

working together, always learning

the Practical Farmer

A quarterly publication of Practical Farmers of Iowa

Winter 2017



On the cover



Angela and John Tedesco, of Johnston, donated their Granger farmland to Practical Farmers, forever preserving it as a sustainable, working farm.

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the Practical Farmer

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

Newsletter Editor: Tamsyn Jones

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



A Day at Practical Farmers

For this issue, I thought I'd share a quick summary of a recent day at work. Why? Maybe to brag a little about how fun and fulfilling my job is. But mainly to show how dynamic a place Practical Farmers is, and to provide a glimpse into the myriad ways PFI is working – one day at a time – to strengthen farms, communities and the quality of Iowa's working landscape.

I arrived at work hungry and caffeine-deprived; today PFI staffers got blood drawn as part of our wellness initiative, so I had to fast 12 hours prior. Afterwards, with co-workers, I sucked down coffee and ate a delicious breakfast provided by Erica, our office manager. I then sent comments to Sarah Carlson, PFI's Midwest cover crops director, for a paper she is co-authoring in partnership with Soren Rundquist of the Environmental Working Group. This paper projects the future growth of cover crops on corn and soybean acres in Illinois, Indiana and Iowa, and discusses impacts of this growth as well as strategies to further spur adoption.

After this, I met with Greg Van Den Berghe, our Beginning Farmer Program manager, to finalize potential mentors for aspiring and beginning farmers in Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program. These mentors provide important perspectives and support to beginning farmers trying to establish sound farm businesses – a difficult feat.

Next on my agenda: I schemed on and took a practice run of our member survey with Laura Frescoln, program director with PFI. **You should have received this by email. Please take the time to fill it out.** Whether you are a farmer or friend-of-farmer member, your answers give vital insights that help us gauge how well we are doing meeting your goals. We also use your responses to help guide the goals we will outline in our next strategic plan, or marching orders, for 2018-2020.

After this, it was time for lunch. I walked to Wheatsfield Cooperative with co-workers – a regular staff ritual – and then talked with Nick Ohde, PFI's research and media coordinator, about his press plan for Practical Farmers' small grains video series.

We also discussed farmer Earl Canfield's impressive mind. Nick interviewed Earl about his small grains work and, in this issue, has profiled the Canfield family and their efforts to diversify their family farm (see pages 22-23). What gifts of knowledge we get from our members!

The winter issue of "the Practical Farmer" always highlights PFI's leaders from the previous year, so I then transcribed names of leaders from 2016. This tedious job is an inspiring review of all the members involved in strengthening farms and communities in Iowa. The multitude of people involved in this organization, and the depth of time and knowledge they provide, is why we exist and how we are effective. On pages 18-19, get an overview of the many ways PFI members served as leaders in 2016, including members who made their voices heard in the media. There are so many, 532, that instead of featuring you all in one edition, we are going to highlight some of you in a few successive issues.

Next on my schedule was a fireside meeting with John and Angela Tedesco at their lovely Johnston home to wrap up loose ends of the land donation they made to PFI. This donation will provide long-term income for Practical Farmers, preserve this working landscape in an area of urban sprawl and provide land access for small-scale farmers.

Since the Tedescos are on the way back to my home in Grimes, I drove home after our visit ended – but my work day wasn't yet over. I reviewed Dan Wilson's keynote presentation that he delivered at our 2017 annual conference, and pondered what he thinks is most important to pass on to others: Embrace change, be creative and be a problem-solver.



Staff holiday photo taken in Gary Guthrie's field in December 2016.

Front row (left to right): Liz Kolbe, Laura Frescoln, Lauren Zastrow, Steve Carlson; **Back row (left to right):** Nick Ohde, Sally Worley, Stefan Gailans, Sarah Carlson, Meghan Filbert; **Staff not pictured:** Erica Andorf, Suzi Howk, Tamsyn Jones and Greg Van Den Berghe

Then I had a phone conversation with Practical Farmers' board president, Mark Peterson, about details regarding the then-upcoming board meeting and PFI conference. We also chatted about his farm's economic analysis for 2017 and decisions his farm is facing. We talked about the cyclical nature of farm economics and how it is necessary, but hard, to look at farm economics in multi-versus single-year calculations.

Finally, I looked through files of calendars that PFI member Helen Gunderson created to sell and donate proceeds to Practical Farmers. Helen's images captured the essence of urban agriculture at her urban farm in Ames, and the essence of rural Iowa. A talented photographer, she transported me to these places with her images.

Take this recap and multiply it by all the PFI staff, who have just as many activities going on with various farmers around Iowa every work day in our office. Our four phone lines and computers get heavy use from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day as we keep busy communicating with members and partners about how to advance our important work. This staff is a magnificent group, and I am thankful I get the opportunity to work with them each day.

Sally Worley

Meet the Savings Incentive Program *Class of 2018*



Maren Beard (left)
Decorah



Carmen Black
Solon



Kelly Clime
Dallas Center



Emily Fagan
Decorah



Matt Lansing
Dubuque



Emily and Nathan Paulsen
Elk Horn



Jenny Quiner
Des Moines



Bart VerEllen
Centerville



Matthew and Lori Wiese
Earlham



Tom Wilson and Taylor Williams
Nevada



Jon Yagla
Iowa City

Learn More:

View profiles of Savings Incentive Program Class of 2018 members at:
practicalfarmers.org/member-priorities/beginning-farmers/savings-incentive-program

A Better On-Farm Training Program

Labor4Learning connects farmers with job seekers

by Steve Carlson

Having sufficient on-farm work experience is vital to the success of new farmers just starting out. Many on-farm employment opportunities, however, are limited in scope. The range of skills needed to run a farm business includes not just knowledge of production methods, but also marketing, finances – and often, human resources. Many farm employees come to understand the hard work needed to raise crops or livestock, but fewer understand what it takes to run the business end of a farm.

To help aspiring farmers gain this sort of experience, Labor4Learning connects experienced farmers looking for eager employees with aspiring farmers seeking paid, on-farm training. Labor4Learning “trainer farms” are approved to serve as qualified teachers by a committee of Practical Farmers of Iowa members, and have agreed to provide additional training on topics necessary to be a successful farmer.

In addition to the normal work activities related to the specific on-farm job, the trainer and trainee agree on a set of learning outcomes they will address during the course of employment. PFI gives trainers a stipend to account for the extra time they spend teaching and offers additional perks to trainees, in addition to providing general support during the term of the program.

The design of Labor4Learning is a win-win for both parties involved. “It is a great program,” says Erik Sessions, of Patchwork Green Farm in Decorah who has served as a trainer. “It forces me to be more organized about covering topics thoroughly, and it’s good for worker morale, as they feel like they are becoming invested in our farm as they learn more about what makes it tick.”

Job opportunities through Labor4Learning vary greatly, from greenhouses to diverse crop and livestock farms. In this article, we feature two opportunities available in 2017. Several more opportunities are listed on our website.

If you’d like to take part in this program as a trainee or trainer, visit practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning and contact Steve Carlson at steve@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

1.

Gibraltar Farms » Iowa Falls (Hardin County)

Job Title: Farm Intern **Trainers:** John C. and Sarah Gilbert

Farm Description: Gibraltar Farms is a 770-acre diversified row crop, dairy and livestock farm that includes traditionally bred corn, soybeans, hay, oats and a variety of annuals for forage; 60 Brown Swiss dairy cattle; and antibiotic-free, pasture-farrowed pigs sold to Niman Ranch.



Production Methods: Managed grazing, extended rotations, cover crops, minimum-till, strip-till, no-till, and non-GMO crops and feeds

Marketing Outlets: Swiss Valley Cooperative, Niman Ranch, a local meat locker, and conventional and non-GMO markets

Job Terms: Full-time, 40 hours a week, starting between March and May and lasting at least through August with potential for longer-term. Pay starts at \$9/hour commensurate with experience.

Work Activities: Assist with all aspects of the farm, including the dairy, hogs and crops. This will include assisting with milking dairy cows, mixing and delivering feed, setting up pasture fencing, assisting with forage harvest, and construction and repair projects.

Visit: practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning

2.

Organic Greens LLC » Kalona (Washington County)

Job Title: Farm Labor **Trainer:** James Nisly

Crops and Enterprises: Mini greens, micro greens, wheat grass, and vegetables

Production Methods: Certified organic, cover crops and crop rotations

Marketing Outlets: Grocery stores, institutions, restaurants, food service, farmers market and directly to consumers

Job Terms: Full-time, 40 hours a week, beginning in May and going through the end of the year. Pay starts at \$10/hour commensurate with experience.



Work Activities: Activities including planting, care, harvest, washing and packing of mini greens, micro greens and market garden crops, as well as planting and incorporating cover crops and delivering products to customers.

Visit: practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning

Shifting Roles

The Van Der Pols tackle farm transitions

by Teresa Opheim

Jim and LeeAnn Van Der Pol are in their 60s and in the thick of farming – and are shifting their roles and ownership on their central-Minnesota farm.

Jim's parents started out with a "team of mules and \$600," as Jim's father liked to quip. They were children of the depression and dropped out of school to work. "My dad was raised very rough, malnourished and worked too early and too hard," Jim says.

By the time Jim and LeeAnn came back to farm in 1977, his parents owned 480 acres – quite an accomplishment. But Jim's father had had enough of farming by then, and he and his wife promptly retired and moved to town. Jim and LeeAnn moved into their house. "My dad walked away from management when I came back. He would drive the tractor and that's all he would do. I didn't wish he could provide more guidance, but I probably should have. There was never an idea in his mind that he was still running things. He basically said 'now this is yours.'"

The farm was Jim and LeeAnn's to operate, but ownership proved to be a lot more complicated. In 1979-80, Jim and LeeAnn purchased 100 acres on contract from Jim's parents so they could improve the house and add buildings for the livestock. "We thought we should own it to be putting money into it," Jim says. Through the years they also purchased the farm's machinery "for a pretty good price, but still we had to buy it."

When Jim's parents died, Jim inherited a one-fifth interest in 320 acres; his four siblings inherited the remaining interests. Jim and LeeAnn were still paying on contract for the 100 acres, although it had been converted into a mortgage because they had purchased another 60 acres from Jim's mother. Then Jim's two older siblings



Jim and LeeAnn's son Josh (center) with his eldest, Jacob. Both Jacob and his brother Andrew want to farm.

wanted their money out of the inheritance, so Jim and his two younger siblings came together to buy them out. Now, Jim and LeeAnn are "working out a pretty good deal" for buying 80 acres his younger sisters own and adding it back into the farm. If that arrangement comes together, Jim and LeeAnn will have purchased 320 acres of his parents' original 480 acres in three different transactions.

Business Ownership

When Jim and LeeAnn began farming, they added pigs to the operation, and when son Josh and his wife Cindy joined the farm in the mid-1990s, they expanded the pasture-farrowing. "And then we hit 1998 and the \$18 hogs in October and November," Jim says. "That really knocked Josh and Cindy around, because we didn't have any hogs on contract. We lost what we thought was going to be a goodly share of our retirement by that time because of what the hogs did to us."

"We wanted to avoid the old scenario of the 70-year-old doing all the farming, but he's still 'the boy' because the 90-year-old owns everything and makes all the decisions."

— JIM VAN DER POL

A terrific opportunity opened up, though, and Jim took a job building the facilities for a low-input swine facility at the University of Minnesota's experiment station near Morris. Jim and LeeAnn turned over a portion of his salary to Josh because the farm wasn't able to pay him much out of the farm budget. LeeAnn and Cindy both worked off-farm jobs too, LeeAnn at a nursing home and Cindy at her parents' garden shop.

The Van Der Pols recovered from the hog price collapse and expanded their production again, building a new hog house four years ago and adding a couple of hoop houses. They also put a lot of time and energy into starting a meat business, Pastures A Plenty, through which they now sell to stores, restaurants and direct-to-consumer throughout Minnesota. "That meat company is going to provide a lot of opportunity for those who want to work at it and in it," Jim says. LeeAnn adds that, while "the farm checkbook sucks money all the time, like most farms do, the meat company has six figures in the checking account. Sometimes we plot how we can get money from the meat company to the farm."

"When we started selling pork – and later beef and chicken – direct, we decided we needed a separate accounting structure for the meat business," Jim says. "We needed the farm to be selling the farm animals into this other entity, which would pay to have them processed and to sell the products. That way, we could tell if we were making money on the farm or on the business." They chose a subchapter S corporation, with Jim, LeeAnn, Josh and Cindy all partners in the company.

Then they formed a Limited Liability Partnership – with each family owning 50 percent – to hold the machinery, current crop inventory and breeding livestock. Before forming the LLP, they had been turning over portions of the breeding livestock at the end of each year to Josh and Cindy through bills of sale that were not notarized. "Our tax accountant, Candace, told us you have to get this organized; the way you are doing it is a red flag to the IRS,"



Jim says. "Josh and Cindy have been here a long time, and we are trying to reward them for the effort they have put into the farm. Two years ago, we made Josh and Cindy 60 percent owners of the LLP – which we are using to edge ourselves out of the farming operation. Our plan is to keep passing over shares until we have a minor share or are out. We haven't set this by calendar; it has to do with who is doing the work. So that has to come together."

Now, a wonderful new complexity has emerged: "Our two grandsons are talking farming," LeeAnn says. "Jacob is 21, and he took ag business classes for two years and is now back living with his parents and wanting to farm. Andy is 18 and went off to college this fall, but he wants to farm too." Josh and Cindy's youngest is "still wrapped up in high school," as Jim says, but she's interested in the farm too.

"It doesn't seem like there would be room for many people on 300-some acres," Jim says, "but we have a lot of work here. We have a lot of livestock, and it's on the low-input side. Then there is the labor it takes to make the meat company run. We can't keep up with it! But is there income to go around?"

Who Does What?

The Van Der Pol farm needs a marketer, a farmer and an accountant, and those roles are shifting as well. Right now, Cindy and LeeAnn market the meat, with Josh also doing some, and the grandchildren help pack orders. LeeAnn is the family accountant, "because no one else wants to do it. But I've gotten confident at it. I don't know who is going to do it when I quit. Jacob likes the machinery better. Andy has real knack for working with the cows. Neither of them likes the marketing. Jim likes marketing as well as anyone, and he's supposed to be quitting. Marketing is communicating, and Jim is mainly our communicator."

This has led Jim and LeeAnn to consider if any nearby family members could help with this aspect of the farm business –



Jacob teases his sister Kirsten while Josh, Jim and LeeAnn watch.

"We want to be fair to the kids, but if it's divided equally like it was for us, what happens to the farm? If we can make it work, our thinking is that there is inheritance for everyone, but Josh is going to get access to his sooner." – JIM VAN DER POL

a development Jim says would mean "bringing [that person] in and cutting them a share. At least one of our daughters has a real knack for these things. She collects people and friends like honey collects flies. She has a small part of the business running very well in New Ulm through an informal food co-op they are trying to organize. She could have a larger role in the future; she just has to be invited in."

As part of the transition process, Jim and LeeAnn are consciously downsizing their roles. "We wanted to avoid the old scenario of the 70-year-old doing all the farming, but he's still 'the boy' because the 90-year-old owns everything and makes all the decisions," Jim explains. "I'm not picking out the seed now. The last two tractors we bought I had no say in. Josh, Cindy – and now Jacob, somewhat – make those decisions. I'm not agreeing with all those decisions either. There's an old Amish story where the older man is asked, 'How do you get along, two families on the same yard?' The older man says 'you get out there and cut weeds and keep your mouth shut.'"

Different Transition Strategy Than the Parents

Years ago, Jim's parents decided to split up their land equally between farming and non-farming children, but Jim says he and LeeAnn aren't sure that's a good idea. "Our two daughters and our son are all going to inherit something," Jim says. "We want to be fair to the kids, but if it's divided equally like it was for us, what happens to the farm? If we can make it work, our thinking is that there is inheritance for everyone, but Josh is going to get access to his sooner. For example, if each child gets 80 acres, Josh could get his now so he has a chance to build on that, and the other two get it at the end of our lives.

"We haven't decided about transferring title and reserving a life estate for ourselves, but are looking at that favorably. And we are looking at gifting a certain amount per year. If we were to gift 80 acres to our farming partnership, the people who own that [right now, 60 percent Josh and Cindy] could go

(Continued on pg. 8 →)

(← Continued from pg. 7)

to the bank and say 'we have 80 acres here free and clear that we want to use to get a mortgage to buy more land.'

The 8 acres that include Jim and LeeAnn's house and livestock buildings need to go to whomever is farming the farm, Jim says. But LeeAnn adds that is tricky too. "Our girls like coming here and their children do too. So it's difficult to say Josh can have all that. I don't know how that will all play out in the future."

The Van Der Pols also differ from Jim's parents in their approach to "retirement." Jim reports that getting out of farming completely was hard on his father's health. "He didn't have a real good retirement, and I think that's because he walked away from the farm. He fished for awhile for the first couple of summers, and then sat there until he passed on."

LeeAnn says she and Jim "can't think of ourselves moving to town," and Jim agrees. "I don't know what we would do. That looks like the cemetery to me," he says. "Who knows what's coming and how incapacitated we'll get, but I plan on working as long as I can."

"Our girls like coming here and their children do too. So it's difficult to say Josh can have all that [the acres with our house and livestock buildings]."

— LEEANN VAN DER POL

They have started to travel a lot, including four European visits, and they attend a variety of conferences, sometimes sharing as speakers what they have learned. They are mentoring the grandsons as well. "I'm trying to teach Jacob and Andy how you think through a major thing that needs to be done," Jim says. "For example, you know you have 25 head of sows that are going to start farrowing in 10 days. How are you going to get that all done? Who needs to be moved from which building to make way for the newly weaned pigs, and where will they go? Where will the weaned sows go? When will farrowing be cleaned? And so forth.

"The same with getting in the field. In the spring, there may be geese floating around out there, and mud and snow in the grove. In a month you want to have corn planted.

How are you going to get there from here? What comes first, second, third and fourth? That's how you do everyday management. The people who are really able to get a big task done are the people who are able to break it up into small chunks in the proper order. Schools and the Internet don't teach this. You learn that by watching someone else do it. I learned by watching my father and mother both."

What is the Van Der Pols' vision for the farm 30 years from now? "I'd like to see lots of people here," LeeAnn says. "In the '80s, all of our neighbors were leaving. We thought: Do we really want to stay in this environment? Should we leave too?"

"That decade really changed things around here," Jim says. "All the farms around us were farmed by people living in those buildings. Now none of them are. Thirty years from now, I hope this farm has a lot of people on it like it has now. They could be family members, they could be friends, whatever is needed to make the farm run. There are a lot of enterprises we haven't gotten into yet. The farm could be even more diverse than it is now." ■

Teresa Opheim Transitions to a Consulting Role with PFI

Teresa Opheim, former Executive Director of Practical Farmers of Iowa, left the PFI staff at the end of January 2017. For the past year, she has served as a staff member and director of Practical Farmers' Farm Transfer Program. She will continue to work on farm transition issues with PFI on a consulting basis.

"I am passionate about farm succession," Teresa says. "And have learned so much from all those members who have been willing to share their stories – people like Tom and Irene Frantzen, Dan and Lorna Wilson, Charlotte Shivers and Martha Skillman, and so many more."

Teresa moved to Minneapolis in 2016, when her husband Rich secured a teaching job at the University of St. Thomas. Since then, she has been

keeping up with PFI friends through field days, conferences and PFI's discussion lists. She also has made new Minnesota farmer friends and has become active in promoting sustainable agriculture in her new state. Beginning Feb. 1, 2017, she will become Senior Fellow with Renewing the Countryside, a Minnesota non-profit organization that works on farm transition issues.

In addition, Teresa is managing a federal grant for Iroquois Valley Farms, a social impact company that helps farmers get secure access to farmland. Through that grant, the company will develop Soil Restoration Notes, a short-term debt vehicle for investors to purchase, which will in turn allow the company to reduce the rental rate they provide their

farmers who are transitioning land to organic production.

"There are many of us who want a financial return with our investments, but also want those investments to follow our values as well. Iroquois Valley Farms is a great example of one of those 'social impact' companies."

Iroquois Valley Farms made its first investment in Iowa late 2016, when it provided mortgage funding to PFI members James and Julie Petersen. ■



Long-Time Members Donate Their Farm to PFI

A portion of urban Granger will now be forever preserved as a sustainable, working farm for future generations thanks to a land donation from Angela and John Tedesco to Practical Farmers of Iowa.

In December, Angela and John donated 13 acres of their 20-acre certified organic farm to PFI – the first realized land gift in Practical Farmers' history – to ensure its agricultural legacy, rich soils and reservoir of wildlife don't succumb to a developer's plow, a fate that has befallen many Iowa farms.

"We were looking for the best way to keep the farm a farm," says Angela, who operated Turtle Farm, one of Iowa's first Community Supported Agriculture businesses, for 17 years until her retirement in 2012. "Because it's right on Highway 17 in Granger, I knew if we sold the land to another farmer, eventually it could get sold for development prices. It's important to us that it remain a farm for someone to continue using in a sustainable manner."

Angela and John, who reside in Johnston, purchased the farmland in 1998, three years after Angela started farming on rented ground elsewhere – and one year after they joined PFI. John says this long history with the organization was a major factor in their decision to donate their land to PFI instead of another group. "We have experience and trust with Practical Farmers that we haven't developed with other groups," he says. "We knew PFI would be interested in preserving the land for sustainable farming."

Regenerating Soil and Habitat

When Angela and John first purchased the land, it was bare ground that had been part of a conventionally managed row crop farm. Angela immediately started the process of transitioning the land to organic production. In addition to the vegetables she raised for her CSA, she planted perennial crops and added a buffer of peach trees, hazelnuts, elderberries, dogwood and evergreens.

She also installed a hoop house, drilled a deep well for water access, built a barn,



"We were looking for the best way to keep the farm a farm . . . I hope communities will see there are ways to preserve farm ground, that it doesn't have to all turn to development."

– ANGELA TEDESCO

added electricity and installed a driveway – all features that Angela says will help make the land "a turnkey operation" for another farmer.

Over the 17 years Angela ran Turtle Farm, she grew her CSA from 30 to 180 members; raised more than 30 types of vegetables and hundreds of varieties; added U-pick strawberry and organic transplant enterprises; and expanded her season with a fall CSA share. Her land improvements and management practices also turned the farm into an oasis for wildlife, and helped to restore its soil health – a fact she recalls noticing visually. "The fact that the land had been farmed conventionally showed up the very first year I was there," Angela says. "I had one employee and we did lots of hand work. That entire summer, I could count on one hand the number of earthworms we found. Years later, I could find that many earthworms in one shovelful."

Preserving Farmland in a Developing Urban Area

At the same time Angela was growing her farm, the town of Granger was growing too. Angela watched as farms that had

once surrounded her land were sold to developers and converted into housing developments – sometimes recklessly, she says, recalling the time developers dug up the farm that adjoined hers.

"There was no respect for the layers of soil that plants put down over so many years," says Angela, who grew up in red-dirt Oklahoma. "The developers carved up the land so it would be easy to build houses, and then they went back and spread a few inches of topsoil. Anyone who knows anything about soil knows that really damaged it for future use – and the people who bought those houses had a terrible time with drainage in their backyards."

For John, who grew up in Council Bluffs and worked as a child clinical psychologist, Granger's hunger for land on which to grow is a microcosm of the change he has seen in Iowa. "You tend not to notice it in the moment, but putting it in perspective, you can easily see all the land that's been gobbled up and how fast it occurred."

More personally, Angela and John witnessed the impact of development on the other 7 acres of their farm, which they ended up selling to a developer to provide retirement income, and so they could afford to donate the rest of their land.

"The first thing the developer did was rip out all the trees and dig up the dirt, which was very painful to see," Angela says. "But we chose to sell it because we were able to get enough money to donate the rest."

Both John and Angela hope that donating their land to Practical Farmers of Iowa will serve as a model for others to see there is an alternative path for farmland beyond ceding it to development.

"I hope communities will see there are ways to preserve farm ground, that it doesn't have to all turn into development," Angela says. "There can be urban farms. Our farm was and still is a good educational tool. In its now urban environment, it stands as a beacon for preserving land for farming over development." ■

Resisting the Ragweed

An ecologically minded approach to managing a master weed

by Nick Ohde

Longtime Practical Farmers members Tom Frantzen of New Hampton and Ron Rosmann of Harlan are two of many farmers who have been taking part in a series of phone calls with Iowa State University weed scientist Matt Liebman aimed at better understanding – and therefore better controlling – the most problematic weed on their farms: giant ragweed.

“Giant ragweed is a real problem, not just for organic growers but for conventional farmers because of herbicide resistance,” Ron said during one of those calls. Giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*) has a number of characteristics that make it difficult to manage. It has large seeds – which lets it emerge from significant depths in the soil. Its seedlings are also large, making it hard to kill even when it’s young. It grows fast and tall, enabling it to easily overshadow not just shorter crops like oats, but even taller crops like corn, causing significant yield losses. Giant ragweed can also germinate in cool weather, making it especially problematic for crops like small grains because it has a similar life cycle.

Tom Frantzen hosted a “Ragweed Roundtable” session at the PFI’s annual conference in January, where farmers and researchers from across the state discussed management strategies for the weed. “I would have to say that, after 43 years of farming, if you take a list of all the weeds, put giant ragweed on one side of a balance and all the other weeds on the other side of the balance, it might not even be equal then,” Tom said. “It’s worse than all of the other weeds put together.”

During that session – and others at this year’s annual conference – Matt Liebman of Iowa State University, Adam Davis of the University of Illinois, and Jochum Wiersma of the University of Minnesota all discussed the growing challenges of weeds that are becoming resistance to glyphosate and other common herbicides. “Herbicide resistance is a good example of



Above: Tom Frantzen (right) hosted the “Ragweed Roundtable” session at PFI’s 2017 annual conference. **Opposite:** Ron Rosmann speaks at a PFI field day his family hosted in 2015.

rapid evolution,” Matt said. “It’s happening. You have populations of waterhemp and palmer amaranth that are resistant to five different modes of herbicides. That’s a serious threat to conventional farming.”

An Evolutionary Master – Or Monster

One interesting phenomenon has been observed by farmers and researchers alike: Not only is giant ragweed developing resistance to herbicides, it’s adapting to be able to germinate later in the year. This is a big problem in itself, but it is amplified when those late-germinating ragweed plants happen to be resistant to herbicides, or when they infest an organic farm, because the cash crop is already well established and the weeds can’t be eliminated through tillage. “The extended emergence of this pest is no joke,” said Tom during the roundtable session. “Ten years ago, we never had ragweed emerge

that late in the summer. It really is an evolutionary monster.”

Following up on Tom’s comment, Matt explained the process of how a weed like giant ragweed evolves resistance to an herbicide – or adapts germination timing to avoid cultivation. Herbicide resistance is not usually the result of weeds mutating genetically, Matt said. Rather, the plants that are easily killed by herbicide die and do not produce seeds. “Think of a given herbicide as a big filter,” he said. “Individual weeds that can survive that herbicide pass through the filter. Those are the ones that are surviving, reproducing and passing their seeds on to future generations.” Eventually, weed populations come to consist only of weeds that cannot be killed by herbicides.

Battling Ragweed With Biology

How do you control weeds without herbicides or when herbicides are less effective? “If you want to develop a weed management program, you have to think about weed population dynamics the way you look at your bank account,” Matt said. This is the “weed seed bank.” When weeds go to seed, they deposit new seeds in the bank. Those seeds have dormancy, the length of which differs for different species. Some decay, some are eaten by predators,

“If you want to develop an ecologically based strategy of managing any weed, you have to look at its biology

Giant ragweed’s Achilles’ heel is that it is relatively short-lived in the soil.”

– MATT LIEBMAN

some are killed by farmers at different stages in their lives. And some weeds go to seed. "If you do all the balances of what goes in and what goes out," Matt said, "you can find out if you're gaining or losing weed control."

So what do you do if you're losing control of weeds? What if you're organic and herbicides won't work? "If you want to develop an ecologically based strategy for managing any weed, you have to look at its biology, at what we call its life history stages," Matt explained. "When do the seeds germinate? When do the seedlings emerge? How rapidly do they become reproductive adults? How many seeds are produced per reproductive adult in each different crop? What's the fate of those seeds? Are they consumed by different organisms, how long do they last in the soil?" By answering these questions, Matt said farmers can use different techniques to prevent weed growth – and using multiple tactics will drastically slow weeds' ability to resist any single tactic.

In his conference session on weed management, he used giant ragweed as an example. "Giant ragweed's Achilles' heel is that it is relatively short-lived in the soil," Matt said. Its large seed size makes it attractive to animals like insects and mice, which like to eat ragweed seeds because of their large energy reserves. The seed also seems to decay quickly in the soil. Both Ron Rosmann and Tom are using that weakness to improve their management.



Changing It Up

Paul Mugge of Sutherland presented at the "Organic Weed Control" session at PFI's annual conference on Friday, Jan. 20, and said that the weeds farmers have reflect their cropping systems. "If you're raising just corn and soybeans, you have two summer annual row crops, and you're going to have particular weeds that are adapted to that particular system – and they're going to get out of hand." Crop rotations that include both row crops and solid-seeded crops – crops like small grains or hay that grow in very high densities and smother competition from weeds – can be very helpful in weed control.

Paul reminded us that creativity is key to effective weed control. "Weeds will adapt to what you have and you need to change it up once in a while," he said. One unique strategy he uses is promoting seed predation by animals such as mice and insects. "If you leave these seeds on



the soil surface for a longer period of time, something is going to eat them." Avoiding tillage for as long as possible means seed predators have more time to eat the seed. To encourage populations of those seed-eating animals, Paul said that leaving field borders and other cover on the edges of fields can provide winter habitat and food sources when there aren't weed seeds available. ■

"We're looking at extending the years that ragweed cannot go to seed," Ron said. Each year, the Rosmanns either cut the weed before it can produce viable seeds or prevent it from growing in the first place by growing solid-seeded crops like hay or pasture, which effectively choke out other plants from growing in them.

"We plant winter rye the first year, which completely chokes out the ragweed,

then we combine it in the summer," Ron said. "Then we plant millet, which chokes out the ragweed the rest of the summer, and you can graze or hay that. The next spring, we go right back to small grains to establish a hay crop, like oat underseeded with alfalfa and orchardgrass, and we keep that for two years." Tom outlined a similar plan at the ragweed roundtable.

At the end of the day, the toughest element of the weed seed bank account equation is inputs – seed production. Most weeds produce thousands of seeds per plant. If only a few plants survive long enough to produce seed, it can quickly lead to a new infestation. "A small percentage of a large number is still a very large number," Matt said. Because of the necessity to get nearly every last weed, walking fields and hand-pulling, though expensive, could pay off in the long run.

All the discussion around ragweed at the conference points to one big takeaway – no one strategy is enough. Successfully managing weeds over the long haul requires, as Matt has said, "many little hammers." ■

Tools of the Trade

by Liz Kolbe

What do calendula oil, fingerless lifting gloves and walk-behind tractors have in common? They each made the list of a PFI vegetable farmer's favorite or must-have farm tool. At the peak of the growing season, vegetable farmers frequently work 12-hour days in the full sun – a facet of the job that can make the right implement, clothing or other item an indispensable farm aid.

With the diversity of vegetable farms and farmers in our membership – and the equally impressive array of horticulture-specific tools on the market (and creatively "hacked" by farmers) – I wanted to find out what members rated as the "best of" on their farms.

Kate Edwards – Wild Woods Farm, Iowa City

"I like the 5-gallon Dynamic Manual Salad Spinner. You have to be careful to lift the lid off to stop it and not use the handle as that can damage the gears. Also, it's important to stop the inside of the spinner with the palm of your hand rather than your fingers as it can rip your nail off (I did it wrong once, ouch!)."



Joe Lynch – Onion Creek Farm, Ames

"I have found the HOSS wheel hoe superior in many ways. For me, the geometry is better, it has a wide selection of stirrups and knives, and it has a steel wheel instead of pneumatic."

Gary Guthrie – Growing Harmony Farm, Nevada

"Without a doubt, a solid stirrup hoe from Johnny's is the one tool I could not live without. For rototillers, a BCS rototiller beats Troybilt by a long shot in dependability."



Emma Johnson – Buffalo Ridge Orchard, Central City



At a 2016 PFI field day Emma hosted with her husband, Marcus, she emphasized that Felco power-assisted, electric pruners will make seasonal pruning a more physically sustainable endeavor over the long-term. She also carries Felco hand pruners and a Felco 621 saw whenever she's in the orchard. About the saw, Emma says, "They make foldable saws, but I don't like having to unfold my saw. The teeth on the 621 are not too fine, so it doesn't take forever, but it's not too coarse where it's tearing through the branch."

Susan Jutz – ZJ Farm (retired), Solon

At Laura Krouse's 2015 field day, Susan Jutz discussed how she uses broadforks on her farm to dig garlic. The biggest problem with broadforks, she says, is that a lot of stress is put on the handles, and eventually the handles break. Her favorite broadfork (shown in the photo) is one she had custom-made by Gulland Forge Broadforks in North Carolina.



Carl Glanzman – Nishnabotna Naturals, Oakland

Carl found an inexpensive version of the TubTrug – an 11-gallon flex tub (pictured above-right) – at his local Aldi's. These colorful trugs are strong, flexible and brightly colored so they're easy to find. Carl labels them in the field using a water-based marker on duct tape. For cutting jobs around the farm, Carl likes the Ginsu serrated bread knife (above)



with a black-plastic handle for cutting greens, and the Fiskars EA1114 Bypass Loppers. "The loppers cuts limbs up to 1 inch in diameter cleanly, without pulling a ribbon of cambium from base," he says.



Jan Libbey – One Step at a Time Gardens, Kanawha

Jan's favorite tools include a Nejiri Gama hoe; a long-handled DeWitt half-moon pull hoe – which has a unique handle (both pictured at right below); the farm's barrel washer; and a backpack turned into a tomato harvest bag. "I strap the bag around my waist with the main pouch partly unzipped, picking as many as I can without squishing those on the bottom. Then I carry my marsupial pouch to the pre-set tomato totes to unload."



Jill Beebout – Blue Gate Farm, Chariton

Jill provided a succinct list of her favorite tools for various tasks:

- **Pruners:** Felco & Bahco
- **Harvest knife:** Victorinox 4-inch serrated with red handle
- **Work gloves:** Wells Lamont all-leather pigskin
- **Hand soap:** "Coarse sea salt in calendula oil as an aggressive scrub followed by Dr. Bonner's liquid peppermint soap."
- **Best version of a commonly used tool:** Glaser stirrup hoes, Planet Jr. (Hoss) wheel hoe
- **Unexpectedly useful tool:** C-clamps on the apron of the tiller to mark rows



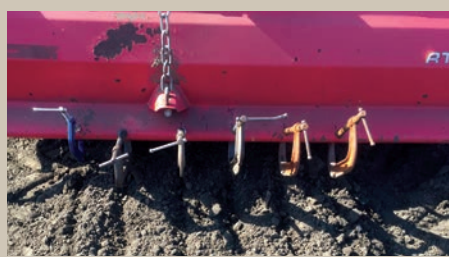
From Jill Beebout's farm (clockwise from top left): The original Planet Jr. double wheel hoe (the brownish-colored hoe at the bottom) next to Jill's Glaser wheel hoe. The Hoss wheel hoe, preferred by Joe Lynch, is a newly made version of the Planet Jr.; Jill's high tunnel trellis threader; hacked clips and bucket handles; drip tape winder.

• **Worth the money:** BCS tiller, Farmers Friend Greens Harvester

• **Best farm hacks:** "My 10-foot-long high tunnel trellis 'theader' and a t-tape roller made from an old hose trolley and a 5-gallon bucket," and "damaged sections of a three-quarter-inch irrigation header line are made into replacement bucket handles and row cover clamps."

John Wesselius – The Cornucopia Farm, Sioux Center

John Wesselius likes many tools from the Johnny's Seed Catalog. "Johnny's can seems expensive, but they have the right idea and the right stuff," he says. Favorites from the catalog include **transplanters** – "The Hatfield transplanters have saved our backs, and a lot of labor cost. They provided an excellent return on investment. If I have to transplant by hand, I like the right-angle trowel." – and **knives**, specifically, the steel produce knife (#9786) for brassica harvest and the Victorinox serrated harvest knife for greens harvest.



John's favorite hoe depends on soil conditions and weed size, but he and his workers have found themselves reaching for Cobrahead hoes more often during the last two years. They also like collinear hoes from Johnny's. Outside the Johnny's catalog, John depends on his crop lifter and barrel washer for carrot harvest, and adds Rogue hoes to his arsenal. And, he adds, "We would never give up using a nail apron for a money belt at market."

Rob Faux – Genuine Faux Farm, Tripoli

Rob offered feedback on several categories of farm tools:

• **Unexpectedly useful tool:** A 3-foot piece of sturdy metal piping "for those times when you need extra leverage to break



From John Wesselius' farm:

LEFT: Cobrahead hoe
BOTTOM ROW (left to right): clamps on the tiller apron mark rows; crop lifter; collinear hoes



loose a stubborn lug nut," Rob says. "Or, it can be used to roll up a section of tubing."

• **Worth the money:** "Our Williams Tool Bar system. The onion crops alone have paid off the cost," Rob says. "We continue to learn how to use it with our tractor and feel it does very well with potatoes and onions with the tines down. If you get the squash knives, you can cultivate many other crops with tines up over the crop."

• **Bang for the buck:** "We like our Glaser wheel hoes. I prefer the small-wheel design, which focuses the energy effectively on the cultivation point of the tool. Ergonomically, the wheel hoe is superior to a number of hand tools, and the ability to change blades to match field conditions or cultivation needs is useful."



• **Best farm hack:** "If you have to transplant by hand, workers often have a hard time with straight rows and plant spacing. I give them a template for spacing by cutting a paint stick equal to the length of the desired distance between plants. This relieves a great deal of stress for the workers and they speed up significantly."

• **Farm clothes:** "I like my padded, fingerless gloves (Veleo padded, fingerless lifting gloves). The padding helps with some of the wrist stress when working with a tiller, wheel hoe and other similar tools."

Ann Franzenburg – Pheasant Run Farm, Van Horne

"I love my **needle-nose shears** (top photo) from Johnny's for cutting most flowers. They are lightweight, sharp, and open and close smoothly," Ann says. "A.M. Leonard sells look-a-likes for less, but they're not nearly as responsive. Because of carpal tunnel issues, I also need to reduce the amount of squeezing (closing the shears) I do each day, so I harvest large-stemmed flowers like sunflowers and gladiolas with a **grape knife** (bottom photo) from Harris Seeds. It is extremely sharp and very inexpensive. I catch the hook on the stem and quickly pull toward myself, making the cut at an angle." ■



...Conversing & Connecting...





1

Opposite Page: 1) Amber Anderson and Aaron Lehman chat during a break.



2

2) T.D. Holub, who farms near Coggon, catches up with Laura Krouse, of Abbe Hills Farm.

3) Benjamin Barron (left), a 2016 graduate of PFI's Savings Incentive Program (SIP), chats with another conference-goer.

4) Angie Scharnhorst, of Bountiful Harvest Farm, connects with a fellow attendee during lunch on Saturday.

5) Anna Johnson, with the Center for Rural Affairs, one of the conference sponsors, chats with Farnaz Kordbacheh.

6) Long-time member Ken Gingerich (left), of Iowa City, visits with James Nisly during the PFI potluck party.

7) Cornelia and Jan Flora (center and right) have a chance to visit one-on-one with conference speaker Jonathan Lundgren at the PFI potluck party.

This Page: 1) Bart VerEllen (left), one of the new SIP Class of 2018 enrollees, connects with his SIP mentor, Jim Petersen, who farms with his family near Knoxville, during lunch on Saturday.

2) Brad Law, who farms near King City, Missouri, converses with Jenny Thomas, who raises corn and beans near Humboldt.

3) Kris Johnson (left), of Johnson's Produce near Fairfield, visits with Emma O'Polka.

4) Patrick Corey, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Crawford County, chats with Darwin Pierce, farm manager at Whiterock Conservancy in Coon Rapids.

5) Kathy Rose (right) connects with Larry Kershner, of Farm News.



3



5



4

Family & Friends...

1) > Xavier Rosmann (center) inspects Suzanne Castello's name tag, as his father, Daniel Rosmann, and sister, Geneva, look on.

2) > **Clockwise, from left:** Margaret Smith, of Hampton; Paul Muggle, of Sutherland; Tom Frantzen, of New Hampton; and Gayle Olson, of Winfield, reconnect during a break. Many PFI members look forward to catching up with old friends at the annual conference.

3) > Donna Prizgintas (left), of Ames, poses for a photo with LaVon Griffieon, who farms with her family near Ankeny.

4) > Julia Slocum, of Lacewing Acres, and Patti Edwardson catch up at the PFI potluck party.

5) > Maja Black, sister of Carmen Black (a SIP Class of 2018 enrollee), helps Susan Jutz's grandson, Tysen, peel an orange.

6) > Jennie Erwin's son, Logan, tries the seed cleaning screen at the Seed Savers Exchange booth, as Seed Savers staffer Jennifer Zoch looks on.

7) > Kate Gilbert found herself on slinky duty during the PFI potluck party after niece Isabel invented a new way to use the classic toy. Isabel's grandmother, Beverly Gilbert (right) – who received PFI's 2017 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award earlier that night, along with her husband, John – helps monitor traffic around the slinky.





... Good Food



1) > Robert Ryerson (front left), Steve Schmidt (front right), Scott Shriver (behind Steve) and Steffen Mirsky (back right) fill their plates with pulled pork, roasted vegetables and salad during Saturday lunch – all supplied by PFI members.



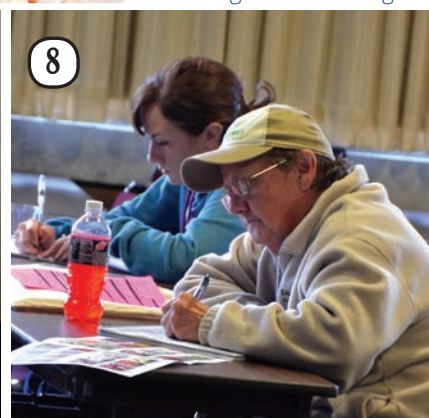
2) > Mary Damm and Dan Beard have a chance to chat as they head to the lunch room.

3) > Delicious food shared by fellow members is one of the highlights of attending the PFI potluck party.

... Learning & Laughter



4) > Jim Riddle, of Blue Fruit Farm in Winona, Minnesota, demonstrates how to make a cutting of black currant during the "Production, Processing and Marketing of Alternative Berry Crops" short course.



5) > Gabe Bahrenfuss performs for the camera as Jill Beebout and Dave Schmidt enjoy a laugh at lunch.

6) > Attendees enjoy speaker Will Harris' humor during the "Profitable Vertical Integration of Livestock" session.

7) > One conference-goer's program is full of notes taken during earlier sessions.

8) > Becci McCarty takes notes during the "Cut Flowers for Beginners" session, taught by Ann Franzenburg.

Alone We Can Do So Little

Honoring PFI's leaders

by Sally Worley

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." – Helen Keller

Practical Farmers has documented **532 individual members** who served as leaders for the organization in 2016. This list is likely not complete; we try to capture everyone, but it is a feat!

The power of Practical Farmers is in all of these leaders, who come together to strengthen farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing. Leaders include those who: host and educate at our events; provide mentorship to the next generation of farmers; speak about farming issues in the media; conduct on-farm research; provide guidance and governance for Practical Farmers by serving on committees; and more.

THANK YOU to all these leaders! We couldn't do so much good work without you.

PFI Leaders Highlight:

Members in the News

Securing media featuring farmers is one of Practical Farmers of Iowa's guiding principles. Why? **Practical Farmers strongly believes that more farmers' and farmer-advocates' voices need to be informing conversations on Iowa agriculture.** Here is a list of those who were featured in media this year (not counting the 158 featured in PFI newsletters or 244 members featured on the blog). If you were in the media in 2016 and didn't make the list, our apologies. Please let us know and we will add you! Many, but not all, of these media spots were coordinated by Practical Farmers of Iowa.

We are always looking for more voices and viewpoints to share in the public sphere. If you are interested, contact Nick Ohde at nick@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

Justin Akers	Jordan Clasen
Ben Albright	Rebecca Clay
Doug Alert	Tom Cory
Andy Ambriole	Mary Cory
Catie Ambriole	Craig Cox
Nathan Anderson	Rick Cruse
Amber Anderson	Mary Damm
Jon Bakehouse	Hannah Dankbar
Andrea Basche	Mike DeCook
Steve Beaumont	Wesley Degner
Steve Berger	Daryl DeGroot
CJ Bienert	Kathy Dice
Carmen Black	Tim Diebel
Jack Boyer	Kevin Dietzel
Jeff Burkhart	Wade Dooley
Jill Burkhart	Joe Driscoll
Thomas Burkhead	Patti Edwardson
Dave Campbell	Josh Engel
Earl Canfield	Kamyar Enshayan
Bruce Carney	Suzan Erem
Angie Carter	Rob Faux
Mike Castellano	Darren Fehr

Leaders at a Glance

Governance and Guidance:

- Board members → **12**
- Field Crops Steering Committee → **10**
- Finance Committee → **4**
- Horticulture Steering Committee → **12**
- Labor4Learning Committee → **7**
- Cooperators' Program Committee → **7**
- Farm Transitions Committee → **9**
- Leopold Center Representative → **1**
- Livestock Steering Committee → **10**
- Policy Committee → **7**

Beginning Farmer Leaders

- In Savings Incentive Program → **43**
- Savings Incentive Program Mentors → **12**
- Labor4Learning Trainers → **5**

Members in the Media

- Featured in the news → **192**
- In PFI's quarterly newsletter → **158**
- On PFI's blog → **244**
- Video series contributors → **22**

Event Hosts and Presenters:

- Annual conference speakers → **46**
- Cooperators' Meeting speakers → **14**
- County fair booth hosts → **10**
- Partner event speakers → **35**
- Farminar speakers → **20**
- Field day hosts → **52**
- Field day speakers → **11**
- Social hosts → **7**
- Workshop speakers and hosts → **9**

On-Farm Researchers

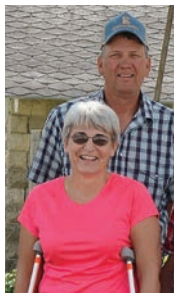
- Research cooperators → **69**

Other Leaders

- Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners → **51**
- Staff → **15**
- Volunteers → **9**
- On Welcoming Committee → **12**

Tom Feldman
 Janna Feldman
 Del Ficke
 Craig Fleishman
 Tom Frantzen
 Irene Frantzen
 James Frantzen
 Ann Franzenburg
 Eric Franzenburg
 Wayne Fredericks
 Al Frederick
 Bill Frederick
 Jim Freeland
 Jim French
 Lisa French
 Mark Gannon
 John Gilbert
 Rebecca Graff
 Sally Gran
 LaVon Griffieon
 Helen Gunderson
 Jeremy Gustafson
 Gary Guthrie
 Neil Hamilton
 Jeanne Hansen
 Jay Hansen
 Rick Hartmann
 Stacy Hartmann
 Chris Henning
 Chad Hensley
 Katie Hensley
 Randy Hilleman
 T.D. Holub
 Chad Ingels
 Fred Iutzi
 Ed Jackson
 Laura Jackson
 Brandi Janssen
 Wendy Johnson
 Marcus Johnson
 Laura Jones
 Rick Juchems
 Susan Jutz
 Larry Kallem

Larry Koehrsen
 Scott Koepke
 Kayla Koether
 Greg Koether
 Barb Kraus
 Laura Krouse
 Tim Landgraf
 Jerry Laughlin
 Aaron Lehman
 Jan Libbey
 Matt Liebman
 Greg Lipas
 Randy Luze
 Lyle Luzum
 Bob Lynch
 Linda Lynch
 Vic Madsen
 Cindy Madsen
 Eric Madsen
 Tyler Magnuson
 Montre Marti



Linda and Bob Lynch farm near Gilmore City.

Martha McFarland
 Maggie McQuown
 Gene Mealhow
 Lynn Mealhow
 Laura Merrick
 Ray Meylor
 Laura Miller
 Paul Mugge
 Danelle Myer
 Lonna Nachtigal
 George Naylor
 Josh Nelson
 Tom Neuberger
 Ruth Neuberger
 Dale Nimrod
 Denise O'Brien
 Nathan Paulsen
 Emily Paulsen
 James Petersen
 Amy Petersen
 Mark Peterson
 Donna Prizgintas
 Jenny Quiner



Barb Kraus operates Canoe Creek Dairy near Decorah.

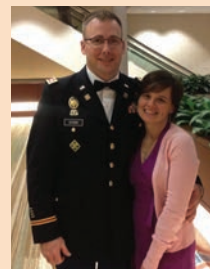
Ruth Rabinowitz
 Mark Rasmussen
 Lois Reichert
 Marian Riggs
 Greg Rinehart
 Bruce Roskens
 Ron Rosmann
 David Rosmann
 Tom Ruggieri
 Matt Russell
 Billy Sammons
 Frank Santana
 Al Schafbuch
 Jordan Scheibel
 Mark Schleisman
 Dave Schmidt
 Meg Schmidt
 Matt Schuiteman
 Lisa Schulte-Moore
 Joe Sellers
 Shanti Sellz
 Faith Sherman
 Ashley Sherrets
 Caleb Shinn
 Jacqueline Shinn
 Charlotte Shivvers
 Tim Sieren
 Martha Skillman
 Dick Sloan
 Julia Slocum
 Margaret Smith
 Tim Smith



Tim Diebel (left) and his wife, Lori, chat with Ray Bratsch-Prince during PFI's 2017 annual conference. Tim and Lori hosted the Hobby Farmer Meet-Up session at the conference.

Big Tent, Diverse Voices: A Small Sampling of Stories Featuring Members in 2016

- Jan. 22, 2016 – *Farm News* – “Creating Soil Health,” and Jan. 28, 2016 – *Iowa Farmer Today* – “Farmer panel discusses cover crop goals” – [Steve Berger](#) of Wellman shared his thoughts on soil quality via a roundtable discussion.
- September 2016 – *Wallaces Farmer* – “Small Grains: Overcoming the Challenge” – Featured [John Gilbert](#) of Iowa Falls, [Jack Boyer](#) of Reinbeck, [Jerry Laughlin](#) of Imogene, [Mark Schleisman](#) of Lake City, [Paul Mugge](#) of Sutherland, [Ron Rosmann](#) of Harlan and [David Weisberger](#) of Ames
- Feb. 1, 2016 – T.D. Holub was profiled in a University of Iowa College of Liberal Arts and Sciences publication – “T.D. Holub (BA 2012) is bringing homegrown food and nutritional knowledge to his hometown of Coggon” – His profile was emailed to all Iowa state legislators and their staffs by UI's Hawkeye Caucus team as part of its “Hometown Hawkeyes” series.
- Jan. 28, 2016 – *Food Tank* – “Women We Love: 25 Influential Women in Food and Agriculture” – Featured [Denise O'Brien](#) of Atlantic (she was also featured in the 2016 Food Tank article “17 Farmer Heroes for Sustainability, Equality and Defense or Traditions”)
- July 2, 2016 – *New York Times* – “American Dreams” – [Tom and Mary Cory](#) of Elkhart wrote a letter describing their farm and its connection to healthy food and landscapes that was among a handful of letters chosen to feature.
- June 22, 2016 – *The Des Moines Register* – “Is it GMO? ‘Smart labels’ aren't enough” – [George Naylor](#) of Churdan wrote about why he doesn't support “smart labels.”
- January 2016 – *CNN Money* – [James Petersen](#) of Knoxville shared thoughts on crop production in a mini-documentary on food ingredients.
- May 27, 2016 – *The Des Moines Register* – “Millennials put down roots on urban farms” – Featured [Jenny Quiner](#) of Des Moines, [Ray Meylor](#) of Polk City and [Jordan Clasen](#) of Johnston.
- Jan. 25, 2016 – “We are Iowa” (a segment on central Iowa's ABC station) – Featured [Caleb and Jacqueline Shinn](#) of Osceola talking about their farming aspirations.
- April 22, 2016 – Iowa Public Television's “Iowa Ingredient” program – Featured [Danelle Myer](#) of Logan talking about potato production.



Caleb and Jacqueline Shinn



Danelle Myer



Dave Campbell, (left), of Maple Park, IL, during the Gabe Brown ranch tour.

Exploring the Web of Life

Message of interconnectedness inspires farmers

by Meghan Filbert

In November 2016, Practical Farmers members spent a mind-blowing three days with Fred Provenza, a rangeland scientist from Colorado who has spent 40 years observing grazing behaviors of wild and domestic animals. During our time together, Fred contextualized his observations and research findings in relation to the deep connection humans have to the plant and animal kingdoms. Attendees left with a profound outlook on why and how livestock and land management are vital parts of a healthy food system and a thriving, diverse ecosystem. One month after Fred's workshop, I asked farmers to reflect on their experience.

We Are What We Eat

"We are all connected and it starts with the soil," affirmed Paul Ackley of Bedford. This was one of Fred's key points: Everything in this world (and beyond) is connected. The health and well-being of people is linked with that of the soil through plants and herbivores. The healthier the soil, Fred argues, the healthier plants and animals will be – which, in turn, provide nutrient-dense, phytochemically rich foods for humans. Phytochemicals are compounds produced by plants that are considered to have a beneficial effect on human health.

The compounds that plants produce can be detected by herbivores, who can self-select for what their bodies need – an ability Fred calls "nutritional wisdom." If livestock have the chance to forage in landscapes with a diverse arrays of plants, they treat it as their pharmacy and are able to self-medicate. On the flip side, Fred asserts, livestock that are

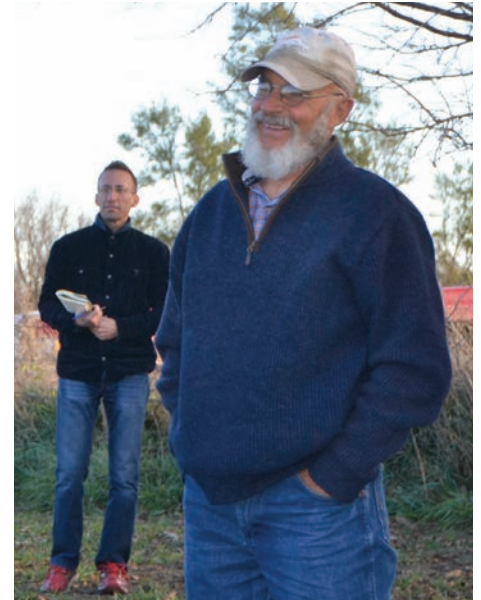
unable to select for or are not provided with a balanced ration will overeat in quest of nutrients in short supply. For Jerry Laughlin, of Imogene, this information has persuaded him to switch to a cafeteria-style mineral program: "Allowing the animal to select only what it needs just makes sense to me."

For herbivores, nothing is more important for health than eating a variety of foods and foraging in a variety of places. This message resonated with Rory Van Wyk of Winterset. "Dr. Provenza's research demonstrated various wild and domestic animals' abilities to sense chemical changes in plants that are triggered by acute environmental factors such as weather, insect or animal attack, soil composition, etc.," Rory commented. "These chemical changes influence the diet and health of the herbivores who eat those plants, which in turn affects the health of those who may choose to consume those herbivores."

After the workshop, Mary Damm – who lives in Bloomington, Indiana, and owns farmland in McGregor – felt inspired. "I want to learn the plants in my diverse pastures that the cows eat, and then I want to learn the nutritional value of those plants for the cows and, eventually, the nutritional value of the cows' milk and meat products for humans. (Sounds like an on-farm research project in the making!)"

"I know with certainty that I will never fully understand what, why and how everything functions in my operation, but I feel more okay about that than I did before . . . I feel like it's my job to get out of the way of nature as much as possible and let the plants and animals show me what works best."

– JERRY LAUGHLIN



Fred Provenza (right) and PFI member Michael Christl at the field visit hosted by Frank Santana during the three-day workshop Fred led in November.

During the workshop, Fred went on to link the health of the ecosystem to genetics by explaining the role of epigenetics. Epigenetics are changes in gene expression caused by mechanisms other than changes in the DNA sequence. Fred emphasized that our environments, and the foods we consume, influence gene expression – and that this gene expression can carry over into future generations. "Fred introduced me to how changes in gene expression caused by the environment can be passed on to the next generation," said Tom Wind of Jamaica. "This made a deep impression on me and motivated me to think about the long-term impact of my family's exposure to pesticides that I use on the farm. I now have the desire to use fewer pesticides and would like to convert my whole farm to organic."

Diet and Environment Affect Animal Behavior

Gene expression also influences behavior, and Fred told livestock farmers they should practice grazing management that promotes natural foraging behavior. Animal experiences early in life (and in utero) have life-long influences on habitat selection and forage preference. Fred suggested that

farmers focus on creating locally adapted herbivores, and shared examples of how to do this:

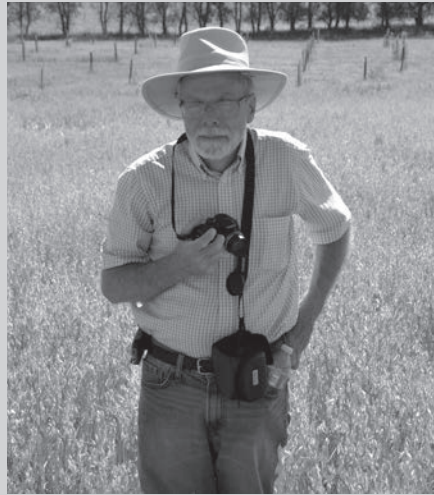
- Retain animals that can survive only on what nature provides seasonally in landscapes
- Match production cycles to seasonal availability of forage (maintenance during fall and winter and reproduction during spring and summer)
- Rear offspring with their mothers where they will be expected to produce as adults (this helps to create families based on epigenetic and learned abilities of matriline to use diets and habitats)

"I know with certainty that I will never fully understand what, why and how everything functions in my own [farm] operation, but I feel more okay about that than I did before [the workshop]," Jerry Laughlin said. "I feel like it's my job to get out of the way of nature as much as possible, and let the plants and animals show me what it is that works best. The animals that are best adapted to my farm will excel and they should be able to, and allowed to pass that on to the next generations. I have been considering raising my own replacement heifers, and after the workshop, I feel that it only makes sense to do this. Selecting progeny from animals that have already proven to be able to perform on my farm seems like the logical thing to do."

These lessons sparked a robust discussion about weaning strategies, and some farmers in the room said they no longer force weaning, opting instead to simply let young animals wean themselves. In his reflection, Paul Ackley said he learned the great value of later weaning and from now on will give calves and lambs a longer opportunity to learn from their mothers.

Wisdom of the Body

Another point Fred made at the workshop is the link between our palates and the health of the soil and plants and animals we eat. Unlike our ancestors, the palates of many individuals are no longer linked in healthy ways with landscapes, Fred argues.



"Fred introduced me to how changes in gene expression caused by the environment can be passed on to the next generation. This made a deep impression on me and motivated me to think about the long-term impact of my family's exposure to pesticides that I use on the farm."

- TOM WIND



"I want to learn the plants in my diverse pastures that the cows eat, and then I want to learn the nutritional value of those plants for the cows and, eventually, the nutritional value of the cows' milk and meat products for humans."

- MARY DAMM

While flavors of produce, meat and dairy have become blander, processed foods with synthetic flavors have become more desirable. Just like livestock with unbalanced rations, humans over-ingest energy in the quest for protein and minerals. We, too, have "nutritional wisdom" and instinctively know what's best for our bodies, Fred asserts, but the food choices we've learned to make have been influenced by corporate, political and academic powers. Fred used the example of margarine versus butter. For years during the "anti-fat" era, we were told that margarine was a healthier choice than butter, but our bodies have always been able to distinguish the truth. (Who really prefers margarine over butter? Not me!)

Fred reminded us that cravings are very meaningful. If people are eating wholesome foods and they experience cravings, it is their bodies guiding them to select what's needed at the cellular level. "The body was the first geneticist, molecular biologist, physiologist, nutritionist, pharmacist and physician," Fred told workshop participants. "A body knows what to do regarding diet and health, given appropriate choices."

In turn, producing and consuming phytochemically rich foods is essential for the health of animals and humans. Fred left us with a few action steps that can have a great impact on soil, plant, animal and human health:

- Practice no-till farming, pasture cropping, and managed grazing
- Get rid of lawns and grow vegetable, herbal and medicinal gardens
- Shop and create meals mindfully
- Expose your body to a variety of whole foods and trust the wisdom of your body to select what it needs

For Practical Farmers members, the workshop inspired them to improve the fertility of their soils while embracing and encouraging pasture diversity in order to produce the highest quality meat and milk. For Frank Santana of Winterset, Fred's lessons "confirmed my existing management and grazing practices and allow me to have a more profound smile." ■

Part of Something Bigger

The Canfield family is on a journey to diversify

by Nick Ohde

I first met Earl Canfield at the 2015 annual conference, not long after I had started working at Practical Farmers of Iowa. He saw my PFI name tag and caught up to me in one of the hallways between sessions. He had just become a member and wanted to learn more about our organization. I really perked up when he said he would be growing oats for the first time in 2015, because I knew small grains were a topic of interest to many members. He planted oats for the first time that year, and since then, has been on a journey to transition his family's farm into a more diversified operation.

You know a family is a pillar of the community when the main north-south road in town bears their name. So when I turned left on Canfield Street to head out of Dunkerton to Canfield Family Farms, I knew I was headed somewhere special. I was not disappointed. The Canfield family includes Earl, his wife, Jane, and their four children: Matthew, Hannah, Andrew and Elijah. For the past couple of years, the family has been transitioning from growing mainly corn and soybeans to a diversified farm operation with corn, soybeans, oats, hay, popcorn, livestock and a few fruits and vegetables.

I first visited the Canfields in April 2016, as they were getting their oats and hay planted. They were busy, but not so busy that Earl couldn't chat for a while as his son Matthew finished the last couple of fields. We talked about the flavor of free-range chickens and goat milk; soil biology, rumens and ruminants; why the family has embraced small grains; and of course, oats.

"Growing small grains and hay crops allows us to even out the work flow, instead of our labor being concentrated in the spring and fall," Earl explains. "We now have a much



Working Together: From left to right, Hannah, Matthew, Andrew (standing on seeder) and Earl Canfield work to get the family's oat crop planted. Earl says that adding small grains has provided more opportunities for the Canfield children to participate in the farm.

more even balance of work we're doing throughout the year."

While Earl plants oats and has read extensively about them the past couple of years, he believes other types of small grains and forage crops are also vital for people and the landscape. "It's very important for farmers to be able to raise

"Growing oats has been a great learning experience for our kids. The things we're doing allow them to get involved in a more hands-on fashion."

— EARL CANFIELD

those crops profitably again because of their positive impacts on soil and water quality in Iowa – and ultimately, the quality of the food we all end up eating that comes directly from plants or meat products fed those grains and forages."

Part of farmers being able to raise small grains profitably is having access to markets, and Earl took his message

directly to a potential class of buyers: horse owners. A couple of weeks before my visit to the Canfield farm, Earl and his family attended the Iowa Horse Fair, where they passed out fliers with graphs showing the decline of oat production in Iowa over the last 50 years. "I firmly believe that we as Iowa farmers, if we are to make a commitment to growing oats again on our farm, have to talk to and engage consumers and convince them to purchase their oats from local suppliers," Earl says. (Earl's friend, neighboring PFI member Clark Porter, helped design surveys targeting Iowa horse owners at the fair, to learn more about them and their needs. See the sidebar for Clark's comments about Earl and the Canfield family).

Family-Friendly Farming

Growing oats has benefits beyond soil and water quality: Earl says oats are good for the family too. "Growing oats has been a great learning experience for our kids. The things we're doing allow them to get involved in a more hands-on fashion. When we were just a row crop farm, the opportunities were very limited. There weren't a lot of things they could do that were safe for them."

One of the other benefits of becoming more diversified can be found around the dinner table. Jane has been milling wheat berries to make whole-wheat bread with freshly ground flour. "By milling the grains right before we use them, it allows us to capture far more of their true natural flavor and nutrition," Jane says. "It also allows us to eliminate all the artificial additives otherwise needed to preserve and maintain food quality while it sits on a shelf or in transit somewhere."

Jane says this freshness comes with a tradeoff: You forgo the convenience of buying bread or flour whenever you need it. But it's a trade the Canfields feel is worthwhile. Jane explains that opting for convenience foods means accepting all the artificial – and often unhealthy – measures necessary to process and manufacture food with a long shelf life. In contrast, choosing the freshness and higher nutrition of freshly ground grains means making a commitment to regularly milling and making your own flour, and understanding that it needs



← **The Canfield Family:**

Back Row: Hannah, Earl and Matthew Canfield

Bottom Row: Elijah, Jane and Andrew Canfield

In 2016, Canfield Family Farm was recognized as a Heritage Farm by Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship for being in the Canfield family for 150 years.

to be consumed in a timely manner or possibly frozen for a time. "Having the best available flavor and nutrition is definitely proving to be worth the inconvenience," Jane says.

For Earl, getting healthier soil, food and communities is going to take some work. "It all works together and there's no

shortcut to getting there," Earl says. "It has taken us a long time to deplete the health of the soil on many of our farms [in Iowa], and it's going to take some time to get it back again. We just have to be willing to go through the work necessary to get to that point." ■

Farming by Design: Thoughts on the Canfield Farm

By Clark Porter

I'm honored to be a friend of Earl's.

I first met Earl at PFI's 2016 annual conference. We were both committed to raising oats, and as our crops grew our friendship did as well. Early last July, Earl and I bought an oat swather together. We had to pick it up hundreds of miles away in the potato and cranberry country of north-central Wisconsin. After a long day's journey towing a flatbed trailer through winding blacktops, Earl and I pulled into his driveway around midnight. His children rushed out of the house and swarmed the truck, clearly happy to see him and tell him about their day. They had obviously stayed up waiting for their dad. I didn't know Earl very well prior to this journey, but to me this was all the evidence I needed. When a man's children are that fond of him, it says more than any awards, certificates, bank accounts or accolades from notables.

Earl and his family have a tagline on their logo. It says "Farming by Design." They have a strong faith in God, a belief in an intrinsic design. This shows in their philosophy towards farming. They are doing what they can to work with this design and not against it, to live and farm in harmony with core values and principles that are good for the soil, animals, food and people. On their farm, purpose guides practice. They are not simply making a living, they are making a life.

Earl is smart, energetic and inventive. These qualities are common in the family. His children do a lot around the farm and his wife has a knack for writing, graphic design and publishing. In the last year, I have watched

Earl and his family transform their farm to meet goals for their business plan. He has a gift for finding bargains throughout the countryside. He refurbishes, redesigns or re-purposes everything from industrial scales and grain cleaners to Army surplus trailers. Earl's son built a handy auger for bagging oats with a cordless drill and some PVC pipe. If civilization should ever collapse, I'm heading for the Canfield farm – they'll be doing fine.

Earl has learned a great deal about growing and storing oats, lost arts in this part of the world. For him, they have a place in the rotation of crops and the restoration of soil. They fit with the larger design and with the type of agriculture he stands for: an integrated, holistic and diversified family farm. He knows how oats fit into his system, and what must be done if the larger system is to accommodate oats.

When Iowa farms lost oats, they lost a whole lot more. The scarcity of oats is a symptom of a larger, more menacing syndrome. Earl knows that restoring oats and the oat market is part of a greater effort to resuscitate the family farm and revive local communities. Like everything on Earl's farm, oats are part of something bigger, something all of us need. ■



30 Years of On-Farm Research

Master researchers reflect on program's history

by Stefan Gailans

Since 1987, the Cooperators' Program has been Practical Farmers of Iowa's vehicle for conducting on-farm research on the issues and concerns deemed most important by our members. The Cooperators' Program is the epitome of what PFI is all about: farmer-led investigation and information-sharing. Results from on-farm trials are shared through research reports, newsletter articles, the ag press, at field days and at our annual conference and annual Cooperators' Meeting. This coming year marks the 30th anniversary of the program, which has seen over 280 farmers conduct close to 1,400 on-farm research trials.

Then and Now

The earliest trials conducted investigated weed control, tillage and soil fertility (primarily nitrogen) practices for row crop farmers. Coming out of the farm crisis of the mid-1980s, managing input costs for crop production was the primary theme that transcended these early trials. Ridge-till systems were compared with conventional tillage practices and cultivation techniques were compared with post-emergence herbicides to determine the effects on weed pressure in corn and soybeans. Ridge-till was seen as a way to lessen reliance on herbicides and reduce input costs, both in terms of purchased chemicals and diesel fuel usage.

The program evolved to include grazing and feed-ration trials among livestock farmers in the mid-1990s. Cooperators documented forage quality, costs and returns through the year in dairy grazing systems in an effort to reduce the amount of grain and silage in the dairy cattle diet – a major expense for that production system. And in the late '90s, the first horticulture trials involved the establishment of hazelnut trees on two farms. In the early 2000s, vegetable production system trials emerged that focused primarily on weed and insect management and associated labor and costs.

Fast forward to 2017. Research interests among the cooperators have blossomed to include cover crops, soil health, pasture monitoring and regeneration, and vegetable variety trials. Cover crops have universal appeal among field crop, livestock and horticulture farmers. In recent years, cooperators have observed several benefits of cover crops including weed control in soybeans, forage opportunities in grazing systems and living mulch in vegetable systems. The overarching goal of improving one's farm remains a central tenet for those participating in the Cooperators' Program.

Master Researchers Reflect

The Master Researcher Award is presented to members who have conducted 20 or more on-farm research trials and hosted at least five PFI field days to share knowledge gained over the years.



Front Row (left to right): Vic Madsen (who is not yet a master researcher) Ron Rosmann, Dick Thompson, Sharon Thompson and Gayle Olson.

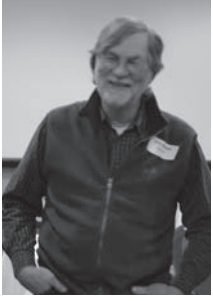
Back Row (left to right): Ron Vos of Dordt College, Margaret Smith, Dan Wilson, Doug Alert, Irene Frantzen, Tom Frantzen, Paul Muggge (tallest), Larry Kallem (PFI co-founder, who is not a master researcher), Dave Lubben, Lisa Lubben and Jeff Olson

In 2013 – the year Practical Farmers launched the award – 12 members attained master researcher status. Those members, and the number of trials each completed, include:

- Dick and Sharon Thompson, of Boone – (PFI co-founders) – 54
- Tom and Irene Frantzen, of New Hampton – 53
- Paul and Karen Muggge, of Sutherland – 50
- Ron and Maria Rosmann, of Harlan – 32
- Jeff and Gayle Olson, of Winfield – 26
- Iowa State University's Neely-Kinyon Memorial Research and Demonstration Farm, Greenfield – 25
- Dordt College, Sioux Center – 25
- Don and Sharon Davidson, of Grundy Center – 22
- Ron, LaDonna, Steve and Tara Brunk, of Eldora – 22
- Margaret Smith and Doug Alert, of Hampton – 22
- Dave and Lisa Lubben, of Monticello – 22
- Dan and Lorna Wilson, of Paullina – 20

"I had some real bonding experiences with the guys at the Cooperators' Meetings in the early years," says Jeff Olson, who farms with his wife, Gayle, near Winfield. "Looking back, as I have told others, it was a support network of like souls on the same path. I liked being associated with other questioners." Tom Frantzen echoes that sentiment: "What the Cooperators' Program does is to provide a setting where a farmer can feel part of a larger program." Tom and Irene Frantzen raise organic crops, cattle and hogs near New Hampton and have completed over 50 trials since 1988. Tom says of his long-term participation in the program: "I do not feel like I am alone and I have the comfort of knowing that other farmers are involved with efforts to make for a sustainable future."

Memorable Trial for Olsons: Strip Intercropping



Jeff says that one of his most memorable trials investigated strip intercropping for multiple years in the early 1990s. This strategy involves planting alternating 15-foot-wide strips of corn, soybeans and oats across a single field (rather than planting each of the three crops in three separate fields). In the first year (1992), the Olsons saw corn yield benefits to the strips compared to where they planted a large

block of corn in a field. This was attributed to the corn in the strip border rows capturing much more sunlight than the corn in the field block.

By 1995, they began to see corn stand reductions in one of the border rows, which Jeff suspected was due to stalk borers migrating from foxtail weeds in the adjacent oats+clover strip. "The stalk borers were affecting the vigor of the outside corn row, which was the bread winner for increased corn yield," Jeff says. The next year the Olsons decided to experiment with a Bt corn hybrid in their strips and partnered with Dr. Rick Cruse and Mohammed Ghaffarzadeh of Iowa State University. Jeff recalls: "So I've got Iowa State researchers and Ph.D students picking corn [from each row in the strip] and gunny-sacking and weighing in one of the worst European corn borer infestation years in history (by luck of Mother Nature) and they see 35 bushel per acre increases in yield by planting the Bt hybrid, and they were devastated. They could see that an insurance purchase of a trait to fight an occasional pest would turn into a blanket use by farmers and lead to resistance problems down the road. And I saw it in my field on my farm and heard of the future from ISU folks I respected." Insect pest resistance to Bt was eventually documented in Iowa by ISU researchers in 2011.

Memorable Trial for Frantzens: Nitrogen Rate Trials

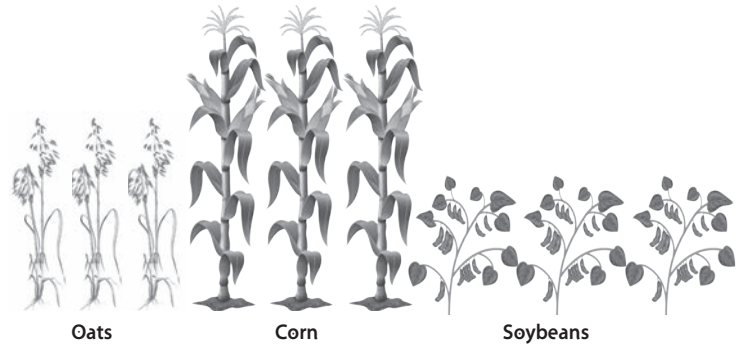


"I will never forget doing a nitrogen trial where I compared the standard rate the farm was using to the rate recommended by the late-spring soil nitrate test," Tom says. The Frantzens, along with several other PFI farmers, served as test sites across Iowa in the late 1980s when the late Dr. Alfred Blackmer of ISU was developing the late-spring soil nitrate test for corn. The test is based on soil samples collected when the corn is 6 to 12 inches tall, and

determines how much extra nitrogen, if any, the crop needs just before the period of maximum nitrogen uptake by the crop.

The trials the Frantzens and other farmers participated in involved randomized and replicated strips across the field where corn in some strips received the nitrogen rate recommended by the soil test and other strips received the farmer's standard rate, which was higher than the recommended rate. The trials conducted at several farms over numerous years helped Dr. Blackmer refine the test. Thanks to all of those trials, critical soil nitrate levels and

Strip Intercropping



↑ Illustration of strip intercropping, a planting arrangement whereby oats, corn and soybeans are planted directly adjacent to each other in alternating strips, rather than segregated in separate fields.

recommended side-dress nitrogen rates were developed. Trial participants, and the farmers who have used the tests in the years since, have been able to see how historical field management and annual weather patterns affect recommended corn nitrogen rates. Tom recalls the usefulness of the soil test: "My test site happened to be in a place where lots of animal manure was applied over the years. In early June, the soil nitrate tests came back at 110 parts per million and I only needed 25 ppm (according to the test recommendations) for a good corn crop! Adding more nitrogen only added to my costs!"

On-Farm Research is Key to Success

For Tom and many other cooperators, farmer-led research conducted through the Cooperators' Program is integral to what PFI is all about. "PFI was created to help farmers make better decisions," Tom says. "The Cooperators' Program is the essential component of this effort. The research data generated creates a flywheel momentum that helps farmers keep on the land."

The curiosity of members seeking to improve their farms is what helped set in motion a program that has now served farmers for 30 years – but its strength is based on farmers getting involved. "We need to bring in some more farmers, particularly young farmers who might not be aware of or think that on-farm research is relevant to them," says Jordan Scheibel, a young farmer who has been conducting research on compost application, mulching and vegetable varieties on his farm near Grinnell for the past three years. "I think the Cooperators' Program is the living heart of PFI, and more people who participate in Practical Farmers of Iowa should consider participating in on-farm research." ■

Get Involved

➡ To learn more about participating in the Cooperators' Program and conducting on-farm research, contact Stefan Gailans at stefan@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

➡ Visit practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/research-reports for links to published reports (old and new). You can query by program area or use the search function to enter keywords, such as the names of participating farmers or specific topics of interest.

Making Progress with Conservation Assistance

by Steve Carlson

Increasing profitability, efficiency and stewardship were among the primary goals of PFI co-founders Dick and Sharon Thompson and Larry Kallem – and the other founding members of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Our members are still driven by these goals. While the support system proffered by Practical Farmers' network remains vital for farmers working to meet these goals, they also have more options today for drawing financial and technical assistance through state and federal programs.

Mark Schleisman of Lake City, is one farmer who can credit Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) support for some of his improved profitability, efficiency and stewardship. Along with his son, Matthew, and son-in-law, Colby Winter, Mark farms 4,500 acres in Carroll, Calhoun and Sac counties. The family raises corn, soybeans, popcorn and popcorn-field-corn hybrid seed, as well as hogs and cow-calves. In 2016, they planted cover crops on 1,200 acres, crediting NRCS assistance as a major reason for their adoption on so many acres. "[The program] did what it was designed to do and got us to try cover crops out," Mark says. "Now we continue to plant cover crops every year."

Mark started with a three-year contract to plant a single-species cover crop through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Following this, Mark moved on to a two-species mix on another three-year contract, then a three-species mix after that. "EQIP forced me to look at multi-species mixes," Mark explains. "Without it, I wouldn't have looked at multi-species mixes, which are better for grazing, cheaper and better for soil health."

Having comfortably adopted cover crops as part of his operation, Mark was able to leverage these conservation practices to get enrolled in the more competitive Conservation Stewardship Program. CSP applications are ranked

according to conservation measures already implemented, so it's a natural progression after the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Mark just began his second five-year CSP contract addressing a range of conservation issues. In addition to maintaining his existing practices, the conservation plan developed with his district conservationist involves a management plan for pesticides, irrigation, pasture and nitrogen, as well as additional soil health enhancements. Payments

from CSP are made according to existing conservation activities, the activities the farmer implements and a supplemental payment for resource-conserving crop rotations. The average annual payment through the Conservation Stewardship Program is \$24 per acre.

Grazing Covers Field Day – April 11

One of the enhancements Mark chose for his Conservation Stewardship Program contract is to host a field day this spring, now set for April 11, on Mark's farm in Lake City. Mark will discuss:

- planting and grazing strategies
- cover crops as a nutritional forage source
- how he deals with compaction from cattle
- the economic benefits of grazing covers

You'll see Mark's cows and calves grazing a mix of diverse cover crops planted in fall of 2016.

Activities in Marks's pesticide management plan include reducing pesticide drift by using specific spray nozzles and a drift-retarding additive. For the irrigation plan, he has installed in-field weather stations and a soil probe that maps projected water use to help schedule water use. His pasture management plan involves rotational grazing and a pasture scoring method to evaluate the condition and growth of his pastures. And his nitrogen management plan includes a nitrification inhibitor that delays the rate nitrogen breaks down into nitrate in both the hog manure and commercial fertilizers used.

In addition to Mark's working-lands conservation efforts through CSP and EQIP, he also has non-production acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for buffer strips, pollinator habitat and pheasant habitat. On one farm he manages, owned by his father and uncles, Mark is working with the Elk Run Watershed and a handful

of other organizations on a demonstration project through which they have installed a bioreactor and saturated buffer to treat tile water leaving the farm.

Visit your local USDA service center to discuss how your farm can access financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices. ■



The Schleisman Family: Front Row (left to right): Braeya Winter, Colby Winter, Brandy Winter, Matthew Schleisman, Mark Schleisman, Melissa Schleisman and Cassie Schleisman **Back Row (left to right):** Kylee Schleisman, Kypton Winter, Blair Schleisman and Landon Schleisman



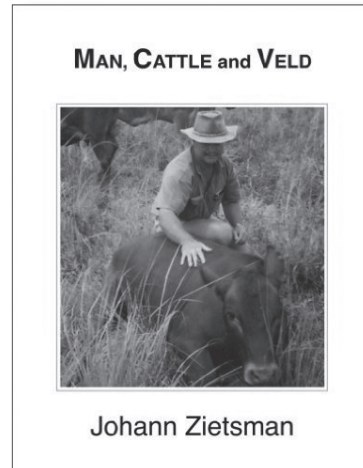
"Man, Cattle and Veld"

by Jerry Laughlin

In "Man, Cattle and Veld," published in 2014, author and grazer Johann Zietsman does an excellent job describing the role each part plays in the relationship between man, cattle and the grasslands – or veld, as some grassland ecosystems are called in parts of southern Africa – they inhabit. He believes man is key to obtaining harmony among them, and to do so they need to be managed as a whole.

“Since the domestication of cattle, man has decided what is desirable or undesirable in terms of breeding and management,” writes Johann, who raises and breeds cattle in Zimbabwe. He feels that a degree of ignorance, and more so arrogance, in man’s view of nature has led to the mismanagement of cattle and veld – and isn’t afraid to place blame where he sees fit for the discord between man, cattle and veld. He believes the most important step in achieving harmony between them is an appropriate goal, and he thinks a goal of **maximum sustainable profit per acre** fits that description.

Johann attempts to debunk conventional wisdom of cattle breeding while showing an alternative way with nature as mentor. In his opinion, cattle have a dual role, the first being the enhancement of the natural processes in a grassland or savannah ecosystem, and the second being the efficient conversion of veld into a marketable product. He states that there is a relationship between size, growth rate, grass intake, maturity rate, body condition and efficiency of feed conversion that is essential to understand, and those relationships give smaller-frame animals an unfair advantage over larger-frame animals. Johann argues that **stocking rate** is the most important factor determining ranch profitability, and **fertility** (stemming from inherently good body



condition) is, without a doubt, the most important characteristic required by cattle. He claims that body condition is a reflection of overall adaptation, and the main determinant of practical fertility.

One of the biggest perceptions that Johann tries to disprove in the book is that fertility is 90 percent feeding and 10 percent breeding. Conventional thinking says fertility is lowly heritable, but Johann

argues there are no lowly heritable, economically important traits: Fertility, maturity rate, milk production and meat-to-bone ratio are all highly heritable traits if the appropriate measurements are used. I was especially interested in his methods of determining individual fertility in cows after they have their first calf. By using his methods, one should be able to rank the cows in a herd from most to least fertile, which would be extremely beneficial when selecting replacements from within the herd.

Johann makes a convincing case that, using ultra-high stock density grazing coupled with the right type of animal, it is possible to not only restore grasslands, but also be profitable beyond what can be obtained conventionally. He speaks of doubling, tripling and potentially quadrupling stocking rates when proper management is used.

I highly recommend this book to anyone lucky enough to have the opportunity to influence the interactions between cattle and veld. Depending on your role in the industry, some of what Johann has to say may be a tough pill to swallow, so to speak. It will take an open mind to appreciate all he has to say. In his own words: “The truth is not waiting to be invented by someone. Neither is it the domain of ordinary professors, or even extraordinary professors, and doctors of philosophy. The truth is part of Creation. Anyone with sufficient humility and hunger for the truth will find it.” ■

Jerry Laughlin and his family raise beef cattle, corn, soybeans and small grains near Imogene in Fremont County. He is interested in learning and practicing ways to regenerate his soil health and farm both more holistically and profitably.



← Jerry Laughlin (left) stands near rangeland scientist Fred Provenza (right), who led a three-day workshop sponsored by PFI, that explored the deep links connecting people, livestock, plants and animals, land management, food and ecosystem health (*read more on pgs. 20-21*).

Farewell from Lauren Zastrow: From Iowa to Utah

If you've ever called the Practical Farmers of Iowa office, there's a good chance I've been the one to greet you. It's a bit of a thrill, sometimes, to answer the phone not always knowing who's on the wire. Most of the time, you needed to move forward in your work by speaking with one of my incredible co-workers, but there were plenty of opportunities to help you directly – even if it was just to listen to you for a little while.

I joined the Practical Farmers staff in April 2012 as a part-time office assistant, and it has always been a delight to see the instant results of our work, especially at events. I'm an avid observer of your conversations and connections, and it's been my fuel to continuously improve things on my end so that nothing hinders those interactions.

I, myself, have no farming background apart from a family farm in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin that I visited in summers and holidays. I'm grateful for the opportunity PFI gave me to use what I do know, and



to assist in keeping things organized and helping wherever help was needed. Between that and my willingness to take on new projects, I'm proud of the now full-time events and membership assistant position I carved out for a new staff member to step into, and I'm looking forward to seeing how it grows.

I'm particularly excited for this new person to experience the deep fulfillment of

directing someone to a solution, or at least a clearer path. Some of the best phone conversations were with folks who were unfamiliar with Practical Farmers. Being able to tell people about an upcoming field day that is exactly what they called to learn about, knowing they attended and that it helped them make a more informed decision, is an amazing feeling.

You cannot imagine the profound respect I have for each and every one of you. I'm honored to have served you, in so many small ways. It's not easy leaving this nurturing community, my found family in Ames – and the best food I've ever tasted. I can't wait to tell people about Practical Farmers and how its vision for Iowa ripples out into the world. The work continues for me, just through different practices. I'm heading west to explore cliffs and canyons in Moab, Utah, but Iowa's 99 counties are imprinted on this Florida gal's heart.

Thank you for your calls, your support, your curiosity, your cooperation and your tireless hard work. ■

Alisha Bower Joins PFI Staff as Cover Crops Support

I was raised on a hobby farm in the southwest corner of Wisconsin. We always had horses, then cattle and chickens. Our land rotated through corn and soybeans, then to pasture and forage with the arrival of the cows. Doing chicken chores with my cousins, traipsing through the half-thawed woods to collect syrup buckets and stacking innumerable bales of hay frame my childhood memories as far back as I can remember.

I started my undergraduate career at University of Minnesota Twin Cities with a degree in political science and Spanish, but found that my favorite part of every class was discussing environmental issues, and my favorite part of the week was plotting my next menu concocted from healthy foods. I added a sustainability minor and began to seek opportunities to learn more about the journey of food from farm to fork. My passion was drawing me back to agriculture, while my skills pulled me towards a people-oriented profession. I thus looked for places where my interest in agriculture and social justice could

intersect with my outgoing personality and love of building human relationships. This search led me to Illinois, where I worked as a community outreach intern with Liberty Prairie Foundation on programs related to beginning farmers, youth engagement and healthy food access in nearby urban areas.

I returned to my home state to complete a masters degree in public affairs at University of Wisconsin-Madison, focusing on non-profit administration, and designing and managing research programs to answer questions about the sustainability of agricultural and food systems. While there, I worked at the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Institute in Madison, and in Dr. Erin Silva's lab (of roller-crimper fame) working with farmers participating in on-farm research. After graduating, I spent three months in Lima, Peru as an intern with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service. I worked in the U.S. Embassy there, collecting information on agricultural production in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia and supporting the foreign policy goals of U.S. farmers and ranchers.



When I learned of the opportunity to join the Practical Farmers team, I leapt at the chance: Supporting families like mine in their quest to do right by the land and their children is what drives me. I will be working closely with Sarah Carlson on cover crop and small grains programming. In addition to communications, research and grant tracking work, I will be planning cover crop and small grains boot camps, and managing our member speakers who appear at events geared toward these topics. ■

John and Beverly Gilbert Receive Sustainable Ag Award

John and Beverly Gilbert, of Iowa Falls, received Practical Farmers' 2017 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award on Jan. 20, during the annual conference. This award is granted each year to an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food.

John and Beverly operate Gibraltar Farms, a 770-acre diversified row crop, dairy and livestock farm, with one of their sons and his wife – John C. and Sarah Gilbert – and one of John's five brothers, Greg, and his wife, Barb. In addition to growing traditionally bred corn, soybeans, hay, oats and a variety of annuals for forage, the family milks 50 to 60 Brown Swiss cattle, and raises antibiotic-free, pasture-farrowed pigs to sell to Niman Ranch. The farm, which sits along a mile of Southfork, a tributary of the Iowa River, also features a restored shallow water wetland, a prairie marsh remnant, woodlands and numerous conservation practices meant to help protect soil and water quality – including terraces, extensive grass headlands and waterways, and stream buffers.

John and Beverly are also vocal advocates of conserving Iowa's soil and water quality – and of the importance of restoring and investing in the future of rural communities. To that end, they have mentored several beginning and aspiring farmers over the years, hosted field days and tours on their farm, and participated

in on-farm research through Practical Farmers of Iowa – always freely sharing their knowledge in the PFI tradition.

John stresses that the farm's accomplishments are thanks to a family effort. "The farm is what is being recognized," John says, "and it's the dedication of the family and all the people who've helped us over the years that have gotten us where we are today." (The Gilberts also have a son, James, of Lakewood, Colorado, and a daughter Kate, of Ames, who have also helped on the farm.)

John credits his late father – who ceased plowing in the 1960s and always kept diverse crop rotations and livestock – with serving as a model and inspiration. And while John served as a soil and water conservation district commissioner with Hardin County for 14 years, he cites Allyn Hagensick, of Hampton, with introducing the family to Practical Farmers of Iowa and altering the course of the farm.

"We bought our Buffalo cultivator from Allyn in the mid-1980s, and he helped us get it set right," John says. "He saw our field across the road where we'd interplanted some beans into rye – that was one of our early experiments – and he started telling us about this new group."



John accompanied Allyn to one of PFI co-founder Dick Thompson's field days, and then later to one of Practical Farmers' early annual meetings. The subsequent learning and networking helped the Gilberts implement ridges, rotational grazing and pasture farrowing, and make vital connections to Niman Ranch – which opened up a critical market permitting the Gilberts to maintain pigs as an enterprise.

"It was one of those serendipitous things where being in the right place at the right time – and the right person started talking – changed your trajectory," John says.

He emphasizes that the family's farming practices have evolved over time, through a process of trial and error – and that they are still learning. "I consider sustainability to be a journey, not a destination. We're on the journey, hopefully heading in the right direction." ■

Plant a Seed Today That will Grow Forever

Annual interest from a permanent endowment fund is like a lifeline for non-profit organizations. Practical Farmers of Iowa's **Endow Iowa Fund** is designed to give you access to the most favorable tax advantages available, and to help PFI develop planned giving programs. With Endow Iowa, donations cost donors less. For example, a \$5,000 gift could cost just \$2,000.

- **Gift:** \$5,000
- **Tax Credit:** \$1,250
- **Federal Deduction:** \$1,750
- **Total Tax Savings:** \$3,000
- **Total Cost of Gift:** \$2,000

The special fund is set up at the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation in Practical Farmers of Iowa's name. Donors to the fund are eligible for the 25 percent Endow Iowa Tax Credit each year a gift is made. The principal of the gift remains intact. Practical Farmers' board of directors determines when to use endowment earnings (up to 5 percent of earnings per year) to work toward achieving our vision of diverse farms, healthy food and vibrant communities.

Every year, approximately \$4 million in Endow Iowa tax credits are set aside to distribute to those who make gifts to permanently

endowed funds at a qualified community foundation.

The credits are available on a statewide first-come-first-served basis, so talk to your professional advisor about how you can take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Or contact Sally Worley at (515) 232-5661 or sally@practicalfarmers.org for more information on Endow Iowa and how Practical Farmers is helping donors do good work within the community, forever. ■

New Members & Upcoming Events

Welcome, New Members!

District 1–Northwest

- Patrick Hall, Carroll
- Jeremy Hummel, Sioux Center
- Andy Juhl, Remsen
- Mark and LeAnne Philips, Akron
- Amy Walter, Armstrong
- Jaron and Liz Wilson, Paullina

District 2–North Central

- Rowan Allen, Cambridge
- Carla Barnwell and Eileen Gebbie, Boone
- Ken and Russilyn Bever, Webster City
- Eric Boelman, Belmond
- Mike and Sherry Buske, Fort Dodge
- Bryan Chalstrom, Moorland
- Carolina Cordova, Ames
- Brian Dougherty, Ames
- Mark Halverson, Toledo
- Becky Huang, Mason City
- Russell Manske, Boone
- Gina McAndrews, Ames
- James and Andrew Metzger, Marshalltown
- Linda Murken, Jim and Ben Noland, Gilbert
- Colleen Neel, Ames
- Huong Nguyen, Ames
- Santos Nunez, Ames

- Ron Rachut, Fertile
- Steve Saltzman, Ames
- Kenneth and Kimberly Smith, State Center
- Blake Smith, Duncombe
- Pat and Steve Thompson, Ames
- Sarah Walsh, Ames

District 3–Northeast

- Kimberlea Baker, D & K Family Farm, LLC, Sumner
- Steve and Brigette Cornelius, Decorah
- Keri Fountain, Fredericksburg
- Mike and Susan Freeze, Hopkinton
- Angela Gadzik, Buffalo Pumpkin Farm, Buffalo
- Bob Recker, Cedar Valley Innovation LLC, Waterloo
- Amy Schmitt, Cedar Rapids
- Michael Svoboda, Vinton
- Catherine Wedemeier, Maynard

District 4–Southwest

- Ted Rumph, Barker Lemar Engineering, West Des Moines
- Kindra Booth, Gravity
- Mike, Donna and Steve Brahms, 3 Bee Farms, Griswold

- Dave and Amy Breese, Bend River Custom Farms, Des Moines
- Emily Burns, Des Moines
- Lois DeWaard, Pleasantville
- Heather and Zane Diersen, Earlham
- Maureen Eickholt, Eickholt Insurance Agency, Council Bluffs
- Samantha Fink, Ankeny
- Jayme Fowler, Hancock
- Amy and Shane Frevert, Centerville
- Matthew Githens, Dallas Center
- Charles Helland, Huxley
- Amy Schechinger, Iowa Agricultural Bio Fibers, LLC, Harlan
- Peggy Jorgensen-Teichert, Taylor Rogers and Shaun Warkentin, Logan
- Emily Kennedy, Kennedy Cattle Company LC, Wiota
- Kevin Lair, Winterset
- Charles Moore, Melrose
- Kevin Petersen, Walnut
- Carole Reichardt and Diane Cutler, Clive
- Kent Ruble, Carlisle
- Andrew Schechinger, AJ Farms, Harlan
- Maureen Schletzbaum, Straw Hat Farms of Marion County, Pleasantville
- Dan Smith, Exira

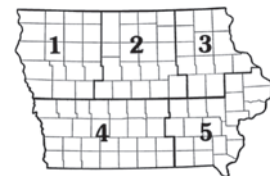
- Dave Sproles, Corning
- S.L. Thompson, Winterset

District 5–Southeast

- Paul Deaton, Solon
- Harriet Dickey-Chasins, Grinnell
- Tim Diers, Rainbow Farms, Lockridge
- Jenna Gibbs, Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, Iowa City
- Steve and Jean Gingerich, Red Barn, Parnell
- Mark and Trisha Haines, Sigourney
- Steven and Alaina Imhoff, Sperry
- Michael Jackson, Jackson Farms LS, Rose Hill
- Gary Klinefelter, Parsons Properties, Iowa City
- Andrew Metzger, Iowa City
- Maynard and Ruby Miller, Hilltop Acres, Kalona
- Mark, Kathy, Matt and Shannon Ogden, Matlin Ranch, North Liberty
- Jim and Gwen Pedrick, Douds
- Jesse Singerman, Prairie Ventures, Iowa City
- Dave Rotole, Bloomfield
- Lori Schnoor, Maquoketa

District 6–Out of State

- Bob and Brock Bollivar, Prophetstown, IL



- Robin Bot-Miller, San Francisco, CA
- Jon Branstrator, Clarksville, OH
- Paul Cardis, Cross Plains, WI
- Loren Gillum, Augusta, IL
- Jeff Hamons, Synergistic Acres, Parker, KS
- Michael Hanus, Fremont, NE
- Eric Johnston, Princeton, IL
- Kristen Kordet, Blue Moon Community Farm, Stoughton, WI
- Dan Legner, Princeton, IL
- Rod Lowe, Newton, KS
- Margaret Murphy, Brandon, SD
- Chris Pelzer, Brooktondale, NY
- Jared Rankin, Frederick, MD
- Mikol Sesker, Mint N More Farms, Henderson, NV
- Rachel Van Daal Wyk, Hortonville, WI
- Emily Zimmerman, Marinette, WI

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ MARCH | APRIL

March 6 – "Map of My Kingdom" Performance | Dubuque, IA | 7 p.m.

The play, commissioned by Practical Farmers, will be performed at the Rural Ministry Conference, at the Best Western Plus Hotel. In the play, character Angela Martin, a lawyer and mediator in land transition disputes, shares stories of how farmers and landowners have approached their farmland transfers. For more information, visit: maryswander.com

March 7 – Farminar: "Variety Selection for Vegetable Production"

Join Rob Faux, of Genuine Faux Farm near Tripoli, to hear about some of the data he collects and how it informs vegetable variety planning on his farm. For more details, visit: practicalfarmers.org/2017-winter-farminars

March 10 – Farminar: "Challenges and Opportunities with Hazelnuts"

Join Iowa Nut Growers Association president and hazelnut grower Jeff Jensen, and Minnesota Hazelnut Foundation member and grower Norm Erickson, to learn more about the benefits, challenges and opportunities in hazelnut production. For more details, visit: practicalfarmers.org/2017-winter-farminars

March 11 – Beginning Farmer Financial Workshop | CG Therkiløsen Activity Center | Halan, IA | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

This workshop, organized by PFI, is for beginning farmers seeking to improve their financial and business knowledge for their existing or future farm. We will cover financial literacy and available programs for farm financing. Attendees will have time to create a projected income statement. The afternoon will focus on marketing and production efficiencies. For more details or to register, contact Greg Van Den Berghe at greg@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

March 17 – 18 – Missouri Blueberry School | Bond Building – Darr Agricultural Center | Springfield, MO

Though a challenging crop to produce, blueberries are in high demand for many markets. The Missouri Blueberry School will offer educational sessions and a tour of innovative blueberry farms. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Bill Cline of North Carolina State University. Join local and nationally known blueberry specialists to gain expertise on a wide range of blueberry issues. For more details or to register, visit: eventbrite.com/e/missouri-blueberry-school-tickets-31999504379

March 30 – April 1 – Holistic Management Workshop: Grazing Planning | Red Oak, IA | 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. (each day)

Pre-register by March 8 with David Carbaugh at (402) 659-0601 or lesliecarbaugh@yahoo.com. Proper application of HM principles will enhance the health of your land and increase productivity while reducing operating costs. Lunch, break food and drinks for each day are included.

Various Dates – PFI Spring Cover Crop Field Days | Various Locations

Join PFI farmers at several locations around Iowa this spring to learn more about cover crops in row crop and grazing systems. For more details, visit: practicalfarmers.org. Field days will be held on the following dates:

- Tuesday, March 28 – Albion, IA
- Tuesday, April 4 – Hancock, IA
- Wednesday, March 29 – Reinbeck, IA
- Thursday, April 6 – Leighton, IA
- Thursday, March 30 – Maxwell, IA
- Tuesday, April 11 – Lake City IA

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

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



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



Healthy Food

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

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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.