields had been in ridge till, we crimped twice, once in each direction.

Although flattened, much of the rye persisted and managed to stand back up. We were aware this was likely to happen since we crimped earlier than was ideal. Based on recommendations, we decided to mow the basal shoot heads with a rotary mower on June 20.

### Any caveats or disadvantages to the technique?

**BILLY:** Dr. Erin Silva, a researcher at University of Wisconsin, has been experimenting with roller-crimping and rye cover crops for the last eight years. In her experience, there is often an approximately 5-bushel yield detriment due to a number of factors: cooler soil temperatures, nitrogen tie-up, moisture and nutrient competition. The beans just tend to grow a bit slower in the V1 to V3 stages. As nodule growth accelerates, the plants get back on track.

We will walk rows early to thwart perennial weeds. The thick mat and allelopathic effect of the rye has controlled annuals well. However, one could cultivate with an older single-sweep, high-residue field cultivator in 30-inch rows. Those were common in the '70s and had dual-gauge wheels to hold down the residue.

**FRANCIS:** One potential drawback of letting rye go to anthesis for rolling is that, in a year that is dry in spring or early summer, the rye can take up a lot of the soil moisture, making the soil dry for soybean establishment and growth. That was the case here in southeast Iowa this year.

However, rains did come in early July, and having the rolled-down rye mat on the surface turned into an advantage. The rye mat pretty much eliminated erosion during hard rains. It also increased rain infiltration by protecting the soil from sealing by the driving rain, and holding the water back from surface runoff. The rye mat or mulch will also reduce water lost to evaporation, compared to soil without a mulch cover.

### From your experiences, what are your tips for success?

**BILLY:** Wait as long as possible to crimp to allow for maximum biomass – but don't worry if you miss the ideal crimping window. If necessary, one can always mow the remaining heads. It is important to plant the soybeans when there is adequate moisture so they get a good start. In no-till fields, increasing the planting rate by up to 30 percent is a recommended strategy. Be ready to implement a rescue strategy if your rye stand is too thin in some parts of your field. An alternative is to incorporate those areas as a green

manure and cultivate as necessary for weed management.

**FRANCIS:** The most important factor is getting the cover crop to produce enough biomass before terminating it by rolling. Research has found that 5,000 pounds of cover crop biomass per acre are needed for adequate weed control. Early planting of the cover crop is the best way to achieve a high cover-crop biomass. The later the cover crop is planted, the higher the seeding rate should be for the cover crop.

Another important consideration is using a no-till drill or planter that can cut through the cover-crop residue and get the soybean seeds planted consistently at the proper depth with good seed cover.

This system is still experimental, so I would suggest trying it first on a small scale to see how it might work on your farm, with your equipment. ■

*Learn more about the field day Billy co-hosted with George Naylor, Joanna Hunter and Patti Edwardson to showcase their roller-crimper, and view photos, in this field day recap on our blog: [practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/06/22/rolling-2016-field-day-season-churdan](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/06/22/rolling-2016-field-day-season-churdan)*



# FARMER-LED LEARNING





## Opposite page:

**Clockwise from top left:** ▶ Leroy Zimmerman (holding mic) takes guests on a tour of his pick-your-own strawberry field.

▶ Virgil Knobloch (left) and Doug Peterson, the Iowa/Missouri regional soil health specialist with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) show guests the soil in Virgil's rotationally grazed, intensively managed pasture.

▶ Nathan Anderson (center) shows guests a field of oats on his farm. He and his family integrate small grains into their crop rotation.

▶ Todd Hammen, with Iowa Energy Alternatives, discusses the photovoltaic solar array installed on Lee Tesdell's property during the field day at his farm.

▶ Emma and Marcus Johnson (left and right) demonstrate a summer pruning technique on one of their dwarf apple trees.



# NETWORKING



## This page:

**Clockwise from top right:** ▶ Aaron Lehman (second from right) talks with field day attendees in his field.

▶ Guests enjoy time to network during Nathan Anderson's field day.

▶ PFI member Mike DeCook (left) chats with Justin Petersen during the Petersen family field day.

▶ Charlotte Shivers (left), a past recipient of PFI's Farmland Owner Award, chats with Linda Appelgate during the Petersen family field day.

▶ PFI member Earl Hafner (orange shirt) chats with fellow member Jeremy Gustafson (second from right) and two others attending Billy Sammons' and George Naylor's field day.

▶ Guests have a chance to speak with Carmen Black (second from right).



## CELEBRATIONS



## FARM ANIMALS

### Farm Animals:

**Clockwise from above:** Sheep munch on hay at Lee Tesdell's farm.

This American toad was found exploring Emma and Marcus Johnson's orchards.

A boy peeks into one of the waterers on Virgil Knobloch's farm, as cattle look on in the background.

Rabbi, Susan Jutz's cat, helps promote PFI's display sign.







## Celebrations:

### Clockwise from top left:

- ▶ Guests at Lee Tesdell's field day enjoy a lunch of Mexican food catered by Victor's Mexican Restaurant in Huxley.
- ▶ Lindsay Kaiser's (right) tot, Weston, is delighted to meet Andrea Rissing (left) during Carmen Black and Susan Jutz's field day.
- ▶ Carlisle Mayor Ruth Randleman (far right) presents the 2016 Practical Farmers of Iowa Farmland Owner Award to Rob and Susan Fleming (center).
- ▶ Guests at Billy Sammons and George Naylor's field day enjoy a lunch provided by local Churdan chefs Tony Pille and Chris Place.

## Enjoying Diverse Farms:

### Clockwise from right:

- ▶ Field day attendees at Nathan Anderson's farm walk through a field of swaying oats.
- ▶ Chad Hensley (far right) points out the Queen Anne's lace flowers that he did not plant, but has used many times in flower bouquets, to illustrate his philosophy of working with nature.
- ▶ Walking through a prairie-covered nob on Aaron Lehman's farm, field day attendees experience a farm vista once common in Iowa.
- ▶ Guests at Susan Jutz and Carmen Black's field day have a chance to see a bigger-scale vegetable operation.

# ENJOYING DIVERSE FARMS



# Experienced Hog Farmers Share Knowledge of Farrowing

by Meghan Filbert

*Farrowing piglets is often the greatest challenge in hog production. In this article, Practical Farmers members share their knowledge of non-confinement hog production, which includes tried-and-true methods of farrowing.*

## Pasture Farrowing Facilities

A growing interest in pastured pork production, especially from beginning farmers, has provoked questions about farrowing hut styles such as: What's the best type of hut to prevent piglets from getting crushed? What's the best way to keep sows comfortable and cool?

### A-Frame Huts

John Gilbert, of Iowa Falls, farrows using an A-Frame hut (you can see the design on the PFI blog, at the link listed at the end of this article). "We farrow in April and September in huts set out on pasture. The doors on the front of the hut are hinged at the top, so they swing out. The swinging door allows for sows to get in and out easily," explains John, whose sows are able to access shared feeders at any time, and then return to their piglets. To help control the temperature in the hut, John says the doors are left closed when they want to keep heat in and propped open when ventilation is needed.

The A-frames have triangular front and back walls, and sloping rectangular roofs that comprise the side walls. Each measures 6 feet by 8 feet, and John's design features



John Gilbert stands by some of his A-frame pasture farrowing huts. Sloped sidewalls in both A-frame and E-hut designs create spaces the sows cannot access, thus providing a safe, protective area for piglets.

plywood and lumber framing for the entire structure. Metal sheeting is then laid over the wooden frame to form the sloping roof. The A-frames also sit on skids, making them very stable and mobile. This style of hut costs about \$300 to \$350 in plywood to construct, plus the cost of metal sheeting. John used metal he found around the farm to cover the roofs. If you're interested in building an A-frame farrowing hut, John gladly offers his help in erecting one.

### E-Huts

E-huts are another type of mobile pasture hut, designed by members Tom Frantzen, of New Hampton, and Dan Wilson, of Paullina, in 2000. The "E" in the name stands for "electronic," because the design was meant to be shared electronically (the design for

this hut is at the same blog link). "These huts are designed to waste no plywood," Tom says. "The door post is the most important feature to get right. A rear door is designed to open for ventilation, and also so the hut can be picked up with a bucket loader." These huts are a cheap option for beginning farmers, he adds, because the entire structure only costs about \$300 to build. Both E-huts and A-frames are thought to be better for farrowing than the classic rounded, metal Port-A-Huts because they don't heat up as much, they provide better ventilation and have safe corners for piglets.

### Indoor Farrowing Barn

Jim and LeeAnn VanDerPol, of Kerkhoven, Minnesota, farrow year-round in a specially designed barn. They've been raising sows



Piglets follow their mother to a hut on John Gilbert's farm.



Tom Frantzen opens the back door on an E-hut used for pasture farrowing.



**Above-Left:** Jim VanDerPol (top row, far right) poses with his family in their farrowing barn. **Above-Right:** Sows and their piglets rest in pens inside the VanDerPols' farrowing barn.

since 1978 and have tried many farrowing systems – crates, pens and Port-A-Huts on pasture – but decided to build a farrowing barn to meet year-round demand. “As our meat business started to grow, we needed to keep a steady supply of retail cuts for restaurants and groceries,” Jim explains.

The barn, built in 2013, houses 30 pens, each 6 feet wide by 11 feet long, with diagonal guard rails to protect piglets. Its most unique feature is the geothermal system under the concrete floor. “We need to keep sows cool during the summer and warm in the winter, so we dug a 400-foot-long trench and buried pipe, in order to use underground temperatures,” Jim says. In the summer, the floor is kept just above 70 degrees, and sows can be found lying on the cool concrete. The VanDerPols can even get by with not turning all the barn fans on. This winter, they hope to pump warm water under the pens, though they have not yet installed a boiler or heat pump. “We may need to continue using a space heater in the winter, which worked just fine last year,” Jim says. “This is a sophisticated and expensive method of farrowing, but we need this to supply our meat business, which in turn pays for the barn.”

## Tips from the Experts

### Genetics

John Gilbert advises those wishing to pasture-farrow to pay attention to pig genetics. “You must pick genetics and sow disposition to match your system,” he says. “Get breeding stock from someone using a system you want to use. It’s important the

sow has intelligence and instinct, which is what mothering is all about. You want your animals to know what to do instead of you having to force them to do it. Remember, the more freedom you give them, the more intelligence they have to have.” One clue, he says, is to look at a hog’s ears: Sows with upright ears that stick straight out tend to be more flighty, and “you do not want these animals as breeding sows.”

### Keep It Simple

Both John and Jim advise beginners to start small and simple. “The great thing about hogs is that you can grow as fast or as slow as you want because a sow will reproduce several times every year,” John says. He recommends starting with two or three sows. Jim adds: “When starting with a pasture system, you don’t need many acres and you can raise sows quite cheaply. Position the farrowing huts upslope, where water won’t pool, and on gravelly soil if possible.” John uses one square bale of straw in each hut to get sows started, then uses less bedding once the sow and piglets start spending more time outside. If you’re farrowing in the spring and it’s cold and wet, more bedding is necessary. Another point to remember: “Hogs need shade,” Jim says. “You should make a wallow if the sows need more cooling than the hut provides.”

### Feeding

You can feed sows right on the ground or use self-feeders. The Gilberts use self-feeders and put up fencing to create groups of 10 sows per feeder, which reduces feed competition. These feeders reduce labor

and sows can get to them day or night. They can also teach their piglets where to find feed and how to use the feeders. A balanced ration is essential, Jim says: “Ensure enough protein, because sows can eat their litter if they are not getting enough protein from forage or grain.”

### Other Recommendations

Both John and Jim say mobile water wagons can be used to fill water troughs, and one strand of electric fencing works when sows are trained to it. Both try to farrow within a two-week window; wean piglets when they are five to six weeks old; and castrate piglets before they are two weeks old. Neither uses ear notches. Both farmers’ average litter size is 11 to 12 piglets, with a death loss of one-and-a-half to two piglets per litter. When handling piglets, they recommend a three-point hog cart, to offer protection from the sow.

For John, pasture-farrowing is part of an approach to raising livestock that emphasizes animal husbandry, rather than technology: “Husbandry skills will always be much more valuable than technology.” ■

## Learn More

➔ Find the farrowing hut designs referenced in this article, including detailed drawings and photos, at [practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/07/15/niche-pork-farrowing-hut-designs-frame-e-hut/](http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2016/07/15/niche-pork-farrowing-hut-designs-frame-e-hut/)

➔ Keep your eye out for an in-depth niche pork production workshop geared toward beginning farmers in early 2017!

## Starting Farms that Fit Lifestyle Goals

*Community support is key for three beginning farms*

by Greg Van Den Berghe

**"How do I start farming without risking everything?" This is a question many aspiring farmers ask when planning to start farming. For some, starting small – and within their financial means – is the approach that best fits their personal comfort level. I recently met with some beginning farmers who are at various stages of growth to see how this approach has worked for them, and where they are at today with their budding farm businesses.**

**W**hat seemed to be a common thread among all the beginning farmers I spoke with was a feeling of needing to place their roots near a community that fits their lifestyles and supports their values. Access to opportunities for off-farm income was a related theme: Many beginning farmers rely on off-farm jobs to cushion their risk, and the availability of jobs, in turn, influences the locations they seek to start their farms.

### Little Mountain Farm

Proximity to a major urban market was a big reason why Ali Clark and her partner Scott Yahnke, of Little Mountain Farm, chose to start their vegetable farming venture near Honey Creek, in western Iowa. While Ali and Scott both have experience working on farms, this is their first season operating their own farm. Scott has worked on a variety of farms, and Ali got her start in 2012 at Big Muddy Urban Farm, a collectively managed CSA and market farm that she started with seven other farmers in Omaha. She worked at Big Muddy for four years, before transitioning it to a non-profit, where she currently serves as a board member.

Being part of the collective proffered an important source of community and support, Ali says: "It allowed the farmers to learn from each other and share in the failures and successes of the farm." Both she and Scott also have off-farm

jobs: Ali coordinates communications and marketing for City Sprouts, a community garden and urban farm in Omaha, while Scott works as the urban farm coordinator at the Omaha Home for Boys.

When Ali and Scott decided they were ready to pursue their own farm, their local connections proved valuable in helping them secure a lease on land – the next step along their farming journey before seeking to purchase their own farm. Through a series of conversations (and some coffee), they connected with fellow farmers market friend Rebecca Bloom, whose current tenant was looking to move. "Rebecca was not sure she wanted to continue farming the land in full on her own," Ali recalls. "She said she might be looking to find tenants who would rent and tend part or all of the land." That conversation eventually led to Scott and Ali leasing Rebecca's farm. This year, Ali and Scott have a 16-member CSA and sell produce through the Gifford Park Neighborhood Market in Omaha. Using the CSA model has been helpful to them, Ali says, because they are able to secure much-needed income in the beginning of the season to help with operating costs when they're most in need of cash.

Ali says being close to Omaha keeps their delivery costs lower and provides access to an abundance of customers that a more distant rural market may not afford.



Scott Yahnke and Ali Clark

She adds that "having an off-farm job is part of the reality when starting a farm," and says finding an off-farm job could be challenging if they were located farther from an urban area. "Here, we have the chance to balance both worlds."

Creating Little Mountain Farm in their present location is the first step toward building their farming dream. Proximity to a supportive community has been another boon of being near Omaha, but Ali says she and Scott eventually want to find a bigger plot of land that will let them "farm at a level that will keep us on the farm and sustain our way of life."



A view of Little Mountain Farm



Cait Caughey and Tyler Magnuson with son Catalpa (standing) and daughter Mira.



Jon Yagla and Wren Almitra



A view of vegetable plots at Botna Burrow

## Botna Burrow

Forty-five minutes east of Honey Creek, just within the city limits of Hancock, is Botna Burrow, the 8.5-acre farm where Tyler Magnuson and Cait Caughey, with their two young children, are growing food for their CSA and local markets. Tyler and Cait have been farming at Botna Burrow for the past three years, and like Ali, also got their start farming at Big Muddy Urban Farm. Tyler says the supportive community they encountered while working with the other members at Big Muddy helped them develop the confidence to jump out on their own and start farming for their growing family. When some friends announced they were moving from their leased farm in Hancock and it would be available, Tyler and Cait jumped at the chance to move to a larger farm. While Tyler works full-time at Botna Burrow, Cait helps boost the farm income with her off-farm job as a garden educator for a local organization. Thanks to a connection made through their local community, Tyler and Cait have just started leasing a nearby 40-acre apple orchard. The orchard has been abandoned for the last 15 years and needs some significant restoration. In return for that attention, the landlord offered the couple a free lease.

Tyler and Cait have dreams of growing bigger still: They are currently seeking a 20- to 40-acre plot that will let them scale up and allow a friend, who is interested in using draft horses, to join the farm. "We know there will be more debt involved once we find this land," Tyler says, but adds they have effectively managed their current, smaller debt. With their commitment to farming, he says he

is confident they will be able to handle a bigger debt load. Tyler cites one key relationship he and Cait have made: They have forged a positive working relationship with their Farm Service Agency loan officer, who has been helping them secure FSA's Beginning Farmer Microloans to manage their operating expenses. As they look to the future, they know there are FSA loans available to help grow their farm and the possibility of a family investor to participate in the land purchase.

## The Millet Seed Farm

Tucked away on a charming dead-end street in Iowa City is the urban farm of Jon Yagla and Wren Almitra, whose backyard blooms with produce that supplies their small-scale farm, The Millet Seed Farm. Their neighbors' properties – which feature homes with solar panels and edible gardens instead of lawns – suggest the presence of a like-minded, supportive community. "I don't think I would have started the urban farm if it wasn't for the CSA model," Jon says. "It fits so well with our subsistence farming goals and allows us to stay small, highly diversified and connect with our community – which are all central to our mission." Most of The Millet Seed Farm's 16 shares have been purchased by families and individuals within a few blocks, making on-farm pick-up very easy (and eliminating costs associated with driving to CSA drop-off locations).

The couple originally intended to find land in the country to start their farm and homestead, but revised that plan when they realized the possibilities inherent in their urban home, along with other resources available in the city. In addition to farming their backyard, Jon rents three other plots in the neighborhood using a

credit system that offers the landlord \$10 in vegetable credit for each 100 square feet of garden space – an arrangement that greatly reduces Jon's capital expenses and avoids debt. Jon's business plan specifies his intent to farm about one-tenth of an acre, and reach 20 CSA shares to obtain his income goals. Wren works off the farm for Women, Food and Agriculture Network, while Jon works miscellaneous construction jobs in the winter, during the farm's downtime. Jon and Wren seek to make a difference at the neighborhood scale: Their top goal is to provide food and resources for themselves, while contributing food to the neighborhood at the same time.

## Advice to Aspiring Farmers

These three farm families all agree that, while the variety of ways to start a farm is endless, it's critical to make sure you start out in a way that fits your needs and goals. Use your business plan as an opportunity to explore what those goals are and how they mesh with your values. The business planning process is also an opportunity to imagine how accruing debt fits into your plan and to identify the resources available within your community.

Practical Farmers of Iowa offers the Savings Incentive Program to help beginning farmers learn strategies that can help them be successful with their farm start-ups. Those enrolled get help drafting a business plan, encouragement to save money – along with a savings match after successfully completing the two-year program – and the chance to learn from experienced farm mentors. Practical Farmers has many resources available to support beginning farmers; let us know how we can help you. ■

## Frankly Speaking

### Farmer's candid comment in newspaper spurs discussion

Compiled by  
Steve Carlson

**"I paid a lot for my land and I'll farm it the way I want, and that means corn. I expect farm organizations to protect my business from stupid regulations, and they do. If you want me to put conservation on my land to protect water, you'll have to pay more than I've seen offered so far."**

*This post, signed by "Central Iowa Farmer," appeared in the Des Moines Register in early June, in the popular anonymous comment column "Your 2 Cents' Worth." The sentiment caught the attention of some Practical Farmers members, spurring a discussion about the roots of some farmers' attitudes against conservation.*

**John Gilbert**, of Iowa Falls, started the discussion when he shared the comment on PFI's policy email discussion list, where members are welcome to constructively discuss their views on agriculture and its intersection with politics, society and advocacy. "It's a good reminder of why promoting sustainable approaches is such an important undertaking," John said. "I think we all suspected this was a common industrial attitude among some of our neighbors, but the starkness of his statements are a little surprising." Other members joined the thread, sharing some thoughtful responses.

**Kamyar Enshayan**, of Cedar Falls, responded that the anonymous farmer's comment "contradicts the image of the farmer as conservationist promoted by the corn growers [association]." **Francis Thicke**, of Fairfield, alluding to Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, added: "And our politicians tell us that a voluntary approach will solve our water quality problems."



"Sadly, that level of arrogance is becoming all too common," **Vic Madsen**, of Audubon, replied. "Maybe part of it goes back to the years of \$7 corn," he continued, in an effort

to make sense of the writer's unapologetic statement. "Many farmers made an unbelievable amount of money then, and that really blew up their egos."

**Frank Santana**, of Winterset, voiced frustration with the anonymous farmer's

disregard for other people's property and shared resources, like waterways. "I see a total disregard for 'freedom / Liberty' as defined by the Founding Fathers, to live your life as you choose, as long as you do not harm other persons or their property. When farmers' methods harm my property, my health or community property (our waterways), then we have a problem."

**Keith Kuper**, of Ackley, lamented that more people don't "do the right thing out of love for our planet and other beings," but said he believes the reality of living in a competitive economy is that most people act out of self interest, and likely share the anonymous farmer's attitude: "I'm not a pessimist, but someone who has been involved in agriculture my entire life, farmed on my own for more than two decades, worked for major corporations, operated businesses apart from farming and observed human nature since I was old enough to be aware. I don't think we can expect people to impose costs on themselves in a competitive economy unless compelled to do so by a 'green ticket' (subsidy) or 'red ticket' (force of law). I wish banks and manufacturers and insurers and brokerage houses and farmers, and everyone else, would do the right thing out of love for our planet and other beings – but that world doesn't exist. Voluntary approaches to environmental protection haven't worked in any other economic sector, so I don't know why they would work in agriculture. The farmer making the anonymous comment is speaking honestly and probably reflects the attitude of most farmers."

**Jack Knight**, of Luana, agreed that the farmer's sentiment is likely widespread. "In my estimation, this is a more common attitude. Seems the defiant ones are digging in their heels deeper rather than being

convinced to work together on the nutrient reduction plan. I hope and pray I am wrong about this."

**Patti Edwardson**, of Churdan, placed some of the blame on a flawed agricultural system:

"When I hear farmers say something like the one quoted, I most often hear a sense of desperation, despair and defensiveness. Farmers work within an industrialized system that tells them it is okay to mine the land by growing only corn and soybeans (or only corn), and to put animals in confinements to eat all that corn and soy. The ag organizations tell farmers they are doing a great job because they are feeding the world. When the farmer feels attacked by the rest of society for not using better farming practices, the [sentiment in the] quote is how he will react."



**Clark Porter**, of Waterloo, concurred with the pervasiveness of the farmer's attitude – but also took a more historical view, seeing it as the "unfortunate consequence" of the Jeffersonian ethos: "Like others, I regard the anonymous farmer's attitude as common. He views himself as an autonomous entity; except for his lender, his responsibility towards others ends at his fence line. This is the independent landholder that Jefferson idealized. And farmers are independent – nobody else will pay a farmer's loans or assume the farmer's risk. The problem is that watersheds extend beyond fence lines. When we think in terms of watersheds, the autonomous, private landholder model no longer applies. We have to figure out how to make the borders of watersheds the new 'fence line' for farmers. Watershed groups help, and regulations or incentives may reinforce the idea. However, for now, the fence line remains the economic border and the watershed remains an ethical border." ■

## Join the Discussion

➔ Email [info@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:info@practicalfarmers.org) to join any (or all) of PFI's email discussion groups. Lists include: General, Cover Crops, Field Crops, Horticulture, Livestock and Policy.

# Advocating for Crop Insurance Reform in the Nation's Capital

By Ron Rosmann

*Practical Farmers of Iowa is a big tent, which is paramount to the effectiveness of our open, sharing membership that welcomes everyone. To preserve this openness, we remain neutral on most policy matters. Our formal policy work at Practical Farmers strives to reflect the organization's history and values of supporting positive alternatives for farmers, and focuses on supporting sustainable agriculture research, beginning farmers and conservation programs.*

*Individually, however, many PFI members dedicate time to advocate for farm policies they believe in. Here is one farmer's views on crop insurance and a report of his work to educate others.*

I traveled to Washington D. C. in late June on behalf of Rural Advancement Foundation International-North Carolina (RAFI) to ask for federal crop insurance reforms. RAFI is a part of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, of which PFI is a member. I traveled with two Latino women, both diversified vegetable farmers, from North Carolina and South Carolina. The purpose of the trip was to meet with Senate and House members and their staff to make recommendations on how to improve crop insurance programs in the next farm bill, including in the states of Iowa, North Carolina and South Carolina.

One of our meetings was a one-on-one visit with Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa. We also had the opportunity to meet with the chief administrator of the Risk Management Agency (RMA) and his program administrators. RMA is responsible for administering all federal crop insurance programs.

Our recommendations for improving crop insurance programs centered around three areas:

- 1). Improving access to insurance for beginning farmers
- 2). Tying conservation practices to crop insurance programs
- 3). Improving Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP)

Compared to established farmers, beginning farmers are discriminated against in various ways from obtaining crop insurance. For instance, beginning farmers are required to have coverage at the 65 percent level – which rarely pays a claim – but higher levels are generally too costly for beginners. Beginning farmers are also assigned an 80 percent county yield average, whereas established farmers can transfer three years of yields from their present farmland to any new farm they are working. We recommended a 10 percent subsidy bonus to beginning farmers and no fees for catastrophic coverage change for 10 years.

In the area of conservation, we recommended that crop insurance program compliance be tied to conservation compliance. Conservation practices and diversified cropping systems should not be discouraged as they currently are. For example, forage and grassland coverage should be encouraged, and programs should be favorable enough so as not to discourage retention



**SPEAKING OUT:** Ron Rosmann (left) poses with Esmeralda Sandoval and Martha Calderon in front of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington D.C.

of grazing systems. Cover crop termination guidelines requiring specified dates should be eliminated. Crop insurance does not address biodiversity or water and soil quality, and only minimally addresses soil conservation issues. The amount of subsidy bears no correlation to a farmer's commitment to good stewardship. Crop insurance should be a safety net for farmers and our food supply. It is supposed to replace past crop subsidies that have tended to encourage farm consolidation and misuse of our soil and water resources. If crop insurance encourages the same poor farming practices and further consolidation in farming, it will not serve the interests of our nation.

Improvements also need to be made to Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), including providing more training for agents and prospective farmers wanting to participate. Participation by most states, including Iowa, has been low up to now. The Risk Management Agency suggested that WFRP, with some necessary improvements, could be a very effective program for diversified crop and vegetable farmers.

This trip turned out to be a good one for starting to impact how crop insurance programs can be improved in the next farm bill. It was well worth the effort when I really needed to be at home helping to take care of this year's crop. ■

*Ron Rosmann farms with his family at Rosmann Family Farms, near Harlan, Iowa. The farm consists of certified organic cattle, hogs, egg layers and a range of crops, including popcorn, soybeans, corn, small grains, hay and pasture, annual forages and cover crops.*

## For Love of Land and Community

### Flemings find joy in restoring and sharing Carlisle farmland

by Tamsyn Jones

On July 16, Rob and Susan Fleming were honored as the recipients of Practical Farmers' 2016 Farmland Owner Award during a farm tour and award ceremony attended by 130 people. The event was an opportunity for guests to see how the Flemings have used their farmland near Carlisle to help two beginning farmers gain land access, and view the fruits of their long-term commitment to land stewardship and conservation.

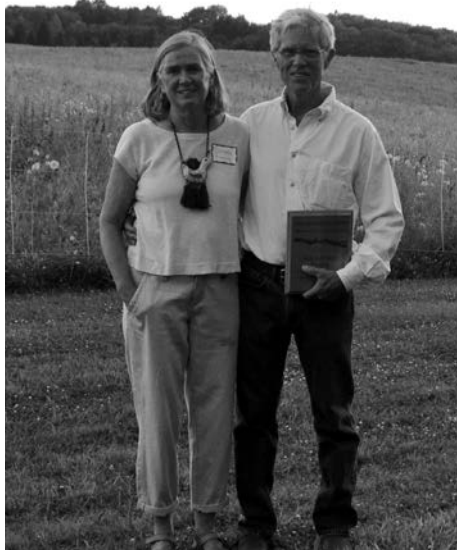
The Farmland Owner Award is granted annually by PFI to non-operator landowners who use their land to help the next generation get started, advance land stewardship, and promote long-term sustainability of farm businesses, environmental quality and rural communities. With this award, Practical Farmers seeks to call attention to the huge role non-operator farmland owners are playing in the future success of sustainable agriculture.

"Rob left as a young man to make his career elsewhere, but then returned later in life to make the farm he inherited – and Iowa – a better place," says Mark Peterson, who farms near Stanton and serves as president of Practical Farmers' board of directors, which selects the award recipients.

"We need more landowners like Rob and Susan. They are willing to provide farmers access to their land in the rapidly developing Des Moines metro area. They also are willing to go the extra mile to help a beginning farmer and a refugee farmer succeed at their farming careers."

#### A Calling to Conserve and Share

After Rob inherited part of his family farm – Danamere Farms, Inc. – he felt a strong calling to explore how the land could be used to support conservation and the community of Carlisle, which his parents, Robert Sr. and Ann Fleming,



had been deeply committed to. He and his wife, Susan, purchased the shares of land his two brothers had inherited and started working with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) and RDG Planning & Design on a master plan for conservation on the 100 acres they now owned.

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*"I'm in love with the place I grew up on. I had fantasized about being involved in conservation of the farm ever since I went to graduate school in the 1970s."* – ROB FLEMING

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As part of the prairie and savanna restoration efforts, Rob and Susan started renting pasture to PFI member Aaron White, a beginning farmer and lessee at the Fleming farm's next-door neighbor. They fenced off the portion Aaron wanted to graze, and cut a corridor in the woods between their properties to move the cattle. To make rental costs more manageable for Aaron, they worked out a fee based on the stocking rate instead of a per-acre agreement.

This spring, they started renting 2 acres to Alex Congera, of Des Moines, a refugee from Burundi and graduate of Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program, so he and his family can raise vegetable crops. Rob and Susan have also donated part of their land to the City of Carlisle for bike trail access, and are exploring how they can work with the Carlisle school district to use their land as an outdoor natural history and farm-to-school classroom.

"I'm in love with the place I grew up on," Rob says. "I had fantasized about being involved in conservation of the farm ever since I went to graduate school in the 1970s. The farm has a unique prairie and oak savanna environment, which is endangered. There are not many of these natural systems left in the Midwest. At the same time, I was intrigued by the potentialities of how the land could be used to assist beginning farmers in getting going, for open space preservation and for engaging the community."

#### Conservation, Community are Family Traditions

Rob grew up on the farm, which his grandfather first purchased in the late 1920s and his father later farmed. He moved to the East Coast for school, where he studied landscape architecture, and he and Susan settled in Philadelphia – but his interest in the farm and his parents' activities related to it remained.

Originally consisting of 280 acres, Rob's grandmother sold the first big chunk of it, about 100 acres, in the mid-1950s. His parents later inherited the farm, and Rob recounts how they were both conservation-minded and community-oriented. Both were active with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation – his mother was a founding board member – and Rob's father worked with the board of the West Des Moines-based Hubbell Realty to get new housing designs into Carlisle featuring denser buildings and narrower streets in order to accommodate more open space.

In the early 2000s, Rob's father sold 90 acres to Hubbell Realty with the proviso that they integrate conservation





**Above-Left:** Beginning livestock farmer Aaron White speaks during the awards ceremony. The Flemings are renting pasture to Aaron as part of their prairie restoration work. **Above-Right:** Alex Congera (top left) poses with his family, who now have 2 acres of land on which to raise vegetable crops.

development. To make good on the agreement, Hubbell is maintaining the open space as restored prairie. "Dad was intrigued at enabling this relatively new kind of development – like a golf course community with the open space, but without the course," Rob says. "Part of the deal was that he'd go to bat to have a new zoning category approved in Carlisle that allows housing to be closer and streets narrower, to allow for this open space – and he succeeded."

Part of the land sale helped Carlisle expand its frontage – including construction of a grocery store, which it lacked at the time – and part was used to provide the Carlisle school district with a place to build a new school. "Right next door to Danamere Farms is the middle school, now 10 years old, which Dad offered as a way to keep Carlisle walkable for school children," Rob says. "He believed, as I do, that any school should be close to downtown and accessible. Dad was a believer in the town and wanted to make these developments possible."

## A Long-Term Vision

When Rob took over managing the farm, he laid out four main goals for his vision of Danamere Farms' potential. He saw the farm as a place where natural history education, farm-to-school, prairie and savanna restoration, working lands and recreation – including fishing access from the farm's pond, and the bike trail that gives residents access to Warren County's 11-mile Summerset Trail – could all co-exist. Achieving this vision has involved

ongoing research, financial and personal commitment, and a broad consortium of groups and people whom Rob has sought for advice and support.

Through word-of-mouth, he discovered Alex Congera. Practical Farmers' Find-A-Farmer website linked him almost instantly to Aaron White. He credits Mark Ackelson, Lisa Hein and Joe McGovern of INHF, and Doug Adamson and Eric Iverson of RDG Planning & Design, for their role in helping develop the master land conservation plan.

Other milestones on his journey as a farmland owner were partly serendipitous. A personal connection led Rob to Fred Kirschenmann, of the Stone Barns Center in New York and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, who helped him realize the imperative of adding grazing livestock back to his prairie-savanna ecosystem. Rob says he was also inspired by now-retired Carlisle school teacher Sue Boll who, until she retired, used to bring children to the farm to learn about natural history.

While he's making progress on his vision for the farm, the work continues. Rob patch-burns one-third of his prairie and oak savanna each year, which Aaron's cattle then graze, to promote species diversity. He is excited to see how Alex's farming venture, which just started this spring, unfolds. He is also eager to see young people learning from his land once again.

"I want to develop a farm-to-school relationship. It could be education about

where food comes from, or growing food to eat in the school cafeteria. It could be summer programs, or teaching the art of food preservation," Rob says. "There are all kinds of things that could happen between our farm and Carlisle Community Schools."

## Lessons to Other Farmland Owners

Farmland ownership continues to be a source of inspiration for Rob as he sees the pieces of his vision coming together – and imagines other ways he can use the land to better the community and environment. Rob encourages other landowners to be creative with their land – and to approach the question of farmland succession with an open mind.

"There are alternatives to renting your land to corn and soybean farmers," he says. "Especially for those who own land close to a metro area, there are a lot of interesting things you can do besides simply leaving the land to your heirs – which also has tax consequences. But if you do have row crop farmers as tenants, it's still possible for a vegetable farmer to make money on even a small part of that land. It's important to diversify."

"What we're doing here at Danamere Farms, it's all in the realm of doing good and doing the right thing – helping farmers get started, and preserving the land," Rob says. "The payoffs in personal fulfillment are huge." ■

## Member Spotlight: Joe Olsen, Volunteer Extraordinaire

by Sally Worley

Independence, Iowa, is abuzz with local food efforts, and one Practical Farmers member can be found at the heart of all the activity.

Here are some of the many local foods activities happening in town:

- Buchanan County Extension is hiring its first local foods coordinator.
- The city's parks and recreation department started a fruit orchard, as well as rentable raised-bed community plots on unused city property.
- Buchanan County Master Gardeners is helping Prairie Hills Senior Living design raised-bed gardens.
- Independence Community School District has been a Farm to School Chapter with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Farm to School Chapter Initiative since 2009.
- The elementary school has its Mustang Roots and Shoots garden, consisting of 13 raised beds, each with its own theme – such as stone soup, butterfly and prairie beds.
- The new high school includes a greenhouse for Future Farmers of America (FFA) and education. In fall 2013, Independence brought agriculture curriculum back after a 50-year absence. The school raises sweet corn and just completed raised beds to plant in next year.
- First Presbyterian Church started a community garden with help from Buchanan County Master Gardeners.

These efforts have taken an enormous amount of time and energy from many people. One person present in each effort above is Joe Olsen. Joe has connected people and educated children, teachers and community members on how to raise and prepare fresh produce. Joe has been a Practical Farmers member since 2008, and still vividly recalls where he was when he was inspired to join. "I was at Eric and Ann Franzenburgs' [farm]. I read the vision and joined to take advantage of the network, to talk with everyone and learn what was

going on. I still have PFI's vision on my refrigerator."

Joe's intelligence, contagious energy and relaxed personality make him easy to like and be around. Joe does not farm commercially, but the 3 semi-rural acres he and his wife Judy own are brimming with flower and food gardens. Retired from a career as a social worker for Area Education Agency, Joe spends significant time helping his community. "Many years ago, I read something like 'Volunteering is the rent you pay for living in a community,'" he says. "That hit me. I'm simply paying my rent." Working on issues he is passionate about is what fuels Joe's volunteer efforts. "My interests started with gardening, which led to an interest in cooking, then paying attention to where and how my food is grown," he says. "It's been a wonderful journey."

During this journey, Joe attended a Regional Food Systems Working Group meeting, where a speaker talked about the importance of food as an economic development tool – a notion he says "hadn't occurred to [him]" until then. He also connected with Kamyar Enshayan and the Northern Iowa Food and Farm Partnership. "Kamyar was very helpful in guiding me through ropes on farmers markets and connecting me with resources to make what I was doing better." Joe joined the Independence Chamber of Commerce and became a chamber board member to help spur economic growth related to local food. He rekindled Independence Farmers Market in 2005, after it had been absent for many years, and served as the volunteer market manager until last year. He also served on the school board in 2008, when Farm to School chapters were first forming in Iowa. He advocated for Independence to apply, and the city became one of the first Farm to School chapters in Iowa. Joe says: "Volunteering is about pursuing opportunities that present themselves, as well as networking."

Joe is currently helping Buchanan County Extension staff hire a county local foods coordinator. The Independence School



Joe with his wife Judy Olsen. Judy serves as secretary of the Buchanan County Extension Council.

District, hospital and city have committed to jointly funding this position for three years. He is also working on PFI member T.D. Holub's farm near Coggon. In addition to providing labor, Joe wants to help T.D. and other area farmers figure out logistics to increase production in order to add restaurants and institutions to their food sales.

As anyone who has worked in volunteering knows, particularly in the local food systems arena, the experience can be frustrating. "It is difficult to keep momentum growing. We always need to add new partners and build the work beyond a champion at a school or institution," Joe explains. But he adds that these challenges are part of the journey, and bring their own rewards: "It has been interesting learning and being connected with something I really enjoy." ■

*Joe's volunteerism isn't limited to local foods. He is known around town for other efforts, such as helping with the annual summer Brew BQ, assisting Buchanan County Arts and reading weekly to elementary students with his dog.*

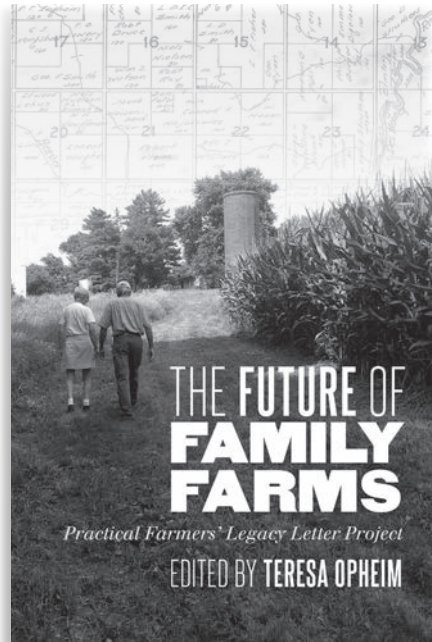
***"Many years ago, I read something like 'Volunteering is the rent you pay for living in a community.' That hit me. I'm simply paying my rent."***

## Cover Revealed: Preorder Now!

“**T**he Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers' Legacy Letters Project,” edited by Teresa Opheim, is getting closer to completion: The book now has a cover design! When you preorder your copy, you'll be first in line to read the many personal stories of families' connections to the land they cherish, and their hopes for the legacy of that land.

The book includes contributions from more than 25 PFI members on farmland legacy, as well as a Q&A with Iowa State University Professor Emeritus Mike Duffy, and essays by playwright Mary Swander, Land for Good's Kathy Ruhf and Teresa Opheim, who directs PFI's Farm Transfer Program.

To preorder "The Future of Family Farms," visit [www.uiowapress.org/books/2016-fall/future-family-farms.html](http://www.uiowapress.org/books/2016-fall/future-family-farms.html); the book will be available in print in September. ■



## Apply to the Savings Incentive Program

**H**ave you been waiting for your chance to apply to Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program (SIP)? Get your business plans ready – and most importantly, your thoughts on why participating in SIP is important to you: **Applications for the next Savings Incentive Program class open on Aug. 22!**

The two-year program helps beginning and aspiring farmers find success with their farm start-ups by helping participants draft a business plan, connect with and learn from experienced farm mentors, matching up to \$2,400 in savings – and more!

“The matching SIP funds certainly have been helpful, but more helpful has been the chance to see what other operations look like through mentorship and PFI events,” says Tony Thompson, of New Family Farm, who graduated from the Savings Incentive Program Class of 2015. “While I’m still figuring out what I’d like my operation to look like five years from now, I’m a lot more aware of what is realistic and what is less realistic.”

**Applications will be accepted until October 7, 2016**, and those enrolled will start in January as part of the SIP Class of 2018. Find the link to apply online – as well as tips on what makes a SIP application stand out – at [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org), or by calling (515) 232-5661. ■

## Order Your New PFI Shirts and Hats!



Fred Abels shows off his new PFI shirt during a cover crops workshop.

(Note: The hat he's wearing is an older version. Order one like it – and see all the merchandise we have available – at [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org)).

**N**ew PFI merchandise is now available. Help spread co-founder Dick Thompson's words of wisdom, "Get along, but don't go along," when you wear one of our new t-shirts! The shirts are 100 percent organic cotton, and are available in dark gray or light blue.

Complement the look with a new Practical Farmers baseball hat, available in dark blue with mesh back, light blue PFI logo and snapping back, or khaki-and-cream fitted style with a green PFI logo.

The cost for t-shirts and hats is \$15 each, plus shipping. Order yours at [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org), or purchase them at upcoming PFI field days and other events where we are exhibiting. ■

## Get to Know Your Neighbors at Upcoming PFI Member Socials!

*Practical Farmers wants to build a stronger sense of community among PFI members (and their neighboring non-members) by providing more opportunities for you to get to know each other – and what better way to do that than to share a meal? Here are the socials coming up in August:*

**+ Sunday, Aug. 21: 12:30 – 3 p.m. – Charles City**

**WENDY JOHNSON and JOHNNY RAFKIN  
JOIA Food Farm**

\* Wendy and Johnny will provide lamb burgers (made with lamb from their farm). Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. BYOB.

\* **Please RSVP** to Lauren Zastrow at [lauren@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:lauren@practicalfarmers.org) or (515) 232-5661 by Thursday, Aug. 18.

**Sunday, Aug. 28: 5 – 8 p.m. – Atlantic GIL and ARDYTH GILLESPIE**

**Harrisdale Farmstead**

\* Gil and Ardyth will provide burgers, condiments, water, iced tea and coffee. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. BYOB.

\* **Please RSVP** to Gil and Ardyth at [gg1localfood@gmail.com](mailto:gg1localfood@gmail.com) or (712) 243-3310 by Friday, Aug. 26.

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

Summer 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 register, call (515) 232-5661 or visit [practicafarmers.org](http://practicafarmers.org).

### AUGUST 20 – TRIPOLI

**Workshop: Enhancing Pollinator Habitat**  
(Xerces Society, Rob and Tammy Faux, Steve Schmidt)

This full-day workshop is for farmers and landowners who want to better understand links between their farm landscape and pollinators. In the morning, Xerces Society pollinator conservation specialist Sarah Foltz Jordan will lead the classroom portion at the extension office. After lunch, the group will caravan to two area farms for “eyes-on” learning.

### AUGUST 20 – WILTON

**Voluntary Robotic Milking and Baleage for Improved Dairy Production**  
(Laura Jones and Steve Leazer)

Join Laura Jones and her dad, Steve Leazer, to see how their 50-head dairy system works. A recently installed voluntary robotic milking system has increased this dairy's milk production and allows more time flexibility. Also learn how this father-daughter team uses baleage for improved forage quality, better animal nutrition and easier feed storage.

### SEPTEMBER 10 – FENTON

**Hazelnut Production and Marketing**  
(IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TREES FOREVER)  
(Jeff, Roger and Joyce Jensen)

Join the Jensen family for a day of learning and fellowship. See the process from nut cluster to bottle of oil and bag of flour. After the field day, Phil Ruger will lead a tour of Ruger Aronia, which is just 2 miles from Hazel Acres.

### SEPTEMBER 12 – 15 – EXIRA

**Livestock Marketing and Stockmanship Schools**  
(Dave and Meg Schmidt – hosting Richard McConnell and Tina Williams)

Learn about livestock marketing and stockmanship from Tina Williams, daughter of Bud Williams, and Richard McConnell, of Hand 'n Hand Livestock Solutions. The cost is \$700 per person for both schools, or \$400 per person for the Marketing School and \$500 per person for the Stockmanship School if registering separately. **PFI members receive a significant discount!**

### SEPTEMBER 25 – DECORAH

**Packhouse Tour and Harvest Efficiency**  
(Erik Sessions and Sara Peterson)

Erik and Sara spent 15 years dreaming about a better packing facility and root cellar. They now have both, but are still figuring out how to best use these farm “tools.” They are excited to show – and discuss details of – the packing facility, root cellar and production area.

### SEPTEMBER 28 – MAXWELL

**Using Ultrasound as a Tool in Grass-Finishing Cattle**  
(Bruce Carney)

**This is the first field day of a two-part series.** At the farm, you will observe grass-fed cattle two weeks before they are harvested at a local locker. These animals will have been ultrasounded twice – as yearlings and as mature cattle – to help determine marbling, rib eye area and backfat within their carcasses. You will visually inspect these cattle and compare observations to the ultrasound data. Discussion will focus on grazing management, forage quality for grass-finishing, what role cattle genetics play in grass-based production, and how ultrasound scans can help producers determine the optimal harvest window for grass-finished cattle.

### OCTOBER 15 – MINGO

**Grading Grass-Finished Carcasses for Meat Quality**  
(Alex Frangopol, Mingo Locker)

**This is the second event of a two-part series.** At the locker, you will inspect four grass-finished beef carcasses from Bruce Carney's cattle (the same animals observed during the Sept. 28 field day). Joe Sellers, ISU Extension beef specialist, will grade these carcasses during the event, discussing meat quality and differences in grass versus grain finishing. You will observe carcass characteristics in each cut, relating them to the live animals inspected two weeks prior.

### NOVEMBER 15 – 17 – WINTERSET

**The Web of Life – Three Days with Fred Provenza**  
(Frank Santana)

Learn from Fred Provenza, renowned animal behaviorist, over three days exploring how behavior links the health of soil, plants, herbivores and humans. Discuss behavioral processes and their implications for what it means for people and the animals in your care to transform – ecologically, economically and culturally – with the landscapes we inhabit. ■

## Welcome, New Members!

### District 2 – North Central

- Mark Fisher, Clear Lake
- Jim Friedericks, AgSource Laboratories, Ellsworth
- David Gerber, Lu Verne
- Zebadiah Gray, Toledo
- Linda Heinzl, Reinbeck
- Jeff Jensen, Fenton
- Savannah Laur, Ames
- Alex Steward, Boone
- Bryan Swenson, Jewell

### District 3 – Northeast

- Gene and Lynn Mealhow, Shellsburg

### District 4 – Southwest

- Stephanie Beavers, Garden Grove

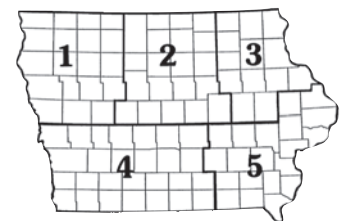
- Julian Galloway, Ankeny
- Penny Perkins, Granger
- Joseph Mickelson, Lamoni
- Jon Neufeld, Des Moines

### District 5 – Southeast

- Cody Kiroff, Davenport

### District 6 – Out of State

- Brian Depew, Lyons, NE
- Sarah and Daniel Fillius, Rushford Village, MN
- Rod, Darcy, Nicholas and Nina Jermanovich, Spickard, MO
- Larry Lawson, Princeton, IL
- Rod and Rick Sommerfield, Mazeppa, MN
- Paul Stewart, Lemken USA, Minnetonka, MN





*By Their Example, PFI Members Offer. . .*

by Teresa Opheim

## Four Tips for Communicating with Family About Your Farm Legacy

### 1. *Communicate Early and Often*

\* **Start as early as possible** and **keep it up** through the years. Your circumstances will change, and so may the decisions you make on your journey to transfer the farm.

\* Once you make significant decisions, you may even need to **communicate them repeatedly**. Gilmore City farmer Linda Lynch reports her children haven't always remembered what she and husband Bob have told them about their farm transfer plans – after all, they are at a different place in their lives.

\* Jane Juchems, who farms with husband Rick near Plainfield has the goal of **no surprises** for the family's farm transfer situation: "Our kids will never get a phone call where we say, 'we sold the farm today.' We will always talk to them about it beforehand."



Jane and Rick Juchems

### 2. *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*

\* **Start by listening** – fully listening – without thinking about what you will say next. Can you listen with an open and soft heart before moving forward to state your own position?

\* **Emotions** about the future of farms **run deep**, and hurts and disappointments often go back to childhood.

\* Do those of us non-farming siblings truly listen about the commitment of farmers like Ron and Dot Dunphy, who have spent a lifetime of blood, sweat and tears improving their own farm? Can those of us who groomed one child for farming **truly listen** to the hurt that might be there for the non-farming heirs?



Ron and Dot Dunphy

### 3. *Use the Best Communication Tool for the Job*

\* Many experts recommend **face-to-face family meetings**. If you can all get together and have productive meetings, like the James family, PFI members from Durango, Colorado, do, that is wonderful.

\* Other technologies – **emails, letters, phone calls** – **might work as well**. Would it be easier to share what matters most to you through a letter? Use email to give people time to think and craft responses? The younger generation communicates in different ways than the older generation does – we will all have to adapt.

\* **All important decisions should be documented** and shared, if appropriate, as our hearing and memories are not always sound.



James family

### 4. *Get Outside Help*

\* Farm transfer is tricky. Often times it is better to have **an independent facilitator** for family meetings or discussions, and to help you work through farm transfer.

\* Martha Skillman is a PFI Farmland Owner Award winner who inherited farmland near Knoxville with her sisters. She sought that help when the sisters set out to decide on the future of their farmland, which includes selling to the James and Julie Petersen family. The Shivers sisters used a social worker for 14 years to **help them negotiate their differences**. Says Martha: "With a group of heirs, differences appear even if their goals are the same. It's to our credit that we got professional help."



Charlotte Shivers and Martha Skillman



# Calendar of Events

## UPCOMING EVENTS ~ AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER

### AUGUST

#### August 19 – 21 – Seed Savers Exchange Seed School | Decorah, IA

Join gardeners from across the country for a weekend of seeds, stories and food. Students will graduate with the confidence to grow, harvest, store and save seeds; engage with their communities through seed libraries, seed swaps and gardens; and discuss the importance of preserving crop diversity. For more, visit: [seedsavers.org/seed-school](http://seedsavers.org/seed-school)

#### August 20 – Mills County Farm Crawl | Mills County, IA

Tour farms in Mills County to see how food is grown and how animals are raised. Help extract honey, visit booths of local vendors, pick up recipes, attend a workshop on planting or cooking, enjoy samples at each farm stop – and more. Stay for a celebration lunch, which can be purchased. All lunch foods will be locally produced. For more, contact Buddi Thompson at (402) 709-2649 or [bthompson2012@rocketmail.com](mailto:bthompson2012@rocketmail.com), or visit [extension.iastate.edu/mills](http://extension.iastate.edu/mills)

#### August 21 – Practical Farmers Potluck | JOIA Food Farm | Charles City, IA | 12:30 – 3 p.m.

Join PFI members Wendy Johnson and Johnny Rafkin, of JOIA Food Farm (2038 March Ave., Charles City) for a potluck and chance to meet neighbors near and far. Wendy and Johnny will provide lamb burgers; please bring a side dish or dessert to share. BYOB. **Please RSVP so we can get a head count!** For questions, or to RSVP, contact Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or [lauren@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:lauren@practicalfarmers.org)

#### August 23 – Neely-Kinyon Farm Sustainable and Organic Field Day | Greenfield, IA | 4 – 7 p.m.

Learn about organic grain crop production; no-till (roller-crimping); water quality in organic systems; adding prairie strips to crop fields – and more. PFI member David Rosmann, who also serves on Practical Farmers' board, will discuss organic marketing opportunities and provide an update on the organic growing season. A local, organic meal will be provided. For more, visit: [extension.iastate.edu/article/neely-kinyon-field-day-highlights-organic-research](http://extension.iastate.edu/article/neely-kinyon-field-day-highlights-organic-research)

#### August 25 – Soil Health Partnership Field Day | Eagle Grove, IA | 10 a.m. – Noon

Soil Health Partnership field days help Iowa farmers learn from their peers about a variety of conservation and water quality protection practices, including cover crops, strip-till and advanced nutrient management. This event is hosted by PFI member Tim Smith. For more information, visit [soilhealthpartnership.org/field-days.html#ia-fd](http://soilhealthpartnership.org/field-days.html#ia-fd)

#### August 25 – 26 – Grass Identification & Ecology Workshop | Minnesota Landscape Arboretum | Chaska, MN | 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. | \$193

In this intensive, hands-on workshop, learn how to identify warm-season grasses in the field and lab; discuss the ecology of grasses; and practice identifying species from keys. For more, visit [bit.ly/grassworkshop](http://bit.ly/grassworkshop)

#### August 28 – Warren County Farm Crawl | Warren County, IA

Enjoy the hospitality of local farms in Warren County during this free, self-guided family event. Visit eight farms and learn about vegetables, berries, fruit trees, garden plants, greenhouse flowers, cows, chickens and goats. For more, contact Edge of the Woods Raspberry Farm at (515) 961-7252 or [beth@vb-designs.com](mailto:beth@vb-designs.com), or visit [warrencountyfarmtour.com](http://warrencountyfarmtour.com)

#### August 28 – Practical Farmers Potluck | Harrisdale Farmstead | Atlantic, IA | 5 – 8 p.m.

Join PFI members Gil and Ardyth Gillespie, of Harrisdale Farmstead (60182 Dallas Road) for a potluck and chance to meet neighbors near and far. Gil and Ardyth will provide burgers, condiments, water, iced tea and coffee. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. BYOB. **Please RSVP to Gil and Ardyth at (712) 243-3310 or [gg1localfood@gmail.com](mailto:gg1localfood@gmail.com)** by Friday, Aug. 26.

### SEPTEMBER

#### September 7 – Bison Advantage Workshop | Ruhter Bison Ranch | Urbana, IL | 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. | FREE

In this introductory course, learn about Holistic Management and marketing bison. Tour the host ranch; enjoy lunch and a networking hour; and leave with a free bison toolkit of production and educational materials. For more, visit: [mosesorganic.org/wp-content/uploads/Events/Calendar/BisonWorkshops.pdf](http://mosesorganic.org/wp-content/uploads/Events/Calendar/BisonWorkshops.pdf)

#### September 8 – Variety Trials to the Extreme | King City, MO | 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

PFI member Brad Law has converted 80 acres into several small plots. He participates in research trials for Willcross Seed and AgriGold Hybrids, and conducts research on cover crops, plant populations and organic farming. Willcross Seed will provide lunch. **RSVP for the meal to Willcross Seed at (660) 535-4444 by Wed. Sept. 7.** For more details, contact Brad at (660) 483-0355 or [lawfarmsllc@gmail.com](mailto:lawfarmsllc@gmail.com)

#### September 8 – 10 – Gourmet Beef on Grass X | Dubuque, IA

Red Devon USA's 10th Annual Conference, Show and Sale includes workshops with Gabe Brown, Blaine Hitzfield, Dr. Allen Williams and Steve Campbell; a field day at Jamie Hostetler's farm featuring Devon cattle genetics and principles of grass farm management; a cattle show and sale; and more. For more, visit: [reddevonusa.com](http://reddevonusa.com)

#### September 13 – American Pastured Poultry Producers Association Workshop | Johnson County Extension | Iowa City, IA | 5 – 9 p.m.

APPPA is launching a series of pastured poultry workshops in the Midwest and beyond this September. The core training will include sessions on the basics, advanced management, health and marketing. For more, visit: [apppa.org/pastured-poultry-seminars-workshops](http://apppa.org/pastured-poultry-seminars-workshops)

#### September 20 – Low-Disturbance Injected Manure Field Day | Albert City, IA | 5015 210th Ave. | 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

This event is being hosted by the Headwaters of the North Raccoon Water Quality Initiative. For more information, including how to RSVP, call (712) 732-3096 ext. 3 or email [anita.patrick@ia.nacdnet.net](mailto:anita.patrick@ia.nacdnet.net)

### OCTOBER

#### October 2 – The 10th Edition of the Original, Biggest and Best Farm Crawl | Knoxville and Lacona, IA

At least seven independent family farms in a small pocket of south-central Iowa welcome you to tour their farms. Enjoy the Iowa countryside as you drive yourself from farm to farm. Meet the farmers, see their operations, visit the animals, sample the goodies, listen to live music, learn something new about agriculture and enjoy delicious food. For more, contact Jill Beebout and Sean Skeehan at (641) 203-0758 or [info@farmcrawl.com](mailto:info@farmcrawl.com), or visit [farmcrawl.com](http://farmcrawl.com)

**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

## Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



### *Diverse Farms*

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



### *Healthy Food*

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

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 [www.linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa](http://www.linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa)



### *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.