



the Practical Farmer

SUMMER 2018



On the cover



Brian Wilson (left) and another attendee at Michael and Denny Vittetoe's June 26 field day near Washington look at cover crops interseeded into corn the week prior.

COOPERATORS' PROGRAM

Connecting Farmers and Researchers

4

POLICY

Community, Conservation and Policy

6

HORTICULTURE

Starting the Prairie

8

In this issue

OTHER FEATURES:

- PFI Leaders
- Teaming Up to Diversify
- Converting Crop Land to Pasture
- And more!

In This Issue

features

4 COOPERATORS' PROGRAM :: CONNECTING FARMERS AND RESEARCHERS

A new PFI on-farm research project using tea bags to test soil health continues a collaborative tradition.

6 POLICY :: COMMUNITY, CONSERVATION AND POLICY

Several PFI members serve as soil and water conservation district commissioners. In this Q&A, two members share why they choose to serve.

8 HORTICULTURE :: STARTING THE PRAIRIE

Bev and Dwight Rutter have made a business out of growing and selling native prairie plants.

10 PFI LEADERS :: GENEROSITY GENERATES GOOD WORK

See the list of donors who supported us in fiscal year 2017, and read why four members have chosen to financially support Practical Farmers.

14 FIELD CROPS :: TEAMING UP TO DIVERSIFY

As A&W Farms co-owners Caleb Akin and Noah Wendt realize their vision of transitioning their farm to organic, they are finding that cereal rye is a natural fit with their new system.

16 PHOTOS :: 2018 SPRING COVER CROP FIELD DAYS

18 UPCOMING :: 2018 FIELD DAYS

Mark your calendars for several field days coming up this summer and fall.

20 FARM TRANSFER :: A NEW CHAPTER OF APPLEBERRY FARM

Despite the challenges, Dave and Kelly Mason have found a new future in orcharding.

22 LIVESTOCK :: CONVERTING CROP LAND TO PASTURE

This discussion list summary highlights advice and experiences shared by PFI members.

24 SMALL GRAINS :: INNOVATING FOR PROFIT IN EXTENDED ROTATIONS

James Asumus has been raising oats for decades, and is now adding triticale.

26 BEGINNING FARMERS :: FINDAFARMER SPOTLIGHT

Read profiles of four FindAFarmer users, and learn about the forthcoming design makover of PFI's land-matching tool.

departments

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTE

28 MEMBER BOOK REVIEW

"Creating a Family Business, From Contemplation to Maturity"

– Paul Ackley

29 PFI NEWS

- Meet new staff member Chelsey Teachout

- Savings Incentive Program applications opening in August

30 WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

30 CALENDAR MID-JULY – SEPTEMBER

31 JOIN PFI

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the Practical Farmer

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership to help 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.)



We Are All Us

“There is room for both,” said a friend recently about room for organic agriculture in Iowa’s conventionally dominated farming landscape. This is something I hear often. Indeed, there is room for both – but the oversimplified two-dimensional view we instinctively apply to so many facets of the world does not match life’s complexities.

Conversations are frequently framed around an inaccurate “us” versus “them” mentality. Issues both within and outside of agriculture are often viewed as clear-cut distinctions, rather than as complex, overlapping blendings of truths and beliefs. Some of the false dichotomies so prevalent in our cultural discourse that I frequently hear these days include rural versus urban; conventional versus organic; green versus industrial; Republican versus Democrat. The list goes on.

Life is not so simple, and we are all imperfect. Although we know this, as individuals we often think we’re right. To some degree, we are probably all partially right: Depending on one’s point of view, there is merit to most arguments. However, our tendency to take the righteous stance leads us to prejudge those who don’t share the same beliefs as us, and helps foster this illusory “us” versus “them” paradigm.

We tend to identify our differences when we meet someone, rather than our commonalities. What if we all immediately searched for values and goals we have in common? What if we shared in honest, open conversations about issues we care about and are collectively responsible for?

Paul Kingsworth’s book, “Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist,” includes a citation from author Wendell Berry, who wrote: “Maybe the answer is to fight always for what you particularly love, not for abstractions, and not against anything.”

Paul goes on to write: “Traditional leftist activism entrenches a kind of dependency. It involves identifying an enemy and taking it on . . . There is always a Them who needs to sort out the problem, and that gives Us, the disempowered but righteous masses, more of an excuse to wash our hands of our own complicity, or simply to never get them dirty in the first place.”

Wendell Berry talked about this book on BBC’s “Start the Week” podcast in May 2017. He said, “It’s easy to encounter people in the present world who do nothing much but protest. The great question that conservation has to face is: How do you get from protest, which is always asking someone else to do something better, to actual good work? When you take responsibility for a specific something, it’s possible you might get somewhere. Living well is something none of us is doing in a complete or perfect way. None of us are going to die free of sin . . . We’re all involved in the destruction of the goods of the world.”

Practical Farmers of Iowa tries to exemplify this ethos of working toward a common good through our big-tent mentality. We are indeed all “us.” It’s not about what others are doing wrong, it’s about what we can personally, and as a community, do better. Let’s continue to work toward complicated solutions to complex problems, together!

Thanks for joining in this collaborative, complex search for betterment and sustainability of our farms and communities.

Sally Worley



From left to right: PFI staff members Stefan Gailans, Liz Kolbe, Alisha Bower, Steve Carlson, Greg Padget and Sally Worley enjoy a bit of down time together at Peace Tree Brewing in Des Moines this past spring.

Connecting Farmers and Researchers

Tea bag soil health project continues a collaborative tradition

by Stefan Gailans

In the summer of 2016, Practical Farmers of Iowa member and then-graduate student David Weisberger connected PFI staff with an incoming Iowa State University faculty member: Dr. Marshall McDaniel, who now teaches and researches soil fertility and ecology in the Department of Agronomy at ISU. The match proved natural: It just so happened that both PFI and Marshall were equally curious about how agricultural practices affect soil health.

Marshall was also keen to involve farmers in the research he was starting with his lab team. "I've always wanted to get into citizen science. It's a great way to educate, engage citizens in science and conservation, and it's just plain fun," Marshall says. During PFI's initial meeting with Marshall, we acknowledged the numerous soil health tests and assessments that were currently being offered to farmers. From our collective experiences with these new tests, we knew farmers using them were often getting back confusing, if not very interesting, results, and that the tests could be quite costly. With that in mind, we agreed to brainstorm ideas for a research project that would investigate soil health while also involving farmers in a fun and easy way.

Path to a New PFI Study

Not long after that meeting, Marshall found a study by researchers in Europe that measured how quickly tea bags took to decompose when buried in soil. Tea is an organic material, not unlike the plant residue or other organic matter present in our soils. And just as the carbon-to-nitrogen (C:N) ratio of the organic matter in our soils influences how long it takes for soil microbes to break down that organic matter, the same can be said for tea. Green tea has a relatively low C:N ratio (like alfalfa hay), whereas red tea has a relatively high C:N ratio (like corn stover).

Organic material with a lower C:N ratio decomposes more quickly than material with a higher C:N ratio. This proved true in the European study. The researchers collected soil from a forest, brought it back to their lab and buried red and green tea bags in it. After only 30 days of incubation, just 33 percent of the green tea's mass



remained, while over 60 percent of the red tea's mass remained after 130 days of incubation.

From this study, and some of his own prior research, Marshall devised a hypothesis: decomposition of tea with a high C:N ratio, like the red tea, is limited by soil microbial activity and the resources available to those microbes (carbon and nitrogen in the soil). In other words, healthy soils that are teeming with microbial life and have an abundance of resources are better able to break down organic material (tea), regardless of its C:N ratio, than less healthy soil. In the poorer-quality soils, meanwhile, the green tea should decompose readily, but the red tea should not. Marshall concluded that comparing green and red tea bags buried in a field or experimental strip could be used to determine a soil health index. The green tea could be considered the "baseline" – it

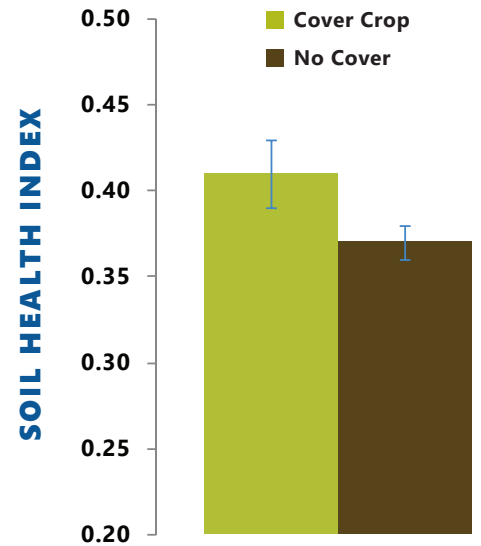
will decompose at roughly the same rate in a healthy and unhealthy soil. The red tea is the "indicator" that should decompose more in a healthy soil than an unhealthy soil. If the amount of both the green and red tea diminished substantially after a given amount of time, the soil would be considered healthy; if only the green tea diminished, but the red tea did not, the soil is of poorer health.

Cover Crops Boost Soil Health

In the fall of 2016, PFI recruited a few farmers to seed replicated strips of a cereal rye cover crop into soybean stubble while leaving an equal number of strips bare with no cover crop. The objectives were twofold: determine the effect of the cover crop on the 2017 corn crop's yield, and detect any effect of the cover crop on the soil. Enter the tea.

Marshall, and his graduate student, Teresa Middleton, traveled to these on-farm research sites in June 2017 to bury sets of green and red tea bags in the replicated cover crop and no-cover strips. "I really enjoyed working one-on-one with the farmers and learning about what was important to them," Teresa says. "It was great to see such enthusiasm for research from the PFI community." Throughout the summer, Teresa returned to the farms to retrieve the tea bags from the soil while also collecting soil moisture and temperature data. The tea bags were brought back to Marshall's lab at ISU, dried and weighed to determine how much tea had decomposed.

Across all nine sites involved in the study, the cover crop strips scored better on the soil health index by 11 percent using the tea bag approach. The cover crop strips scored closer to 1 on the soil health index scale of 0 to 1. A score closer to 1 indicates a healthier soil – there's more microbial activity working to decompose organic materials (in this case, the tea). "It did not seem to matter how long cover crops have been in place at these sites, whether it was one or 15 years," Marshall says. Other interesting findings from Teresa's measurements at the farms indicate that the soil temperature throughout the summer was not affected



Opposite: Marshall McDaniel **Above: (Left)** ISU graduate student Teresa Middleton buries tea bags at one of the on-farm research sites. (Photo courtesy of ISU Department of Agronomy.) **(Right):** Figure showing the average soil health index from the cover crop and no-cover strips from nine cooperating farms in 2017. The index is calculated by dividing the percent decomposition of the red tea by percent decomposition of the green tea. The closer to 1, the healthier the soil.

by the cover crop but that, on average, the cover crop resulted in increased soil moisture at certain times of the year.

Tom Christian, who farms near Roland in Story County, was one of the cooperators involved in the study. At his farm, the green tea decomposed at nearly the same rate where there was a cover crop and no-cover. The red tea, however, decomposed more in the cover crop strips than in the no-cover strips. On the soil health index scale of 0 to 1, the cover crop strips at Tom's farm scored 10 points higher than the no-cover strips (0.45 vs. 0.35). "As a beginning farmer, I was very excited to participate in this study and I found the results to be quite promising," Tom says. "I have many crop seasons ahead of me, and I am always looking for ways to make long-term improvements to the most important asset in our farming operation: the soil. I am confident that continued research will result in cover crop systems that provide both short-term yield gains and long-term environmental benefits."

Corn yields at Tom's farm did not differ between the cover crop and no-cover strips, averaging 199 bushels per acre. This aligns with results of on-farm trials coordinated by Iowa Learning Farms and PFI over the past nine years that report statistically equal corn yields following a cover crop versus no cover crop in all but three cases.

Continuing a Collaborative Tradition

This collaboration between academic researchers and farmer-researchers in PFI's network harkens back to the development of the late-spring soil nitrate test by Dr. Fred Blackmer at ISU in the early 1990s. Back then, several PFI farmers were involved in testing nitrogen fertilizer rates for their corn in an effort to help calibrate Fred's test. The late-spring soil nitrate test is now roundly accepted and routinely used by farmers to help them determine an appropriate amount of nitrogen to apply. The development and trialing of this new tea bag soil decomposition test is yet another page in the PFI tradition of connecting farmers and researchers.

Eventually, Marshall's team wants to produce a simple and useful soil health test farmers could use on their own. "The appeal of using tea bags for such a soil health assessment is that they're inexpensive and readily, commercially available," Marshall says. That appeals to farmers like Tom Christian. "I like the idea of an inexpensive soil health test that can provide me with benchmarks on our farms," Tom says. "Coupled with the results of a typical soil sample, I see the tea bag system as a powerful tool in identifying and treating problem areas within a field."

Since this project began, Marshall has presented to farmers at PFI's 2016 Cooperators' Meeting and 2018 annual conference. In the process, he has generated tremendous interest in his lab team's effort. "We want tea bags!" says Arlyn Kauffman, who will be one of the PFI cooperators burying and retrieving tea bags from his cover crop trials this year. Marshall and Teresa have ordered thousands of green and red tea bags online and, with the help of several undergraduate lab helpers, they are putting together kits to send to interested farmers who are participating in farmer-led trials in PFI's Cooperators' Program this year. The tea bags in these kits will be buried, retrieved and sent back to Marshall's lab at ISU by the farmers themselves. At this point, there's still plenty of work to be done to make this a consistent and reliable soil test. Stay tuned for results of this new, fun soil health test in future research reports. ■

Learn More

➔ For more on this project and how Marshall and his team are using tea bags to assess soil health, check out Marshall's presentation at our 2018 annual conference. Visit practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/annual-conference-multimedia and search for "Marshall."

Community, Conservation and Policy

Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners further PFI's mission

by Steve Carlson

The recently updated mission statement for Practical Farmers of Iowa is simply: “equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.” The staff and members of PFI carry out this mission in numerous venues: on farms, online, at workshops and events, and in board rooms.

For the latter, several dozen members have chosen to serve as commissioners in their soil and water conservation districts, and they are equipping their farmer-neighbors with the tools and resources to build resilient farms and communities. Though Practical Farmers plays a limited role as an organization in shaping farm policy, encouraging our members to be active in their conservation districts is a no-brainer.

Two Practical Farmers members – Don Elsbernd, of Postville, and Frederick Martens, of Winterset – recently shared the role SWCD commissioners play and why they got involved. From these conversations, and many others I’ve had, the common motivations include an interest in community engagement, local leadership and environmental stewardship. If these are important to you, please consider running as commissioner in the November 2018 election! (See the sidebar to learn more about this process.)

Tell me about your background with farming and living in your county.

DON: I grew up in Winneshiek County, but after college we moved to a farm in Allamakee County and have been here since; that was 1982. We were dairy farmers at the time, and have since transitioned from a dairy farm to a crop farm. We’ve been no-till for a long time, and have been working hard at incorporating cover crops. We’ve always been conservation-minded.

FREDERICK: I was raised on the same farm here in Madison County that I’m farming now. I’ve been a lifelong farmer except when I was away at Iowa State and then worked at Farm Credit for a couple of years. Then I had the opportunity to come back home and rent a couple of farms and get started with my dad.

How long have you been a commissioner?

DON: Four years.



FREDERICK: This is my third term, or about 12 years of being involved in some capacity.

Why did you decide to get involved?

DON: I had been involved with Corn Growers (Association) for a long time, serving at the state and national level. When I decided to leave that organization I was looking for other ways to be involved, and the opportunity to be a commissioner came up and I took it.

FREDERICK: I live in the Badger Creek Watershed, and basically all my life I watched it, first from all the ponds and structures being built to the lake itself being built in 1980. One of the motivating factors for becoming a soil commissioner was when the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) put it on the impaired waters list. I just thought about our conservation practices on our farm and trying to promote conservation all around. It’s kind of like my farm – I want to leave the county better than when I got involved. A friend of mine, who was on the board, wanted to retire and he asked if I’d consider it, so that’s how I got on. I’ve been on co-op boards and church boards, and I kind of like doing that stuff.

“One of the motivating factors for becoming a soil commissioner was when the EPA put (Badger Creek Watershed) on the impaired waters list. I just thought about our conservation practices on our farm and trying to promote conservation all around. It’s kind of like my farm – I want to leave the county better than when I got involved.”

– FREDERICK MARTENS
(above-right, pictured with Bob Powers)



“The number-one role (of a commissioner) is to take care of the district business, like approving conservation plans and EQIP funds. But I also see the role as helping develop policy and make changes The third role is, of course, advocating for conservation practices.”

– DON ELSBERND

What do you feel is the role of SWCD commissioners?

DON: The number-one role is to take care of the district business, like approving conservation plans and EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) funds. But I see the role also as helping develop policy and make changes. As you farm and participate as a commissioner, you find out policy sometimes contradicts the kinds of things we’re trying to do out here. So I’m a big advocate for being involved from a policy standpoint, and making changes so we can actually make progress in conservation. And then the third role is, of course, advocating for conservation practices.

FREDERICK: It seems like our roles have evolved over the years. When I started out it was (approving) terraces and tile lines, and a few cost-share programs, and now it’s evolved into all kinds of soil health issues, cover crops and, especially on our eastern side of the county, urban conservation. Things have really evolved over the last 10 to 12 years. We have all these projects going on: timberland management, urban conservation, windmill farm construction, a pollinator project. We have a lot of partnerships with varied groups.

Your county seems to go above and beyond what other districts do. Why is that, or how did that come to be?

DON: For one, we have a good staff. Our district conservationist and the employees have a passion for conservation. A lot of things we, as commissioners, don’t have a whole lot of control over. But from an advocacy standpoint, the door is wide open. We try to take advantage of that as best we can. I’ve always been an advocate for conservation practices like cover crops. One of the reasons for that is because I realize there are regional differences in cover crop practices and I’m working hard to develop practices that are cost-effective and work well in our environment and our area.

FREDERICK: I want to give credit to the other commissioners, and the commissioners before them. They are active in the community and whenever they saw a problem or project that we could help, we tried to help as best we could. Also, the members of the public see the benefits of partnerships. The people that live here love it, and any program or anything that can help protect it, they’re more than willing to do it, I’ve found.

What is your advice to other commissioners for being effective in their role?

DON: Every commissioner is going to be different; they come from different backgrounds. My experience with the Corn Growers Association gives me that experience with policy development. For the advocacy part, I have a passion for that. By being a commissioner you’re playing a role out there, and it gives you resources to advocate for different conservation practices. Through PFI and Soil Health Champions, being active in those organizations gives me a lot of room to advocate for doing more practices out on the land. Use those resources that are available to you.

FREDERICK: My advice is to get out in front of a core constituent group. Network with people and listen to them about what they have to say; it’s gotten me out of my shell. We’ve been going to supervisors meetings and I have learned more about county government that way. They twisted my arm and I gave a presentation down at the NACD (National Association of Conservation Districts) meeting. One benefit of all that is you meet some great people, people you maybe wouldn’t normally meet. And I want to emphasize it’s a two-way street. I’ve learned a lot being on this job and it’s helped me with what I do on the farm. ■

To see what activities the Allamakee and Madison soil and water conservation districts are involved with, visit their websites: allamakeeswcd.org; madison-swcd.org.

To get involved in your local SWCD:

- **Attend a meeting!**
The monthly meetings are open to the public. Call your local NRCS office to learn when the next one is scheduled.
- **Obtain two forms:**
a notarized Affidavit of Candidacy, and a Nomination Petition for Non-Partisan Offices, with 25 signatures from residents of your county.
- **Submit the forms**
to your county court house by August 29.
- **Get elected:** Ask residents of your county to vote for you on November 6!

About SWCDs:

- Iowa has 100 districts (one for each county; Pottawattamie County is split in two)
- Each district is made up of five commissioners
- Commissioners serve four-year terms; they are non-partisan, volunteer positions
- No more than two commissioners can be from the same township
- Assistant commissioners are non-voting participants

Starting the Prairie

Native plants offer new opportunities for some PFI farmers

by Liz Kolbe

As most farmers know, planting a seed is never as simple as it sounds. This is especially true when planting a prairie – even with good management, it will take two to three years for native plants to establish over weedier species. Slower-growing native plants will not appear for upwards of five years, as the planting matures.

This required waiting period for plant establishment may be unfamiliar to farmers who are installing large areas of prairie on their farm for the first time. But as long as their planting tends toward natives and away from weedy species over time, looks don't matter. For homeowners and municipalities seeking to integrate native plants into their landscaping, the ecological and aesthetic function of planting certain species in specific places does matter. For example, homeowners seeking a mix of native flowers along their walk may not want to wait for two years to see which species will take hold. Similarly, a park renovation cannot wait three years hoping the seeded big bluestem will eventually provide a visual break around a picnic area. They want more assured success.

Bev Rutter knows these anxieties well. "I often recommend plants to people over seeding – not because it costs more, but because if they're nervous and want to know for sure what they're going to get, they need to start with plants," she explains. Bev and her husband, Dwight, own and operate The Prairie Flower, a prairie business covering 1 square mile near Spencer, that includes seed harvest and sales, plant sales, and consulting and installation. Bev and Dwight began working with prairie 16 years ago. After many years caring for their son, he died of a brain tumor in 2002. Looking for a new way to spend their time, they launched The Prairie Flower, and began learning that planting prairie was as much a practice in patience as it was experimentation and hard work. Their first crop was pale purple coneflowers – the roots were intended



Above: Dwight and Bev Rutter in prairie they established on their land. **Opposite: (Left)** Alice McGary transplants young prairie plants she and Nate Kempermann started from seeds into special cone-tainers. **(Right):** A flat of cone-tainers filled with prairie plants at Mustard Seed Farm.

for the medicinal Echinacea industry, but destiny gave them to the voles. Next, they started raising seed for government contracts, raising 30 acres of grasses and adding a nursery plot. From there, Bev's

important for the recreation and housing industry, and environmentally conscious lake homeowners appreciate the ability to use native plants toward their goals. About half of the Rutters' prairie installations and

"Prairie plants take a lot of patience and time . . . Start with things that are easy and will give you some gratification right away, like yellow coneflower, prairie coneflower, big-eyed Susan and asters." – BEV RUTTER

organizational skills and Dwight's "out-of-the-box" thinking have grown the prairie and nursery, and the Rutters are now reaching a diverse customer base.

"When we started doing this, no one had really heard of what we were doing," Bev says. "We were ahead of our time." Their timing has worked well. The popularity of native plantings has continued to grow as property values around Lake Okoboji have increased. Water quality, along with bank stabilization and enhancement, are

plant sales are for projects, homeowners and businesses in Okoboji. The Rutters have also helped with larger-scale park projects in the region, including Alden and Mapleton. In addition to the larger-volume sales, the Rutters sell prairie plants from the high tunnel on their farm: \$5 per plant in a 4-inch pot, or \$90 per flat. "Some should be priced lower and some should be higher," Bev says of their pricing setup. "For example, rattlesnake master: It takes about three years for it to get going well enough to sell it. Lead plant and compass plant are



“Our main focus is growing food for our CSA, but we wanted to be more connected to the Ames Main Street Farmers’ Market. We didn’t want to bring vegetables . . . to compete with our friends there. Prairie plants seemed like something we could add to the market, and we want more prairie plants on the landscape.” – ALICE MCGARY

similar. Some species are just very slow-growing to start. Then after three years, they grow phenomenally. Filling a flat for \$90 is easier for the customer and for us.”

To get their plants started, the Rutters sow seeds (collected on their farm) into a soil base and cover the top in pea rock. Plants are started inside their high tunnel in the fall. The plants come up easily through the pea rock, and are transplanted to 4-inch pots; the plants are then moved outside for sale through the summer. Bev and Dwight’s plant offerings range from 4-inch-tall, May-flowering blue-eyed grass to 8-foot-tall big bluestem, and lots in between. “We try to guide our customers toward what will work for their site,” Bev says. “I try to do a good job of educating customers.” Bev’s advice to farmers interested in starting prairie plants as a business: “Patience. Prairie plants take a lot of patience and time. I don’t make a catalog any more – we never know what we’re going to have. Start with things that are easy and will give you some gratification right away, like yellow coneflower, prairie coneflower, big-eyed Susan and asters.”

Vegetable Farmers Capture an Available Market

Many vegetable farmers plant prairie areas to provide food and habitat for native

pollinators, whose services they need for their crops. Some plots they establish from seed, but for some areas these farmers are seeking specific ecological functions that require certain plants. For example, beetle banks require bunch grasses like little bluestem, while pollinator strips require a mix of flowers that bloom from May to October. These plantings are often narrow, to fit among the vegetable fields, so must be more carefully planned. By adapting their vegetable transplanting knowledge and infrastructure to native plants, vegetable farmers can take a faster – and cost-effective – route to successfully establishing prairie plants. After trying it out for their farm needs, some of these farmers have continued growing prairie plants to add to their market offerings.

Nate Kemperman and Alice McGary, of Mustard Seed Farm, near Ames, began raising prairie-plant starts almost 10 years ago as they surrounded their vegetable farm with prairie, and creatively added prairie plantings among the beds. “I didn’t want to sell plants to other people until I was confident in the quality of the plants and in educating people on how to care for them,” Nate says. He and Alice now sow the seeds into flats in early March, getting them started in their house. By April, they move the flats to the high tunnel and transplant the seedlings into

“cone-tainers,” which are commonly used for reforestation projects. The shape allows for ample root growth and easy transplanting. “Our main focus is growing food for our CSA, but we wanted to be more connected to the Ames Main Street Farmers’ Market,” Alice says. “We didn’t want to bring vegetables to farmers market to compete with our friends there. Prairie plants seemed like something we could add to the market, and we want more prairie plants on the landscape.” Mustard Seed Farm now sells 500 to 700 plants each year at the Ames Farmers Market. Some customers only buy a couple; most people buy a dozen to 20, and a few buy 50 to 100 plants.

Andy Dunham, of Grinnell Heritage Farm, has established a variety of native habitats for insects and birds around his farm near Grinnell, with help from his neighbor, Dewey Murken. They still direct-seed some prairie areas, but also cluster-transplant some species among the seeded areas. In 2017, Andy and Dewey planted about 40 species in the prairie areas they started in 200-cell flats in the high tunnel. Andy notes they’ve had particularly good success with St. John’s wort, prairie dock, pasture rose, false indigo and asters of all kinds. “We don’t do that many prairie plant sales deliberately,” Andy confesses. What they don’t use on the farm, they re-pot into 3-inch pots and sell for \$3 apiece at the farmers market – the same price as their tomato plants. The Dunhams have opted not to increase their native plant sales for a couple of reasons. First, they don’t have the high tunnel space; and second, they don’t have the time or resources to properly educate people about native plants during the farmers market. Says Andy: “If someone with a passion for native plants wanted to join the farm and create it as an enterprise, I think it would work.” ■

Learn More

➔ [The Prairie Seed and Grinnell Heritage Farm are both hosting prairie-focused PFI field days this summer:](#)

- **Aug. 9** (Rutters) – “Raising Prairie: Seeds, Plants and Restoration”
- **Aug. 10** (Dunhams) – “Planning and Installing Beneficial Insect Habitat”

To see the full details of these events, visit practicalfarmers.org.

Generosity Generates Good Work

Practical Farmers' budget is strong and growing, thanks to our many supporters!

by Sally Worley

In fiscal year 2017 (Oct. 1, 2016 – Sept. 30, 2017), Practical Farmers received \$1.81 million in revenue. Of this revenue, **\$74,328 came from donations above membership from 266 individual donors.** These individual contributions mean so much for Practical Farmers' effectiveness. They provide income for us to be able to respond directly to members' needs.

An additional **\$68,195** came from Ruth Schoeneman's estate. Ruth's sister, Adele McDowell, is a long-time Practical Farmers of Iowa member. **We also received funding from 39 grants** operating during fiscal year 2017.

Thank you, supporters, for your generosity that allows us to work hard to equip farmers to build resilient farms and communities!

More information on Practical Farmers' finances can be found in our 2017 annual report. This report also highlights accomplishments made possible because of our generous supporters.

Below, four donors share why they financially support PFI.



Sally Worley presenting Mark Tjelmeland with his lifetime membership crock.

MARK AND CONNIE TJELMELAND, MCCALLSBURG

Mark and Connie Tjelmeland have been members of Practical Farmers since 1986. Their initial membership was a gift. Mark says, "I have always been interested in alternative agriculture, and had a subscription to New Farm magazine. PFI received money from the state and used the funds to provide anyone who was subscribing to New Farm a free membership to PFI." Mark and Connie have been active members since.

Mark served on the board of directors; and the Tjelmelands have hosted field days, conducted on-farm research, and generously shared their experiences with farm transfer to inform others. Mark and Connie are long-time grain and egg farmers. They retired their chicken-laying operation a

few years ago, and continue to farm 300 acres of crops.

"When we first joined, I had a big interest in side-dressing liquid nitrogen," Mark says. "We were looking for ways to farm that were gentler on the

"For both farmers and non-farmers, PFI is a very worthy organization to support. If I'm around for 30 more years, I'll continue to support them." – MARK TJELMELAND

land and landscape." Mark and Connie were raising hogs at the time. "Twenty-four years ago, we got rid of hogs and started raising chickens. It was the best career move we made." They raised hogs in open buildings, but found the system to still be disease-prone. "Free-range chickens were much more enjoyable and fulfilling. That

move was inspired by PFI. Through PFI, we received a lot of inspiration, knowledge and support to make this transition." Currently, PFI's work on organic production has been most meaningful to Mark and Connie: Most of their

cropped acres are certified organic. Mark and Connie believe in Practical Farmers, in its staff and in its future.

Mark says, "Since we live close to Ames, I've gotten to know so many PFI staff. I feel so positive about what the organization and staff are doing. By sharing why I support, hopefully it will

encourage other people to support more. For both farmers and non-farmers, PFI is a very worthy organization to support. If I'm around for 30 more years, I'll continue to support them."

Mark served on PFI's board in the late-90s to early 2000s. "Before we had an executive director, I made the comment that organizations like Farm Bureau would be around for hundreds of years. I was really wondering if PFI would be around for the next hundred years. Now there is no doubt in my mind that we really will be. PFI isn't a passing trend or fad; it's serious science, and it's going to be around for a long time." ■

Donors in Fiscal Year 2017

The following list represents donors above membership.

Planned Givers-Legacy Society

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Tom and Irene Frantzen

Helen D. Gunderson

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Teresa Opheim

Rich Pirog

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\$5,000+

The Hope Foundation

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\$1,000 – \$4,999

Steve Beaumont

The Fertrell Company

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\$500 – \$999

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Jeanne and Jay Hansen

Julie Hegmann

Helene Hembreiker

(Continued on pg. 12 →)



STACY MAURER, FAIRFIELD

Stacy Maurer lives and raises vegetables at Abundance Ecovillage Farm near Fairfield. She is a sustaining supporter of Practical Farmers, making a donation every month. She says, of contributing monthly, "It's very convenient and easy to do, and I like being able to support PFI regularly."

Abundance Ecovillage is an off-the-grid sustainable living community. "We rely on only rainwater catchment and a pond for watering our unheated hoopouses and gardens," Stacy says. "We are powered by the sun and wind. The most successful parts of our edible permaculture landscape are the Asian pear trees, persimmon trees and aronia berries. I love the berries in jam and in smoothies."

"I share the PFI values of diverse farms, healthy food and vibrant communities. If we have those things, we have a bright future." - STACY MAURER

Stacy has been a Practical Farmers member since 2010, and says she likes PFI is open to farmers of all types. "I share the PFI values of diverse farms, healthy food and vibrant communities. If we have those things, we have a bright future." She finds many facets of Practical Farmers' work meaningful: "PFI's programs to help beginning farmers are very important. I really enjoy the field days and seeing what other farmers are doing. Right now, a crucial part of PFI's work is to promote their vision for agriculture in Iowa."

Stacy supports Practical Farmers of Iowa because she values healthy food and the environment: "I believe we need alternatives to conventional agriculture in Iowa. I value healthy food, and there is great potential to improve our health, the health of the land and the health of our communities by focusing on farmers and farms that grow healthy food for their local communities." ■



“As I understood agriculture more and more, I realized that agriculture needs to be different if we are going to be doing it for a long period of time.”

- BETH LARABEE

BETH AND RANDY LARABEE, AMES

Beth and Randy Larabee are friends of farmers who reside in Ames. Beth teaches sustainable agriculture, soil science and environmental science at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny; Randy is an electrical engineer who serves as assistant director of utilities at Iowa State University.

Beth first learned about Practical Farmers while studying soil science in graduate school at Iowa State in 2006. She says: “As I understood agriculture more and more, I realized that agriculture needs to be different if we are going to do it for a long period of time. I started wondering what else is out there. What other ways are there to practice and teach an agriculture that will sustain itself?”

Practical Farmers still had an office in Agronomy Hall on the ISU campus in 2006. Beth visited the office, staffed by Rick Exner, and asked what Practical Farmers of Iowa did. Rick offered her a student membership, and Beth and Randy have been members since. They became lifetime members of Practical Farmers of Iowa in 2014.

They have supported Practical Farmers with financial donations above membership since then.

Beth and Randy have a passion for healthy food, and want to help transform Iowa into an agriculture that supports good food, farm families and the environment alike. Beth says, “Practical Farmers is one of the most innovative, successful places where the ability to change how we do agriculture is happening.”

In addition to supporting PFI fiscally, Beth donates her time to Practical Farmers of Iowa. She used to manage the PFI library; currently, she helps file and enter data, and helps elsewhere as needed. Why does she donate her time? “A little time with like-minded people helps renew the energy and thought processes,” she says.

Her membership at Practical Farmers also helps in the classroom: “I learn a whole lot from PFI discussion lists and farminars. I use a lot of these resources when teaching about sustainable agriculture.” ■

(← Continued from pg. 11)

\$150 – 249 (cont’d)

- Gary and Ann Holck
- Steve Holmes
- Clara and Hal Hoover
- Steve and Sara Hopkins
- Wendy Johnson and Johnny Rafkin
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Under \$49

- Kim Alexander
- Mike Arnold
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Read our complete 2017 annual report at practicalfarmers.org.

Grantors in Fiscal Year 2017

Private Foundation Grant Revenue

- Ceres Trust Foundation
- Clif Bar
- Farm Aid
- Fertrell
- Food and Farm Communications Fund
- Illinois Stewardship Alliance
- Iroquios Valley Farms
- McKnight Foundation
- National Resources Defense Council, Inc.
- National Wildlife Federation
- Organic Valley- Dairy
- PepsiCo
- Renewing the Countryside
- Unilever
- Walton Family Foundation

State Grant Revenue

- Conservation Technology Information Center
- Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship
- Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

Federal Grant Revenue

- Department of Health & Human Services
- National Fish & Wildlife Federation
- SARE
- USDA-Farm Service Agency
- USDA-Risk Management Agency
- Wallace Winrock



"I like that Practical Farmers welcomes and provides research for farms of all sizes and enterprises . . . Farmers are more open to new ideas when they hear from other farmers who are already using the practice."

- STEVE WRIGHT

STEVE AND MEGAN WRIGHT, NEW MARKET

Steve and Megan Wright operate Wright Five Farm near New Market. Their farm operation consists of row crops and livestock, including corn, soybeans, hay, cow-calf and a farrow-to-finish swine herd. "We market our pigs through Niman Ranch, so they are raised outdoors or in deep-bedded pens," Steve says. "We also use cover crops, mostly cereal rye, and try to get cows on as much rye as possible."

The Wrights joined Practical Farmers of Iowa as lifetime members in 2017. "Practical Farmers is an organization I had been familiar with for some time," Steve says. "I had read several articles on the Practical Farmers website through the years, and attended a couple field days." While long-time admirers, the catalyst to become lifetime members was an arduous process they experienced navigating a Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Stewardship Program contract, in which adding LLC to their farm name ultimately voided the contract. At the end, the Wrights were successful in getting the contract honored through the entire CSP period. This experience motivated them to support Practical Farmers. "I wanted something good to come from it, and I believed Practical Farmers would do that. I have always thought the organization does good work."

The Wrights have continued to financially support PFI since their initial lifetime membership investment. "I like that Practical Farmers welcomes and provides research for farms of all size and different enterprises," Steve says. "The on-farm research and on-farm field days are very important. Farmers are more open to new ideas when they hear from other farmers who are already using the practice. As someone using cover crops, it's great to hear what others are trying and using successfully."

"Groups such as Practical Farmers are important to help promote new ideas for farmers. They are also important in promoting what farmers are doing for people that aren't in the agriculture community. As there are fewer farmers, we need to continue to tell our story." ■

Teaming Up to Diversify

Cereal rye finds a good fit during organic transition

by Jason Tetrick

Driving past A&W Farms near Cambridge, it would be easy to imagine it's just another typical farm among the thousands across Iowa's landscape: a house and a feedlot in the midst of a sea of corn and soybeans.

It isn't until March that A&W Farms starts to look a little different. As the landscape slumbers, awaiting spring, here, tiny green plants – cereal rye that was seeded into corn last fall – start to sprout from the soil. While other fields are still bare and brown, these cold-hardy plants will become a lush carpet of green helping to protect the soil from the spring rains soon to come.

United By Farming

The "a" in A&W farms stands for Akin. Co-owner Caleb Akin grew up in Upstate New York, far from Iowa's rolling hills of corn and soybeans. In pursuit of a farming education, he attended Iowa State University and earned a degree in agronomy in 2002. Caleb decided to stay in Iowa, and soon after graduating moved to Cambridge to start growing vegetables for local restaurants. For a few years, he grew sweet corn, tomatoes, peppers and pumpkins, and raised some hay until he met Noah Wendt – the "w" in A&W Farms, and Caleb's farming partner.

Noah grew up in northeastern Iowa farming with his uncles, and routinely worked for other farmers. His love for farming led him to Iowa State, where he received a degree in agricultural business. After graduating, Noah worked in the industry for a year-and-a-half before deciding he wanted to get back to farming. Noah and Caleb met through a mutual friend and ended up renting a house together. At the time, Caleb had been growing vegetables for three years and Noah had bounced from job to job. After discovering their mutual love for farming, they decided in 2006 to start farming row crops together.

The operation grew, and for the last 10 years they have been finishing 600-to-750-pound feeder steers; feeding grain; and growing corn and soybeans with cover crops. Now, Caleb and Noah are embarking on a new farm venture: transitioning parts of their farm to organic.

Transition to Organic

Transitioning a farm from conventional to organic isn't a decision to make lightly. It takes planning, time, patience and strategy to get the system moving in the right direction. It also requires financial investment.

"It takes a lot of money to transition," Caleb says, "because generally you're running a negative cash flow for the three [transition] years."

Caleb and Noah had intended to transition to organic when they first started farming together. But high commodity prices in 2007 led them to postpone that idea. They were making enough money in conventional and weren't ready to take a risky jump into organic. By 2015, commodity prices had dropped and Caleb and Noah had a few more years of farming experience. The idea of transitioning some fields seemed to make sense financially.

"In order to diversify our operation and pose ourselves for a better future, we thought transitioning at least a portion of our ground to organic was going to be what we needed to make our operation successful," Noah says.

In 2016, he and Caleb started transitioning a few fields to organic, about 160 acres. In 2017, they started transitioning an additional 160 acres.

Cover Crops Are Key

Caleb and Noah started the 2016 transition process by adding oats to the traditional two-year corn and soybean rotation on the transitioning fields. They added more cover crops into the rotation as well, underseeding clover with their oat crop, in part to help with weed suppression. While cereal rye had been Caleb and Noah's main cover crop in their conventional rotation for the past 10 years, Noah says they never could get it to fit quite right until they expanded their rotation with the organic system.

"Ten years ago up until even five years ago, we struggled trying to figure out how [cereal rye] fit into our system," Noah says. "The transitioning to organic is where we really found out that it does fit right when





Caleb Akins looks at a rye cover crop planted within a field of soybeans on PFI member Craig Fleishman's farm during the field day Craig hosted on his farm in Minburn last summer. (Photo courtesy of Twilight Greenaway, originally featured in "Where Corn Is King, the Stirrings of a Renaissance in Small Grains," published in the November 2017 issue of *Yale Environment 360*).

"Ten years ago up until even five years ago, we struggled trying to figure out how [cereal rye] fit into our system. The transitioning to organic is where we really found out that it does fit right, when we're rotating a little bit more extensively than just corn and beans." – NOAH WENDT

we're rotating a little bit more extensively than just corn and beans."

Cereal rye is widely used as a cover crop in both organic and conventional operations for its ability to establish itself before the winter, survive the winter and then come up early to suppress weeds in the spring.

Using a Roller-Crimper

In the past, Caleb and Noah would terminate the cereal rye with herbicide, but that's no longer an option in the organic fields. They had heard other farmers were using roller-crimpers to terminate the cover crop, and decided to give it a shot. Roller-crimpers roll the stand down and crimp the stalk of the plants so they lay flat on the soil to serve as a thick mulch, nurturing soil microbes and suppressing weeds.

Caleb and Noah found another farmer they knew who agreed to split the cost

of purchasing one, which the two farms would then share. The roller-crimper joined A&W Farms last spring and played a vital role last year on their farm.

"We bought a 10-foot roller-crimper thinking we wanted to at least try this on the beans," Noah said. "We were quite pleased with the way it worked."

While Caleb and Noah had a low soybean yield in 2017, they think that could have been due to dry conditions that season. And in spite of the yield drop, they think the roller-crimper still saved them money by reducing field passes: "Four passes with a rotary hoe, four passes with the row crop cultivator, two passes walking beans," Noah says. "Even with the reduced yield I think we're making up for it, saving probably \$100-plus in production costs."

Caleb adds that the crimper provided an additional benefit they weren't expecting:

it was easier to plant oats there this spring. On the ground that had been cultivated instead of crimped, they had to cultivate once more and roll twice with a smooth roller before it was fit to plant oats. On the crimped ground, all they had to do was plant.

A Diversified Future

Cereal rye will continue to play an important role on A&W Farms, both as a cover crop in spring and as forage for their cattle. Caleb and Noah also plan to continue underseeding clover with their oat crop. As they further integrate their livestock and organic operations, they envision the clover could provide a source of summer and fall grazing for a cow-calf operation. "If conditions are ideal we could even graze the clover into the winter," Noah says.

Caleb and Noah are also musing on other ways they can diversify in the future. "There could be some other crops we grow from a food-grade standpoint," Noah says. "We're just going to have to see. I think a lot of opportunities arise once you get going." ■



Guests at Mike Jackson's (center, in black) March 27 field day near Oskaloosa stand in a field with a cereal rye cover crop and learn how Mike and his family are integrating cover crops into their no-till row-crop operation.



Jason Steele, soil scientist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (above left), leads a soil health demonstration during Mike Jackson's March 27 field day, including a slake test and tabletop soil infiltration demonstration. (Above right) An earthworm in the soil of a cover crop plant Mike Jackson dug up offered another visual illustration of the health of his farm's soil.



A lush cover crop stand is evident on Bill Frederick's farm near Jefferson. Bill hosted a field day on April 3 exploring grazing cover crops.



Zak Kennedy (above left), who operates Kennedy Cattle Company near Cumberland, discusses during his April 5 field day how grazing cover crops doubles as both an economical practice and a strategy for conserving his family's farmland. (Above right) Attendees at Clark Thompson's (holding mic) field day on March 29 look at the inlet to the bioreactor on his farm near Story City. The poles mark the width of the bioreactor.

UPCOMING: 2018 Field Days

2018 Field Days Are Underway!

Practical Farmers' 2018 summer field day season is now in full swing, with 40 field days and other learning events taking place across Iowa – and beyond. These events span topics across the agricultural spectrum and are ideal ways to meet and connect with other farmers, build community and learn about innovative agricultural practices.

This year, as part of our effort to amplify our impact, we are expanding the number of events we are holding in nearby states, with events in Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

If you haven't yet been to an event, there are plenty more field days to choose from. We hope to see you in the field!



Guests at Jordan Clasen and Whitney Brewer's May 31 field day in Johnston learn about garlic production at Grade A Gardens.

2018 Field Days – Mid-Summer Through Autumn

JULY 11 – BRIGHTON

(Nelson Smith)
Mechanical Weed Control for Organic Crop Production

JULY 2 – JANESVILLE, WI

(The Hughes family)
Small Grains, Modest Gains: A Pragmatic Approach – *In partnership with Organic Grain Resource and Information Network (OGRIN)*

JULY 14 – MAYNARD

(Gary and Scott Wedemeier)
New Beginnings: Organic Transition at a Diversified Dairy Farm – *In partnership with Iowa Organic Association*

JULY 17 – DAYTON

(Kellie and A.J. Blair)
Expanding Conservation With Cover Crops, Livestock and Small Grains

JULY 18 – GRUNDY CENTER

(Grundy County SWCD)
Cover Crops and Soil Health at the Grundy County Fair – *In partnership with Grundy County Extension, and Grundy County Soil and Water Conservation District*

JULY 20 – PAULLINA

(The Wilson family)
Improving Organic Crop Production

JULY 24 – MADRID

(Don Adams and Nan Bonfils)
RAGBRAI – Top of the Hill at Full Circle Farm

JULY 26 – CRESCENT

(Terry Troxel)
Terry's Techniques: Seed-Saving and Cultivation Equipment

JULY 30 – MANKATO, MN

(Practical Farmers of Iowa)
CONFERENCE: Rotationally Raised – Making Small Grains Work – *In partnership with Freeborn Area Soil Health Team*

JULY 31 – RED OAK

(Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman)
Farmland Owner Legacy Award Celebration + Soil Health Event

AUGUST 7 – JEFFERSON

(Scott Shriver)
Weed Control for Organic Row Crops

AUGUST 9 – SPENCER

(Dwight and Bev Rutter)
Raising Prairie: Seeds, Plants and Restoration

AUGUST 10 – GRINNELL

(Andrew and Melissa Dunham)
Planning and Installing Beneficial Insect Habitat – *In partnership with Xerces Society*

AUGUST 15 – ROSEVILLE, IL

(Joel Gruver)
Bus Trip to Joel Gruver's WIU Organic Research Farm

AUGUST 23 – NEWTON

(Practical Farmers of Iowa)
Next Generation Summit

AUGUST 24 – WINTERSSET

(Jake and Crystal Bigelow)
DIY Watering and Corral Systems for Cattle and Pigs

AUGUST 25 – HASTINGS

(The Bakehouse family)
AgArts Field Day of Family, Food and Fun

AUGUST 27 – DALLAS CENTER

(Kelly Clime)
Livestock Integration on a Small-Scale Vegetable Farm

AUGUST 28 – 30 – BOONE

(Practical Farmers of Iowa)
Visit Cover Crop Farmer Experts at the Farm Progress Show

SEPTEMBER 5 – WAPELLO

(Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice)
Tree Crop Field Class

SEPTEMBER 6 – MARBLE ROCK

(Dennis Carney)
Cover Crops and On-Farm Conservation

SEPTEMBER 8 – EXIRA

(Dave and Meg Schmidt)
Grass-Fed Beef: From Production to Marketing

SEPTEMBER 10 – STANTON

(Mark and Melanie Peterson)
Cover Crops + Small Grains = A Perfect Pair for Soil Health and Water Quality – *In partnership with Iowa Soybean Association*

SEPTEMBER 13 – JEFFERSON

(The Deal family)
Cider and Pumpkins at Historic Deal's Orchard

SEPTEMBER 14 – SAC CITY

(Julie and Ryan Wheelock)
Hands-On Livestock Care With a Veterinarian

SEPTEMBER 16 – VAN HORNE

(The Franzenburg family)
Production to Market at Pheasant Run Farm

SEPTEMBER 22 – GRANT CITY, MO

(Andy Welch)
From Rotational Grazing to Regenerative Grazing

OCTOBER 5 – KALONA

(Kalona Creamery)
Cheese and Ice Cream Production at Kalona Creamery

OCTOBER 14 – MECHANICSVILLE

(Derek Roller and Molly Schintler)
Fall Vegetable Production and Planning

NOVEMBER 1 – 3 – WEST BRANCH

(Greg and Katie Lipes)
Forage Chains and Forage-Finishing – 3 Days With Anibal Pordomingo

NOVEMBER 8 – SIOUX CENTER

(John and Janna Wesselius)
Root and Tuber Crop Production



Improving Organic Crop Production

July 20 • Paullina • Seven W Farm

The Wilson family will share their experiences and efforts to improve their organic crop production systems. They'll start the day with some machinery shop talk and make their cultivators, planters and drills available for viewing. After a potluck lunch, they'll offer a hay wagon farm tour. You'll see cover crops seeded after small grains harvest; cover crops interseeded to corn in June; and a solid-seeded mix of corn and forage sorghum for silage.



Terry's Techniques: Seed-Saving and Cultivation Equipment

July 26 • Crescent • Terry Troxel

Formerly a casual seed-saver, Terry now saves several varieties of tomato and pepper seed for High Mowing Organic Seed Company, based in Vermont. Come hear how this process works, and how it contributes to her farm's revenue. Terry will also demonstrate several types of small, modified cultivating tractors she uses on her vegetable crops.



Planning and Installing Beneficial Insect Habitat

August 10 • Grinnell • Andrew and Melissa Dunham

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH XERCES SOCIETY

The Dunhams will show and discuss several beneficial insect strategies they use on their farm, including beetle banks that were installed among their organic vegetable fields in 2012. You'll hear about habitat site selection; hedge rows; native plant species and communities; and more. Sarah Foltz Jordan, a pollinator conservation specialist with the Xerces Society, will join the conversation, providing additional insight from her experience with on-farm habitat projects around the Midwest.



Livestock Integration on a Small-Scale Vegetable Farm

August 27 • Dallas Center • Kelly Clime

Come see how Kelly Clime is working to integrate livestock into her small-scale vegetable farm. Her poultry, draft pony and honeybees all play an important part in growing vegetables for CSA and farmers market customers. Everything from fertilization to pollination and draft power is provided by livestock on the farm. Kelly will share her approach to producing and direct-marketing pasture-raised poultry. Over the years, Kelly has improved her on-farm poultry processing system. She will showcase the equipment she uses and the lessons she's learned in getting started. For those interested, Kelly will also offer a live poultry processing demonstration at the end of the event.



Grass-Fed Beef: From Production to Marketing

September 8 • Exira • Dave and Meg Schmidt



Dave and Meg will share strategies for raising grass-fed beef, including summer and winter grazing management, grass-finishing at different times of the year and results from an on-farm research trial analyzing meat samples for fatty acids, including omega-3 content. They will share their approach to direct-marketing grass-fed beef, and their plans for future marketing streams. Dave and Meg have served as mentors for the Savings Incentive Program. Their mentee, Matthew Wiese, of Heirloom Farm near Earlham, will join them to share his experience in the program.

Cider and Pumpkins at Historic Deal's Orchard

September 13 • Jefferson • The Deal Family

The first apple trees were planted at Deal's Orchard in 1917. Since then, the orchard has involved four generations of the Deal family, and has grown beyond apples to diversify and become a destination for family fun. See how the Deal family manages two aspects of their diversified farm: pumpkin production, and the processing and marketing of both fresh and hard cider.



Get More Details Online and in the 2018 Field Day Guide!

Read more about these – and all of PFI's summer and autumn field days and events – in the 2018 Field Day Guide, available online at practicalfarmers.org or by contacting (515) 232-5661.

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

A New Chapter of Appleberry Farm

Despite challenges, Masons find new future in orcharding

by Sally Worley

Dave and Kelly Mason grew up in Marshalltown. They were lifelong avid gardeners; Kelly had a greenhouse attached to her house where she kept a collection of houseplants. They had several fruit trees. “I always had a home garden,” Kelly says. “I had been making my own jams and jellies.” In addition, Dave raised sweet corn with Kelly’s uncle on family land.

In fall 2016, Kelly sensed change in the air. “The place where I worked for my whole life filed for bankruptcy. I anticipated it coming, and wondered, ‘What am I going to do if I don’t have a job?’”

At the same time, Appleberry Farm, a 19.5-acre orchard on the edge of town, had been put up for sale. Bob and Donna Atha had operated Appleberry Farm in Marshalltown for 34 years. This steadfast business supplied the surrounding area with apples, produce, caramel apples, dried flowers, apple cider, jams and jellies from their farm store for more than three decades.

The Transfer

The Masons drove by the farm frequently, and when they learned it was for sale, they couldn’t help daydreaming about the possibilities. “I thought, ‘all the things we do for fun, we could do for work!’” Kelly recalls. The first day they visited the Athas, Dave didn’t think he wasn’t interested “in anything like that.” But the couple couldn’t get the idea of farming for a living out of their minds. “We talked about it, came back again, talked about it again, and thought: There’s no way we can get a loan for this,” Kelly says.

Meanwhile, Bob and Donna were anxious to sell and retire. They hadn’t found anyone who wanted to carry on what they were doing, and for the Athas, the farm had just been a hobby. “It’s not an easy business, and hadn’t been profitable for them,” Dave says. Profitability was less of a concern for the Athas, however. Working as business manager at the Veteran’s Home for his day job, Appleberry Farm had been a labor of love for Bob and Donna, rather than a career. “For us, it would have to be our livelihood,” Kelly says. Bob and Donna received a premium offer from a developer who wanted to turn the 19.5-acre property into an apartment complex. But Kelly



says, “Bob was really adamant he wanted someone to carry on with the orchard, so we decided to go ahead and see if we could get a loan.”

Equipped with impeccable credit, and income and expense records from Appleberry Farm, Dave and Kelly started the search. Bob told them up front that nobody would give them a loan based on the business, just on the land itself. Bankers backed this up. The first bank they went to specialized in farm loans. The bank was willing to loan \$150,000 for the land – less than half the Athas’ \$375,000 asking price. The Masons then went to the bank Kelly

had been using since she was a teenager. With the long-time relationship and excellent credit, the bank was more lenient. “They said, ‘You have a unique situation: it’s a business, and a residence and a farm,’” Kelly recalls. “They had to be creative, but decided to loan us the money.” The bank pre-approved a loan for the property for \$350,000. After appraisal, the loan approval dropped to \$343,000. Kelly and Dave came up with the extra \$7,000 to bring the total amount they could pay for the farm to \$350,000. The sum wasn’t the \$375,000 Bob and Donna were asking – but as motivated sellers who wanted Appleberry Farm to continue, it was enough. Dave and Kelly bought Appleberry Farm for \$350,000 in January 2017.

Adaptation

Originally, Bob had told the Masons he would stay for two months to teach them how to manage an orchard. But plans changed. “The day after we were pre-approved for the loan, he called and said: ‘We are moving in two weeks,’” Kelly says. Dave wanted to back out, and came to the farm to tell Bob. “If he was leaving, there was no way I could do it,” Dave says. “He was persistent and gave me the keys, although we had no paperwork signed.” Bob told Dave he would come back in March and stay for six weeks to show them how to do everything. Bob and Donna, who had tried to sell Appleberry Farm for two years, moved to Texas to be with their children. Once settled, however, life took over and they never returned – unfortunate for the Masons, but fortunate for the Atha family: Bob died in January 2018, and the family was privileged to spend his last year with him.

“We were on our own, trying to figure everything out,” Dave says. Not only did Dave and Kelly buy a farm and lose their mentor, Kelly had resigned from her job. She also got a herniated disc in her back three days after they purchased Appleberry Farm and had to have surgery on April 5. The injury meant she was unable to physically contribute to the farm’s first planting season. Other traumas soon followed. In May, Kelly’s brother committed suicide; and her father, who had terminal



A view of the apple orchard at Appleberry Farm. **Opposite:** Kelly and Dave Mason stand by the aptly named street sign along Appleberry Farm's driveway.

"We went from knowing nothing to completing a growing season, operating a U-pick, a farmers market stand, a store, making caramel apples and making cider." – DAVE MASON

cancer, died in August. "Somebody was carrying me through all of that," Kelly says. "I kept praying, 'God, if you can get us through this year, you can get us through anything.' It was a faith-building year."

Learning Curve

On top of the family tragedies, the Masons had to confront a steep learning curve with their new farm. Dave and Kelly largely taught themselves how to manage an orchard by doing a lot of online reading. They also received advice from several people, including Joe Hannan, commercial horticulture specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and from fellow orchardist Darin Enderton, of Apples on the Avenue in Nashua. "Darin helped me tremendously with spraying," Dave says. "He'd call and say what to spray when. I got all the sprays from talking with Joe and having him connect me with a dealer. The apples came out great, and I have a better idea of what to do this year."

For both Dave and Kelly, the immersion orcharding experience has bestowed a new appreciation of apples and the differences among varieties. Dave tries to sample some of the farm's 26 different varieties every day to learn about the unique qualities of each. "I do that every day because you need to know," he says. "People ask about different taste profiles." The farm has about 1,100 trees in the orchard ranging from

2-year-old saplings to mature 25-year-old trees. A big share of trees are 10 to 15 years old. "They haven't been pruned for a while," Dave says. "I've been pruning them back and will see if that helps them." Overall, he thinks pruning has gone well, but says there are about 250 to 300 trees he didn't get done "because they're in such bad shape."

In addition to the apples, and raising sweet corn on Kelly's family plot, Dave and Kelly also planted 150 tomato plants in 2017 to add to their market offerings. The tomatoes turned out to be a success. "We had some big, beautiful, perfect tomatoes," Dave says. "Everyone said they were the best tomatoes they ever had. Hy-Vee said the same thing."

As one might expect, autumn was a busy time for the Masons – their first season managing apple harvest and opening Appleberry Farm to the public. Kelly and Dave didn't know what to expect. It turns out they needn't have worried. "All these people showed up during apple season," Dave says. "A lot of people drive up from Des Moines. It's free to come, and it's acres of quiet, pick-your-own apples. We sold a lot of caramel apples. There were days Kelly made caramel apples all day long."

Crops and work were abundant. From picking tomatoes and tending to the

orchard to managing the on-farm store and flow of visitors, "we couldn't keep up with everything that needed to be done," Kelly says. "We couldn't afford to hire anyone. We had good friends who would show up and help." The Masons also tried their hand at making cider – which they deemed an experimental success. "We learned a lot last year," Dave says. "We went from knowing nothing to completing a growing season, operating a U-pick, a farmers market stand, a store, making caramel apples and making cider."

Looking Ahead

After surviving what they hope will be their most trying year as orchardists, Dave and Kelly look toward the future with enthusiasm. "We want this to be a place where there is quality produce, quality apples and where people come to gather," Kelly says. The Masons are considering an outdoor movie night, with a place for people to have bonfires. They plan to increase their number and scale of crops to include "lots of zucchini" and peach trees. They also added Granny Smith apple trees, tart and sweet cherry trees, pear trees, gooseberries, and blueberries and raspberries they transplanted from their house in town. They plan to grow more herbs, and want to add strawberries in the future. Kelly and Dave would also like to put up a high tunnel and sell hanging baskets, houseplants and transplants.

They plan to open their store year-round. Kelly has made small batches of natural beauty products, like lip balms, bath bombs and bath salts, and plans to expand next year. She also plans to expand her jams and jellies. "We want to incorporate a commercial kitchen in the store, including a snack area and coffee shop," Kelly says. They are considering getting a pasteurizer so they can sell their cider to stores, and they are attempting to make cider donuts. In addition to selling from the farm store, Dave and Kelly sell product to Hy-Vee and at Marshalltown's farmers market. This year, they also plan to try the Capitol Complex Farmers Market, a midday market held in Des Moines on Tuesdays. "It's really rewarding," Dave says, "especially when someone says this is the best sweet corn, best tomatoes, best apples I've ever had. I'm really looking forward to this season. Kelly concurs: "My back is good. I don't have a job holding me down. I'm ready to go!" ■

Converting Crop Land to Pasture Land

Members share experiences and successes to help others make the transition

by Meghan Filbert

“If it’ll grow 200-bushel corn and 60-bushel soybeans, it will grow forage,” said Fred Abels, a crop and livestock farmer near Holland. Fred was responding to a question posed by Eric Jensen, of Tripoli, on PFI’s livestock email discussion list this spring about converting cropland back to pasture.

About 12 years ago, Fred converted 55 acres of cropland to pasture – and wishes he would have done it sooner. Today, he practices rotational grazing on those tillable acres that are now in pasture.

“Since crop land is usually your better land, it can really respond,” Fred said.

Diversification and profitability are on many farmers’ minds. Several PFI members joined in the discussion to share their experience and practical tips on transitioning land from row crops to perennial pastures.

Nurse Crop or Annual Forages?

“Is it better to put in an annual forage crop in the spring followed by a permanent fall seeding, or seed in the spring with oats as a nurse crop?” asked **Shirley Waite** of Blakesburg.

Kevin Dietzel, of Jewell, recommended using oats as a nurse crop in the spring, along with your pasture mix, the same as you would when establishing hay fields. Other members echoed Kevin’s advice. Oats help to reduce weed competition

in newly seeded pastures and can be harvested as hay in the boot stage.

Samuel Maibach, of Bloomfield, has had the best success with planting a year or two of annuals before seeding down a perennial stand. “Oats, forage turnips and red clover do well on about any ground,” Samuel said, “and provide very good quality grazing or hay when planted early in the spring.” After oats, Samuel planted sorghum-sudangrass, followed by a winter small-grain in the fall. The clover took off in the second year, and again he planted summer annuals. The following fall he sowed his perennial stand. He added that planting, and grazing, annuals before establishing permanent pastures “seems

to improve soil structure, help with weed pressure and add fertility.” **Jessica Blair**, of Starbuck, Minnesota, agrees with Samuel: “I think planting cover crops and grazing before planting a pasture can help get the biology going in the soil.”

Kevin Dietzel added, “If legumes will be in your pasture mix, which I highly recommend, be sure to soil-test to make sure the pH is adequate. If liming is needed, lime the first year and plant annual forages, and then seed the new pasture the following spring.”

A Good Seedbed Is Important

“The key thing with establishing forages is to have a good seedbed,” said **Francis Thicke**, of Fairfield. On ground that is flat or gently rolling, **Wade Dooley**, of Albion, prefers to use a method that may seem old-fashioned: he tills the soil, rolls once to smooth, broadcasts seed from two directions for soil coverage, harrows the seed in, rolls again to ensure seed-to-soil contact and smoothes one last time. “On land that erodes easily, a no-till drill would be my preference,” continued Wade, “then I’d roll it once to smooth out any rough spots.”

The majority of members recommend lightly disking, seeding, then using a





Above: From left to right: Fred Abels, Samuel Maibach, Shirley Waite and Kevin Dietzel. **Opposite:** Cows graze in pasture on Jamie Hostetler's eastern Iowa farm.

harrow or cultmulcher to firm and pack the seedbed. As far as seeding method goes, members have used conventional drills, no-till drills, air seeders, broadcasters and a Brillion seeder.

Plant a Diverse Mix

Start with a mix of grasses and legumes. "Orchard grass and smooth brome grass are both improved varieties that are later-maturing and disease-resistant," according to **Joe Sellers**, of Chariton. "If you use something that is not used a lot here, like perennial rye, festulolium or meadow fescue," he continued, "be sure you have a variety that is adapted in Iowa." He also recommends legumes such as red clover, white clover and birdsfoot trefoil – but keep in mind pH and fertility levels must be considered when establishing legumes.

Jamie Hostetler, of Bellevue, has had success with a blend of endophyte-friendly tall fescue, orchard grass, perennial rye grass, birdsfoot trefoil, meadow fescue and Alice white clover, along with an oat nurse crop. Eight years later, his stand is still going strong. He has observed that the orchard grass has outcompeted the other grasses. Wade has used a 15-species mix consisting of perennials and annuals, including grasses, forbs and legumes. "I like to do this, because we have some really variable soil and climatic conditions, and not everything does well on every acre," Wade said. "The more diverse the mix, the better the chances something will make it! Also, it helped me cut back on

individual seed costs. I mixed cool-season species with a splash of native warm-seasons; those native seeds are pricey!"

Phil Specht, of McGregor, added that variation in species helps spread the maturities of forages in order to span the grazing season. "Birdsfoot trefoil is very productive right when cool-season grasses start their summer slump," Phil said. He also mentioned he likes timothy grass, but it does poorly in a drought. Diversity is key!

The topic of letting nature take its course instead of seeding a perennial mix came up – and members cautioned against this. "I did that on a small corner of a pasture when I converted cropland to pasture, and I got 100 percent endophyte-infected tall fescue, which my cows would not eat, and even if they did it would not be good for them," Francis said. Fescue will dominate pastures if it is allowed to.

Graze It

Now that you've established a new pasture, how soon can you graze it? "The plants need to be rooted properly so they will not be pulled up by grazing animals," Kevin advised. "And be sure to rotate them through quickly so they don't overgraze." Performing a "pluck test" can help you know when your pasture is ready for grazing. Simply grasp a blade of forage between your thumb and forefinger and pluck, to simulate grazing. The plant should break off and not pull out by its roots.

Robert Alexander, of Granville, spring-seeded pasture into a bean stubble field and mowed it the first week in July for weed control. He held off on grazing it until the following October. Jamie also waited to turn animals out. "We made hay off the first cutting and then started grazing it with our cows, rotating every 24 hours to a new paddock," Jamie said. He believes rotational grazing has helped his soil biology bounce back from previously being a conventional corn field; he's seen more earthworms and his organic matter levels increase with each soil test.

Francis Thicke concluded: "If you select a good mix of grasses and legumes and plant in the spring with oats, harvest the oats in the boot stage and manage the forages well, you can create a tremendously productive pasture." ■

Join the Discussion!

➔ **Join the livestock email discussion list** to participate in conversations about all things livestock – grazing, meat processing, animal nutrition and more. The list is also a place to share animals for sale or requests to buy.

To join the livestock email discussion list – or any of PFI's six lists – contact Debra Boekholder at (515) 232-5661 or debra@practicalfarmers.org.

Innovating for Profit in Extended Rotations

Oats, triticale and custom machinery on James Asmus' farm

by Alisha Bower

James Asmus farms near Manilla in Shelby County, raising corn, soybeans, oats, hay and – new this year – triticale. He has been farming his whole life, starting with his dad and father-in-law in 1981 and then on his own since 1990.

Some of his crops sell for grain, and some he harvests as hay, silage or haylage to feed to his cow-calf pairs. For him, growing small-grains crops is a way to increase forage production for his livestock and decrease his input costs on cover crops.

Small Grains as Forage

"I've raised oats since I started farming," James says – though he admits he doesn't have a good market for selling the oat grain. This is a quandary shared by many farmers. In fact, it's usually the first challenge farmers will say they face with small grains production in Iowa. But James has also raised oats every year since he started farming – so there must be more to the story in this case.

For James, planting oats as a nurse crop over an under-seeding of alfalfa or clover hay is an easy way increase the profitability of that year's crop rotation. "My dad used to drill alfalfa in June in soybean stubble with no nurse crop, and that had so many weeds he'd only get one cutting of hay

off of it that first year," James says. "With oats, I get a crop of some sort of forage, and then I can either graze the under-seeded legume or cut it towards the end of August." By planting oats and alfalfa at the same time in the early spring, James ensures that he'll get two crops of forage – usually oat silage in June, and then grazing or haying the alfalfa in August. In contrast, alfalfa seeded by itself might only produce one forage crop that year. This sidesteps the issue of finding a market for oat grain, because the oat is harvested in its vegetative state for livestock feed.

What do the livestock have to say about it? "They love it!" James says. Feeding silage to his cow-calf pairs, particularly during calving season in the spring, has resulted

in excellent herd health, James reports not one calf has gone off the feed yet. "I haven't had to feed any grain yet this spring, and haven't given a single shot to a sick animal either."

Small Grains for Cover Crop Seed

James recently made a big life change: He left his job in town and has come back to the farm full-time, except for a few endeavors he does on the side (see sidebar). For him, farming full-time has given him more freedom and flexibility to adjust and grow his farm operation. He has expanded his herd and the amount of time the cattle are grazing – in particular, grazing cover crops. "I want to have an airplane come in and fly on triticale in corn so that I can get some good winter grazing," James says. "But triticale seed is kind of expensive." Ever a problem-solver, James decided to grow the triticale himself.

Last fall, James planted triticale after soybean harvest with his "antique" grain drill from the 1950s. "My goal is to harvest the triticale for seed, so getting a nice even stand to control weeds is important," James says. He emphasizes the importance





Opposite: (Left) Young oats planted with an under-seeding of alfalfa are starting to grow on James' farm earlier this year. **(Right)** James Asmus (red cap) discusses organic transition and oat production with fellow attendees at Scott Ausborn's field day near Ida Grove last summer. **Above:** Jim seeded this triticale field last fall and will harvest the grain in July for cover crop seed that he will use on his own farm.

of planting small grains instead of broadcasting the seed, a popular practice for planting small grains (like rye, triticale or oats) that will only be used as a cover crop. Plus, James' goal is to harvest the triticale standing with a combine, which is only possible with an even crop stand achieved by placing the small-grain seed at an even depth across the field.

The ideal small-grains harvest method for James depends on the end use of the grain. "You get green material from the plants mixed in with the grain when you combine the grain standing," James says. "Then when the small-grain is put in a bin to sweat, the green matter dries out too, turns to powder and makes the oats 'dusty.' Horse people don't like dusty oats because horses can easily get health issues from it. For other ruminant animals like cows or sheep, it probably won't affect them unless some of that dust is actually mold. But, if you're using the grain for seed, then whether or not the grain is dusty is not as much of a concern." Because James intends to use this triticale grain as cover crop seed, he sees a perfect

opportunity to try to combine the grain standing. If he were using the grain for consumption by animals or humans, however, he might consider swathing the oats and letting that green plant matter dry down in the field before combining to limit the dust mixed in with the grain.

Even though James usually plants his hay crop in the early spring so it's growing simultaneously with the small-grain crop, this year he has decided to plant alfalfa in August after triticale is harvested in July. Doing this will allow him to field-cultivate to control weeds between triticale harvest and alfalfa planting, instead of spraying herbicides to control weeds, which is the only option (besides hand-weeding) if the alfalfa were already established under the triticale before harvest. "I'm trying to steer away from so much chemical use and move towards more organic," James says. "When I'm doing this kind of stuff, it's like preparing for that move. What works for someone else may not work for me, so now I've got to do the experimentation to figure that out." ■

Custom-Built Farm Efficiency

On the side, James loves to design and machine innovative gadgets that can make his work on the farm more efficient, and therefore, more profitable. He is laying the groundwork to become a small-equipment manufacturer, using a computer numerical control (CNC) plasma cutter, for which he writes all of the computer code to operate. The benefit of this machine is that it is hyper-accurate so he can quickly make well-fitting pieces for equipment, which decreases stress on the parts so they suffer less wear and tear over time.

His project ideas come from observing tasks on his own or a neighbor's farm that could be more profitable if simplified or required less labor to complete. One project idea James has been contemplating is how to simplify the process of making small square bales. James has noticed that, in the spring, small square bales can bring in as much as \$10 per bale. "At calving time when the weather is crappy and the calving cows have to be in the barn, you have to use small square bales, not rolled round bales," James says. Because most farmers are making only round bales now, this is a market opportunity for an entrepreneurial small-bale producer. At 4-5 tons of hay production per acre, James says you could potentially make \$1,600 per acre. The drawback is that small square bales require a lot of manual or machine labor to bale, collect, stack, store, re-stack, transport and un-stack.

James has concluded that the most tedious and labor-intensive part of the process is moving all of the separate bales. To simplify the process, he thinks he can make a buncher so that four bales drop off the back of the hay baler already tied together, which would decrease the sheer number of bales a farmer has to lug around. Because the package of four bales would be too large for a person to lift, he has been envisioning another mechanical innovation: a special grab fork designed for small square bales that could be mounted on a skid loader, allowing the bigger stacks to be moved more quickly and easily. While James has yet to create a prototype, the final step of his custom small-square-bale machine would be to design the parts and write the computer code to machine all of the pieces. The plasma cutter will do work of cutting the pieces, and James will assemble them before taking to the field for a test run. ■

New Design Coming to FindAFarmer.net

Visual make-over this summer will boost the site's land-matching success with user-friendly features

by Steve Carlson

Seven years after it originally launched, Practical Farmers of Iowa's land-matching tool, FindAFarmer.net, is in the midst of a visual overhaul – expected to be completed later this summer – that will further its mission to connect landowners with landseekers.

The need to get beginning farmers access to farmland is no less important now than when the site was first launched: The average age of the American farmer is now approaching 60, and it's estimated nearly 100 million acres of farmland will change hands over the next five years. In an effort to help facilitate this farmland transition and get beginning farmers access to land, FindAFarmer.net was built to help farmland owners connect with farmland seekers.

What makes this tool unique from other real estate websites is the ability for both parties to share their vision and values – helping connect two parties who share similar interests in the farmland's future. Names and contact information remain hidden to allow for an anonymous, initial conversation to take place before taking the next step in the transition process.

If FindAFarmer can help you or someone you know, remember these tips for success:

- **Share your story:** As a landowner, describe the history of the land and your vision for the future. As a landseeker, talk about your goals, but also make sure to describe your background and any qualifications to help sell yourself.
- **Upload photos:** Pictures of land, crops, buildings, equipment – and especially of yourself or your family – help add a personal connection.
- **Make contacts:** Once you've set your profile, make sure to be proactive by searching for other users and sending messages. Cast a wide net because you don't know what interaction may turn into a connection.

Stay tuned for more information about the newly designed website, which is scheduled to launch this summer. Meanwhile, here are a few profile examples from the site to help inspire you. ■

FindAFarmer.Net Profile Spotlights



Dillon Blythe

Seeking crop land to rent or purchase in or near Iowa County

Background: Dillon is a beginning farmer in Iowa County, where he is employed as an agronomy sales representative for a local retailer in addition to farming 15 acres. He recently graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in agricultural studies, and he also holds an associate's degree in agriculture from Iowa Central Community College. Prior to college, Dillon raised cattle and was active on his family's and neighbor's farms.

Dillon is a big believer in soil fertility and soil health, and is eager to expand his operation and apply his knowledge and experience raising high-yielding crops with a low impact on soil topography.

See his profile: findafarmer.net/landseekers/dblythe





Amy Schmitt and Zach D'Amico

Seeking a few acres to purchase for fruit, vegetable and flower production near Cedar Rapids

Background: Amy and Zach have worked with an urban farm and school garden programs through a nonprofit organization, as well as worked and volunteered on several CSA farms.

They recently spent a year as apprentices at Foxtail Farm in Wisconsin, where they were fully immersed in farm life by living and working on the farm, which included organic vegetable production, a commercial processing kitchen and a 250-member CSA. They also started their own venture by growing produce and flowers on an acre of borrowed land to sell at local farmers' markets and restaurants.

They now feel they are ready to begin their own farm adventure. Amy and Zach are looking to buy a few acres of land in Iowa, preferably near Cedar Rapids. They hope to use the land to grow sustainable vegetables, fruit and flowers for sale.

See their profile: findafarmer.net/landseekers/aschmitt



Wes and Cheryl Draughn

Recently purchased 12 acres that was previously a nursery near Ames, excited about its potential

Background: The Draughns purchased 12 acres that was previously used as a nursery located within a mile of Ames, and are looking for someone interested in using the land to grow local food. There are about 6-7 acres that are farmable, and the property has many of the things needed to support a farm, including a tractor with some implements, several outbuildings, a well with several spigots and a glass greenhouse attached to a potential retail space.

The family would like to see the land used as an organic or sustainable farm. Wes explains, "While we have a vision, we do not have the education nor the time to start a full production farm. I have a background in engineering and construction, and feel that I can support the infrastructure and maintenance a farm requires, and my wife is a nurse, though we hope we don't need to use her skills."

See their profile: findafarmer.net/landowners/jaydubblazer

John and Deb Bruhler

Currently operate 2,000 acres of row crops in Fayette County, and looking for a partner to incorporate livestock

Background: The Bruhlers farm with a strong emphasis on soil health, practicing no-till, planting cover crops and diversifying with small grains. They're currently looking into adding a large-scale livestock enterprise to the operation, and want someone who also believes in this system and has a passion for agriculture.

The Bruhlers do not want to transition the current operation to someone else or step down from their current roles, but rather provide an opportunity for a motivated person or couple to add a livestock enterprise. They're not looking for an employee, but someone who wants a sense of responsibility and ownership.



See their profile: findafarmer.net/landowners/NEIAFarm

Book Review: “Creating a Family Business, From Contemplation to Maturity”

By Allan Nation with comments by Carolyn Nation and Glinda Davenport

by Paul Ackley

From 1977 until his death in 2016, Allan Nation was editor and owner of the *Stockman Grass Farmer*, a monthly magazine devoted to small, grass-based, environmentally friendly livestock farmers and the businesses that support those farmers.

These businesses could include abattoirs (meat lockers to us), eateries featuring menu items produced locally in an earth-friendly manner, or maybe a vineyard that incorporated sheep to weed the vineyard instead of manual labor. The 272-page book, “Creating a Family Business, From Contemplation to Maturity,” was published in 2018 by Allan’s wife, Carolyn, with help from Allan’s partners, Sonny and Glinda Davenport, from an unfinished manuscript Allan had left behind. The book is Allan’s personal story from his early childhood memories to how he came to be owner and editor of *Stockman Grass Farmer*, and how he grew it to influence and support earth-friendly methods of food production. Allan compares founding and growing a business to raising a child from squalling infant to mature adult. He succeeded in creating a vibrant, living business that will go on after its founder has passed, just as our children will go on after us.

Allan involved others in various positions to gather ideas and material for articles to include in the *Stockman Grass Farmer*. He had no desire to sell the business and retire. He wanted to retire into the business as a grandparent in a family.

Allan Nation came late to visioning what he wanted his life to embody. About 20 years before he died from a heart attack in late 2016, at the age of 69, he listed the following six goals on his personal vision statement: comfortable, free of financial worries, healthy, full of lots of learning experiences, full of interesting people and paid for before tax dollars.

Agriculture’s primary problem is its addiction to overcapitalizing itself. Allan continually sought to correct that by offering a low-cost alternative. His core philosophy was “don’t spend money to fight Mother Nature.” In the book, he explains this and his other core principles: “A quality product, ALWAYS. Always compare your product to the best, not the

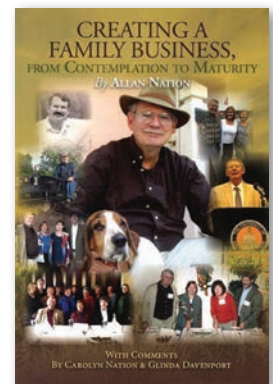


average”; and “Ten-year rule. It takes a minimum of ten years to get proficient at a profession or practice.” The book is full of examples from his own life, or the lives of those he has written about, to support and strengthen his ideas. These anecdotes usually have a memorable twist with a bit of humor.

The last chapter offers some suggestions and ideas for transfer of ownership to the next generation. I found them to be unique or have his unique perspective applied to those I was familiar with. This is a book I wish I had 50 years ago.

Even though it is written from an agricultural perspective, many of the principles are universal to nearly any small business, and many of the examples apply to life universally. I would highly recommend it to anyone who values an earth-friendly lifestyle and production model. ■

Paul Ackley and his wife Nancy run an integrated farm near Bedford, Iowa, raising corn, soybeans, wheat, cattle and hair sheep. Cattle are rotated daily through pasture during the grazing season, all crops are produced using no-till and cover crops.



Chapters include:

- Figuring out where you are and where you’re going
- Making a business plan
- The three-legged stool of production, finance and marketing
- Selecting a product and setting a price
- The importance of due diligence
- Working with your spouse and children
- Bringing in employees and partners
- What to do when disaster strikes
- Enjoying the fruits of your labor

Chelsey Teachout is PFI's New Digital Media Coordinator

In May I started working at Practical Farmers of Iowa, and will manage PFI's website, email newsletters (including Practical News, our main weekly email newsletter, as well as other e-newsletters that serve our program areas) and social media. I'll also write content for print and online outlets. I enjoy learning about all things food- and farm-related, collecting plants and hearing people's stories. What does that sound like? A nerd farm kid.

My whole life has in some way been connected to farming, food production and the culture that goes along with it. I grew up on my family's fifth-generation farm in southwest Iowa near Shenandoah. Our farm landscape has changed over the decades, much like everyone else's.

I attended Drake University in Des Moines and studied writing and journalism. During my time at Drake, I had the opportunity to study, travel and work with a network of people. One summer, my zip code was a tent because I worked on a trail crew. We traveled throughout Iowa to work on some state park trails developed almost a hundred years ago. Another summer, I interned with the World Food Prize and got to meet international leaders. One of my favorite experiences was studying abroad in Poland for a few weeks – a place rich in



history, people and farming. There's some pretty good food there too.

Towards the end of college, I worked as a communications assistant with the Women, Food and Agriculture Network. I really enjoyed getting to meet women landowners and farmers, and hear their stories. It opened my eyes to learn how much land is owned by women – not only within Iowa, but nationwide. A few years later, I moved to DuPont Pioneer, where I wrote agronomy training materials and learned a lot about the work sales

representatives do. Through all these experiences, I have been amazed at how there is always something that connects us: Our shared experiences teach us, and unite us as humans. Thank goodness I have many people in my life to share experiences with – my fiancé, Thomas, family and friends.

I'm excited to join Practical Farmers because its mission supports a collaborative learning environment. I look forward to working with farmers and those connected to them. ■

Applications for Savings Incentive Program Open in August

Are you a beginning or aspiring farmer who would like more help crafting your business plan or refining your farm goals and knowledge? Consider applying to Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program. The two-year program helps beginning and aspiring farmers find success with their farm start-ups by helping you draft a business plan, matching up to \$2,400 in savings, pairing you with experienced farm mentors – and more! **Applications for the next Savings Incentive Program class will open on Aug. 15.**

"I applied for the Savings Incentive Program and was matched with a mentor, Gary Guthrie, and we worked through

all the main steps of coming up with a business plan and all of the financial planning for a farm," says Julia Slocum, who operates Lacewing Acres in Ames and was part of the SIP Class of 2014. "I think [having a network] gives you a lot of really good ideas, and also relieves a lot of that beginning farmer pressure that there's a right way to do things. Seeing all of these experienced people doing things in different ways was really important to know that I was going to find my own path."

Applications will be accepted through Oct. 10. Those enrolled will start in January 2019, and be part of the Savings Incentive Program Class of 2020. Applications



and tips for applying will be available at practicalfarmers.org.

Questions? Contact Greg Padget at greg@practicalfarmers.org. ■

New Members & Upcoming Events

Welcome, New Members!

District 1 – Northwest

- Bev and Dwight Rutter – Spencer

District 2 – North Central

- Tanner Buck – State Center
- Tim Couser – Nevada
- James Long, Double L Family Farm – Maxwell
- Dave and Kelly Mason, Appleberry Farm – Marshalltown
- David Obrecht – Zearing
- Craig Pfantz – State Center
- Lynne and Adriana Schnoebelen, 9.6 Farms, LLC – Madrid
- Douglas VanLangen – Ellsworth
- Alex Woodall – Kamrar

District 3 – Northeast

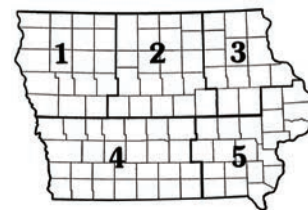
- Rudy Abebe – Waterloo
- Craig and Debbie Aldrich – Cedar Rapids
- Tony Baltes – Lisbon
- Craig and Rachel Boeke, Dubuque Urban Farm – Dubuque

- Lee Busching – Waverly
- Daniel Craft, Craft Farms – LaPorte City
- Indian Creek Nature Center, John Myers – Cedar Rapids
- Mary Kauffman, Healthy Rise Bakery – Cedar Rapids
- Tim Keegan, South Valley Farms – Mount Vernon

District 4 – Southwest

- Kevin Ball, Brad Ball – Lacona
- Terry Bandstra – Pella
- Billy Baudler – Fontanelle
- Dean Bauer – Exira
- Brian Beachy – Leon
- Craig Becker – Atlantic
- Melynda DeCarlo – Cumming
- Kevin Dittmer – Columbia
- Don Wiviott – Windsor Heights
- Randy Euken – Lewis
- Lance Hansen – Guthrie Center
- Gary Johnson – Emerson

- Scott Jorgensen – Adair
 - Kent McCorkle – Knoxville
 - Omar Miller – Leon
 - Brad Pellett – Atlantic
 - Joseph Riley – Des Moines
 - Dave Rowley – Knoxville
 - Stephen Schurman – Lacona
 - Donna Schwenke – Atlantic
 - Tony Smith – Exira
 - Sam Spellman – Woodward
 - Rick Sprague – Bedford
 - Clete Steensen – Adair
 - Kenneth Sutter – Pleasantville
 - Tiffany Tauscheck – Clive
- ## District 5 – Southeast
- Cliff Bowie – West Branch
 - Caleb Hargis – New Sharon
 - Keith Hotz – Lone Tree
 - Jeremy Hotz – Iowa City
 - Jake Pedersen – West Liberty
 - Mark Richardson, Abundant Provision Farm – Searsboro
 - Sam Roberts, Roberts Family Farm – Oxford Junction



- Dave Roberts, RED Inc. – Ainsworth
- Nelson Smith – Brighton
- Kevin Veenstra – Grinnell
- Jacob Veith – Mount Pleasant

District 6 – Out of State

- Glen Kadelbach, Kadelbach Organic Farms – Hutchinson, MN
- Jim Krahling – Lake Crystal, MN
- Jon Luhman, Dry Creek Farms LLC – Goodhue, MN
- Marvin Peters – Lake City, MN
- Zach and Sierra Peterson – Trimont, MN
- Paul Salander – Mendota, IL
- Tony Sarabia – Chicago, IL
- Luke Stevens – Hanley Falls, MN
- James Syburg, White Oak Farm – Oconomowoc, WI
- Dan Totushek – Jordan, MN

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ MID-JULY | AUGUST | EARLY SEPTEMBER

JULY

July 20: Wholesale Vegetables on a Small Scale | Balsam Lake, WI | 9 a.m. – Noon

MOSES presents this free half-day field day at Seed to Seed Farm. Learn about wholesale production on a small- to medium-sized farm. Farm host Ariel Pressman will explain how to grow quality produce consistently for larger accounts, including supermarkets and co-ops. Tour the farm and talk with Ariel about his farm efficiency practices, how he selects the best plant varieties and the many other lessons he has learned since he started farming seven years ago. To learn more, visit mosesorganic.org/events/organic-field-days/july-20.

July 24: Dual Cropping Systems: An Introduction | Polk City | 9 a.m. – Noon

Spend a summer morning at Lehman Family Farm during this Iowa Organic Association field day. PFI members Aaron and Nicole Lehman have a 400-acre farm where they raise conventional and organic corn, soybeans and hay. The Lehmans will talk about the challenges and opportunities of these dual farming systems. To learn more, visit: iowaorganic.org/dual_cropping_systems.

July 26 – 27: National Strip-Tillage Conference | Iowa City

This unique, one-of-a-kind learning experience assembles the best strip-tillers, agronomists and researchers together in one location to share cutting-edge ideas, techniques and strategies to raise your level of strip-till profitability, efficiency and efficacy. To learn more, visit: striptillfarmer.com/nstc.

AUGUST

Aug. 1 – 2: Emerging Farmers Forum | Clarinda

Iowa Learning Farms presents the Emerging Farmers Forum, which will include tours of Pinhook Farm, owned and operated by PFI member Seth Watkins; hands-on activities; and thought-provoking discussions on conservation practices, business and financial planning, marketing, diversification, ways to facilitate conversations with parents and family as you transition into the farming operation and more. To learn more, visit iowalearningfarms.org/emerging-farmers.

Aug. 3 – 5: Medicinal Herb Intensive Workshop | North Freedom, WI

Jane Hawley Stevens and David Stevens at Four Elements Herbals offer a comprehensive, hands-on educational weekend covering all aspects of medicinal herb production from seed to product, on their certified organic herb farm. Topics include propagation, soil health, planting, harvesting and post-harvest handling. The course is intended for experienced or new growers looking to gain more knowledge about medicinal herb production. To learn more, visit fourelementsherbals.com.

Aug. 7: Integrating Livestock Options Workshop | Kerkhoven, MN

Land Stewardship Project presents this workshop, featuring farmer, grazer and soil health speaker Kent Solberg. Learn ways to increase farm profits, stack enterprises, reduce inputs, diversify farm income, increase farm resilience and build soils by integrating livestock onto row-crop acres. To learn more, visit landstewardshipproject.org/events/item/1183.

Aug. 11: Minnesota Garlic Festival | Hutchinson, MN | 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

This family-friendly event will feature cooking demonstrations, music, area artisans, games – and lots of garlic. Minnesota garlic growers raise more than 100 varieties of garlic, and will have the first of this year's crop at the festival. (It can keep in your kitchen for up to a year!) To learn more, visit sfa-mn.org/garlicfest.

Aug. 17 – 19: Seed School | Decorah

Join Seed Savers Exchange to learn how to grow, harvest, store, and save seed while discussing the importance of preserving crop diversity in your own backyard. Discover how to engage your community in seed stewardship through seed libraries, seed swaps, and community gardens. To learn more, visit seedsavers.org/seed-school.

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 5: Tree Crop Field Class | Wapello

Join PFI members Kathy Dice and Tom Wahl, of Red Fern Farm, to learn about a variety of tree crops suitable for forest farming systems in Iowa – including chestnut, pawpaw, American persimmon, heartnut and Asian pear. Tour Tom and Kathy's agroforestry farm that specializes in nut, fruit and berry crops, as well as medicinal forest plants, and learn how they market their crops through U-pick. There will also be an opportunity to sample some of the non-traditional crops featured throughout the day. Registration is required by Monday, Sept. 3. To learn more, visit practicalfarmers.org.

For more events, visit practicalfarmers.org



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

JOIN or RENEW

< **This annual membership is a:**

- New Membership
 Renewal

< **I am joining at the level of:**

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

Organization – \$110

Lifetime Member* – \$1,000

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

< **I am joining or renewing as:**

- An Aspiring Farmer A Farmer or Grower Non-Farmer

< **How did you hear about PFI?**

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS with an ADDITIONAL DONATION!

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

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

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

Or, make a recurring monthly or quarterly donation.

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

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

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

Thank You!

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____ Email 2: _____

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

EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUP SIGN-UP

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

- Cover Crops Field Crops General Horticulture Livestock Policy

PAYMENT

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

Additional donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

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

Credit card (Visa, MasterCard or Discover only).

Name on card _____ Number _____ Exp. _____

Please automatically charge this credit card each year for membership

Practical Farmers of Iowa

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101

Ames, IA 50010



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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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.

