

working together, always learning

the Practical Farmer

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Dan Wilson stands by the family sheep herd during the Seven W Farm field day on Sept 26.

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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).



LEOPOLD CENTER



Beautiful Rural Places

Mary Swander's play on "who gets the farmland" has hit a nerve. People came out – in West Branch, Decorah, Chariton and Red Oak – to watch "Map of My Kingdom." After each performance, attendees' stories about both successful and challenging farm transitions poured out. Catch the play at the annual conference on Jan. 23 and then help bring it to your hometown.

All four of the venues for this play were lovely: The simple, clean lines of the Quaker Meeting House at Scattergood Friends School in West Branch; the 150-year-old Lutheran church on the hilltop outside of Decorah; the lovingly restored freight house in Chariton; and the spanking new, first-class Wilson Performing Arts Center in Red Oak. What a commitment by all of these communities to their architectural and agricultural heritage and the arts.

Gifts of Membership

I was astounded by the response to our "give a gift of membership" campaign! We raised nearly \$4,000, which will help

more than 100 people try us out for a year. Members joined for their friends and neighbors. They sent in money and asked us to join for someone else. Here is Rick Hartmann, one of the "gifters" of memberships, on why he and his wife Stacy participated:

Why did we do it? For several reasons. First, we felt the benefits we have received from PFI over the last decade have far exceeded the cost to us. In a sense, we felt a little beholden to the organization.

Second, we are frugal. We spend money, sure. In fact we really don't mind it, but there are so few good things to spend it on. There are so few goods or services that have any real value for their cost, we usually just go without. We think PFI uses money efficiently and delivers real value for our hard-earned money.

Finally, by giving memberships to PFI, we not only benefit PFI with a lasting and likely reoccurring gift, we also



benefit the recipient of the membership. In this way we can strengthen our community and local network of like-minded farmer and eaters.

Thank you, Rick.

Working for you,

Dog of the Issue

We are looking for volunteers to help keep this organization member-focused!

If you might be interested in serving on a committee or on the board of directors in the future, let us know. Your PFI staffers use our strategic plan and member survey feedback to implement programming, but often we need the more specific direction and counsel that the committees provide.

Here are some of the Committees we have:

- Welcoming (new members)
- Savings Incentive Program
- Nominating
- Policy
- Cooperators' Program (on-farm research)
- Hospitality (for conference)
- Labor4Learning (for helping farmers hire help, helping beginners get experience)
- Practical Landowner Services (fee-for-service helping non-operator landlords and their tenants plant cover crops)
- Energy
- Farm Transitions
- Finance
- Strategic Directions
- Horticulture
- Livestock
- Spray Drift



Meet Buddy! His owner, Martha McFarland, raises bison with her father on Hawkeye Buffalo Ranch near Fredericksburg. Reports Martha: "Buddy is an eight-year-old Great Pyrenees who was officially our neighbor's dog, but roamed our country 'neighborhood,' adopting everyone within a 4-mile radius. He's always had a sixth sense for arriving when we have tours, and loves to block visitors' way and lean in for lots of pets and scratches. After our neighbor went into the rest home, Buddy more or less claimed Hawkeye Buffalo as his residence. However, he still likes to visit everyone in the neighborhood."

Building Soil at Maple Edge Farm

Bakehouse family seeks to "feed the soil" through no-till, cover crops and small grains

by Stefan Gailans

Judging by field day topics and conversations on our email discussion groups, soil health and quality are on many of our members' minds these days. Soil health is associated with the biological integrity of the soil – the life in the soil. Soil quality refers to physical aspects of the soil, such as structure and organic matter content – the house where the soil community lives. Over the course of the past year, farmer-member Jon Bakehouse has shared with me in a series of conversations and correspondences his thoughts on these topics and how they have forged his farming mindset.

Jon and his father, Bach Bakehouse, manage Maple Edge Farm near Hastings in Mills County, on a beautiful slice of land in southwest Iowa along the West Nishnabotna River. The farm was originally farmsteaded by Jon's great-great grandfather in the 1880s and now Jon and his wife, Tina, and son, Anderson, live on the farm. They primarily raise corn and soybeans, but also raise small grains, alfalfa hay and a small cow-calf herd. Jon and his father began thinking more about the health and quality of their soil in the late 1990s when they transitioned the farm to no-till production.

Since then, Jon has thought about more ways to improve and regenerate the farm's soils. He joined Practical Farmers of Iowa after attending a field day at neighbor and fellow member Steve McGrew's farm. Since then, "seeing all the work going on with cover crops turned the volume up, then hearing Gabe Brown speak [at the Practical Farmers of Iowa annual conference] 'cranked it up to 11.'" He was especially moved by Gabe's words of advice: "If you want to make big changes, change your way of thinking." Crop rotation and cover crops have become more of Jon's farming mindset.

Small Grain in the Rotation

My interest in Jon's operation was first piqued when I emailed to introduce myself and to ask him about his farm operation. "We are experimenting with planting triticale after corn and soy, rotating between the two," Jon explained. "The idea is to extend our rotation by skipping a

year of corn in one location and a year of soy in the other." Given that so few acres of small grains like triticale are grown in Iowa, I wanted to know more about why Jon grew what he grew. Turns out, he was looking to increase biological diversity on his farm and searching for an inexpensive source of cover crop seed. As cover crops are increasing in popularity – along with adoption across the state – so too is the cost of cover crop seed. Some farmers like Jon are circumventing those rising seed

Jon Bakehouse uses a shovel to show off the diverse cover crop growth above and below the soil surface at his August field day.



costs by growing their own cover crop seed on-farm.

Jon said he was glad they transitioned the farm to no-till in the late 1990s, but was not entirely satisfied: "Even no-tilling corn and soybeans leaves a certain percentage of soil uncovered. Our most immediate goal is to get as much soil covered as possible. Our priorities include getting a cover crop on every single acre every year. While our ground is relatively flat, any kind of erosion is unacceptable." By raising triticale for seed, which grows vigorously during April, May and June, and using cover crops between growing corn and soybeans, Jon began to achieve this goal.

Window of Opportunity

Jon also shared another reason why he likes to grow triticale: "Growing a small grain spreads the farm work load more evenly: planting triticale in fall, harvesting in July, planting again right after harvest."

Planting after harvest in July? Jon explained: "After harvesting triticale in July, we plant a six- to eight-species soil-building cover crop mix." The family has thought about grazing or baling this mix, but Jon said he's not sure they would "get enough tonnage for that *and* our primary goal of soil-building." Most farmers who use cover crops are growing them during the off-season between corn and soybeans. But this period, between October and April, does not leave Iowa farmers with many options, given the often-harsh winter conditions here that prevent many cover crop species from surviving.

With a July planting date, however, cover crop options are much more numerous. Explaining why he likes the cover crop planting window afforded by triticale, Jon says: "Diversity, diversity, diversity. Nature demands it. Our soil is alive and will provide for us if we let it. Our most overreaching, long-term goal is to regenerate our soil." The multiple grass, legume and brassica species that Jon

plants after triticale harvest help to feed the diverse soil microbes and regenerate the soil for the rest of the summer and fall before planting corn the next spring. "My goal is to provide diversity and feed the soil to feed the crop."

By feeding the soil, Jon is referring to the carbon-rich exudates that living plant roots "leak" into the soil. At the field day Jon and his family hosted in August, state soil scientist Rick Bednarek explained how the bacteria in the soil feed on these root exudates. Different plants leak different exudates, and different exudates feed different bacteria. In a sense, diversity breeds diversity. Combining no-till practices with increased plant diversity (crop rotation and cover crops) works to improve the physical structure of the soil (the housing) for the microbial life.

Given a good home in which to live, those microorganisms can go to work for the farmer. The bacteria in the soil are consumed by protozoa that then excrete plant-available nutrients, Rick told the field day audience. Farmers like Jon are not only thinking about their cattle herd above the soil surface but also the "microbial herd"



Rick Bednarek (seated) elaborated on soil health and quality as field day attendees take a look at a soil pit Jon dug on his farm.

Even no-tilling corn and soybeans leaves a certain percentage of soil uncovered. Our most immediate goal is to get as much soil covered as possible . . . Any kind of erosion is unacceptable.

— JON BAKEHOUSE

farming," Tina said. "I've gotten to know more about the diversity and complexity involved in the operation. We've spoken more about the farm in the past two years than we ever had in the years before. The two of us have been more open about our feelings, desires and roles on the farm. We ask more questions about how we want to live our lives on the farm."

Jon agreed, and both he and Tina believe that their quality of life on the farm and their sense of well-being, both mentally and physically, have improved.

Our conversation that evening turned to some of PFI's goals to increase biological diversity on the Iowa landscape and reduce the use of purchased external inputs on farms. "It's been fun to do things differently," Jon said. "We are trying hard to shed the 'farm-for-yield' mentality. Instead, we need to adopt a 'what's-best-for-the-soil' mentality." ■

below the soil surface. "Take care of the soil and it will take care of you," Jon says, adding that this has become his mantra on the farm as he has thought about soil health and quality the past few years.

Quality of Life on the Farm

The night before the Bakehouses hosted close to 60 people on their farm for a field day, Jon and Tina both opened up about how the farm has been changing for the better as they have begun adopting these practices and philosophies. "I've noticed more of a spark in the way Jon talks about



Tina Bakehouse says that the family's focus on soil health and diversity has led to her and Jon being "more open about our feelings, desires and roles on the farm" than ever before.

Cattle Versus Crops: Can We Justify Keeping Cattle on the Land in an Era of Profitable Corn?

Compiled by
Meghan Filbert

In July, Margaret Chamas (Dunn) posed a question to the livestock email discussion list: "How do we justify keeping cattle on land when it seems corn brings in higher profits?" This question was generated after reading the Drovers CattleNetwork article by Kris Ringwall, "BeefTalk: The cow herd struggles to expand". A chart from 2013 included in the article showed an average net return per acre in North Dakota of \$65.22 for spring and winter wheat, corn, soybeans and oil sunflower. Alfalfa-grass hay earned \$36.73 per acre, while cow-calf production made just \$20.33 (based on 12 acres per cow per grazing season). While these numbers are now outdated and not relevant to Iowa, the question sparked a complex discussion among PFI members on cattle versus crops in Iowa.

As stated in the Drover's article, "The reality of today's agriculture is heavily slanted toward crop production if land has the potential to be converted to crops. For beef production to expand, the economics of the beef cow need to have an increase in net returns to compete with crop production."



Margaret Smith of Hampton suggested several reasons why we see so much corn in Iowa: "Beef cows have always been an enterprise that you ran on the ground that wasn't suitable for cropping. Our

federal farm programs reward the big five crops and skew everything in the direction of row cropping, so historically it's been hard to match crop income potential with a beef cow. The recent changes in corn and soy economics may be a game-changer for this enterprise comparison. Calf and cull beef prices are high and grain prices are very low."

Because of differences in rotation regimes, yields and inputs, it is hard to directly compare net returns in Iowa versus North Dakota. Iowa has more precipitation and better-quality soil than in North Dakota, and thus, higher grass production and grain yield.

With this in mind, **Greg Lipes** of West Branch pointed out that "in most parts of Iowa, you do not need 12 acres to support a single cow during the growing season." At the time the article was written, he continued, "the net return for a beef cow in North Dakota was \$244. Let's say 3 acres would support a cow in Iowa. If we did the math, $\$244 / 3 \text{ acres} = \81.33 average net return per acre for a cow-calf pair." His point? With good grazing management, cattle can become a more viable enterprise.



During the discussion, no conclusions were made about the most profitable enterprise in Iowa, but many members who responded had insightful thoughts on the importance of integrating cattle with crops. "One failing in our rotations is the missing inclusion of grazing livestock and it's something we need to work on," commented **Harn Soper** of Emmetsburg.

Rebuilding Soil Health

One of the overall themes of the discussion was how livestock can be used to increase soil health. **Jeff Murra** of Buffalo Center said he justifies keeping cattle "based upon the land's suitability to grow crops." He looked at the issue from the perspective of how cropping certain types of land can end up being counterproductive for various

reasons. "Cropping some land results in reduced yields and more fuel consumption, especially when farming around terraces," Jeff wrote. "Other disadvantages are erosion on hills and rockiness destroying equipment. The increased microflora in the soil from having livestock on it may help justify keeping cattle."



Joe Sellers of Chariton also addressed the issue of land suitability. "We have lost a lot of pasture acres in Iowa and that is

impacting soil erosion and water quality," he wrote. "There is no doubt in my mind that most marginal land in [south-central] Iowa would be better suited environmentally and financially to pasture and hay or rotations that include forages."

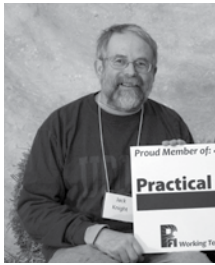
Jess Jackson, a grazing specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Fairfield, commented that soils ranked as grazing class three or higher "can be profitable and, if well managed, can maintain or improve the land." He said the key in Iowa is to first spend time and effort rebuilding soil health, and then forage health in order to "move from a cow-calf pair per 3 to 4 acres to a pair per acre. There are multiple high-density grazing operations at that level after rebuilding soil health and forages." Shifting over time to

Jess Jackson



a cow-calf pair per acre can be achieved, he added, "with high management and an investment in fence, watering systems and rebuilding the soil fertility. I've had several credible producers tell me that they make a profit per acre of \$300 or more with cattle."

Benefits of Manure



Jack Knight of Luana chimed in on the nutrient benefits of integrating livestock and crops: The herd produces nutrient-rich, easy-to-store manure that can be mixed with

livestock bedding, which provides a carbon source, and then spread on the parts of the crop fields that need it most. "Most of these farms also make some hay to feed cattle, and even though it is a small portion of the rotation, even once in seven to 10 years is far better than never," he said. "I've documented yield bumps 15 years after the former hay field goes to all row crops. It may not be the most efficient or the best way to make money in the short term, but it improves the farm slowly and maintains the standard crops." Continuing in this line of thinking, Jack argued that if every big corn and soybean farm had a small beef feedlot and 500-pig finishing unit with deep bedding, "we would come a long way to a better Iowa in every respect."

Livestock Integration for Long-Term Wealth

Matt Russell of Lacona also commented on the benefits of integrating livestock, but from the perspective of multi-faceted long-term wealth over short-term monetary wealth. "Researchers have followed the industry and stopped looking at livestock as an investment to build wealth," he said. "Too often the researchers jumped on the industry bandwagon and encouraged farming families to join the ride, rather than empowering families to

develop strategies focused on longer-term wealth connected to soil health, community health and family health."



Tony Thompson of Elkhart agreed that short-term wealth isn't the only – or even most desired – outcome. "We want to be financially viable, of course, but short-term financial gain alone is

not the clear and simple desired result," he said. "Soil health, our own (and our animals') well-being, our neighbors' well-being, and the well-being of the people who will consume the food we grow are just a few of the things that come into my 'value equation' as a beginning farmer."

Infrastructure and Beginning Farmers

Factors hindering cattle production in a state dominated by corn were also discussed. Margaret suggested that changes in land tenure, farm size and the age of farmers comprised "other factors that have moved us away from cow production." She added that opportunities remain to better integrate cow production with row crops, but that this is happening more often on land farmers own, rather than land that is rented to younger farmers. "Cattle need infrastructure, fencing and water lines, and we are not devoting time and money to building this kind of infrastructure on rented land,"



she said. "Folks are apprehensive to make these multi-year investments, not knowing what the future relationship of the grain-beef comparison may be."

Joe elaborated on this point, saying that "even though some of the conversion to corn and soybeans was based on short-term economics, a lot of infrastructure has been removed from farms in southern Iowa, so it will take some time to get it turned around." What is needed, he continued, is a partnership between veteran farmers willing to help beginners get started, and younger farmers willing to take on and commit to the hard work of raising livestock.

"It takes a combination of older producers helping younger producers get started, and younger producers having the passion and drive to do the hard work involved in cow-calf production," Joe said. "We need to build relationships between landowners, cattle owners and producers to capitalize and return cattle and small ruminants to our farms." ■

Interested in grazing cattle but lack the infrastructure?

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offers financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS offers cost-share assistance for infrastructure including:

- interior fences
- water lines
- troughs
- stream crossings
- brush management
- and more

Perimeter fences for a new grazing system (conversion from crop) or a significantly upgraded one are also eligible. Visit your local USDA Service Center to apply or go to: www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

Tell Your Story: The Farm Legacy Letter

by Vic Madsen

“My folks would never have wanted this to happen.”

How often have we heard comments like this when it comes to farmland transfer? The cases of farmland divided, farmers kicked off the land and families torn apart are sad and often tragic.

Too often, farmland owners have not decided and then communicated what they want most for their farmland when they are gone. Over the next several years, Practical Farmers will be helping 100 farmland owners document those goals through “farm legacy letters.” These farmland owners can then use the legacy letters to ensure that the financial and legal strategies they take help achieve their goals.

Sign up early for the farm legacy letter short course at the PFI conference (space is limited), and develop your own letter. Members of the PFI Farm Transitions Committee will join up with Chris Henning, a farmland owner from Cooper, and Vic Madsen, who farms near Audubon, for the course. Thank you to Vic Madsen, for sharing portions of his farm legacy letter here.

– Teresa Opheim

September 22, 2014

To my future generations:

I recently sat down and thought about the past, present and future of Madsen Stock Farm. What is meaningful about the farm? What memories do I want future generations to know about? And what are my overall goals for the farm 30 years from now?

Cindy and I purchased our home property in 1975 and moved here and raised our three sons. About 10 years ago, we purchased another 80 acres nearby; together those 225 acres are owned free and clear. We also rent 90 acres nearby.

We bought the property because it had cattle feeding facilities. And we fed cattle until 1984 when the government began the dairy cow buyout program, which totally pulled the rug out from under the beef cattle market. When our feeders went to market 10 months later, they weren't worth much because of the huge supply of meat on the market.

We've raised hogs here pretty much all the time. I was part of a farrowing co-op until 1999. Then I sold my shares because I didn't feel comfortable with gestation stalls and the other ways we were raising hogs. We then started farrowing on our own. We added beef cows back 7-8 years ago. We really enjoy the beef cows. Cindy also raises a couple thousand broilers a year, which she direct-markets.

We were traditional corn-bean conventional farmers until 2000. Ron Rosmann tried for 10 years to get me to go organic. He finally succeeded in 1998, when we started transitioning some ground. Now we have a variety of rotations: Corn/beans/oats/hay. Corn/beans/wheat. Corn/oats/hay. We run a different rotation on every field, depending on the hill slope.

We added about 300 aronia bushes in 2008. They are kind of fun. I'd never had any fruit crops before. It's not a big income thing, but it has helped us diversify, and it makes the farm a more pleasant place to live.

Cindy does the poultry work. She's on hand to chase hogs and calves or cows. Until our youngest son, Eric, got older, she hauled all the grain from the combine into town. She put a lot of hours on the 440 tractor hauling

grain in the fall. Eric got started farming when he was a freshman in high school, about 10 years ago. He has a knack with the mechanical part, which I'm not good at. He does the machinery management. I have done the livestock thing. Today we all do what has to be done. I still like to plant, he runs the combine.

Our oldest son, Jeff, works for a seed corn company. We were Pioneer dealers, maybe that's why he got into that. Our middle son, Mark, earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry and genetics and moved to California. He and his wife are pretty well established there.

The older two boys grew up when we were having a difficult time farming. They saw that, and it probably soured them on farming. Farming then, in the 1980s, totally changed my farm management philosophy. It is so important to have animals on the farm and to have diverse enterprises, so you don't have "all of your eggs in one basket."

The current crash in grain prices and the boom in the cattle business are good examples...

Many say the neatest thing about fall is driving a combine and listening to an Iowa State football game, and I kind of agree with that. I really like the smell of harvested corn. Since I've become organic, I notice the spring smells a lot more. Our soil when we were conventional was pretty much odorless. Now when we till in the spring, we get that earthy smell I remember as a kid growing up. Cindy Cambardella [a soil scientist] says that it is probably actinomycins that give off that odor, and they are associated with healthy soil. I feel like we're doing the right thing when I smell that.

I also like the smell of alfalfa hay after it's cut. I like walking in the hog barn and hearing the sows grunting while they are nursing their pigs. I know everyone is healthy and well when I hear that. I like the sight of the corn peeking through the soil. Usually the first week, 10 days after planting, I go out every day and check each field on the four-wheeler, if I have time, because that new plant coming through the ground is such a miracle. Plus, I check for errors in planting.

June is probably Iowa's prettiest time. You can still see between the rows of the corn. The beans are up and need to be cultivated. Oats don't have weeds yet. The hay is green and lush. The whole farm scene in June is beautiful.

My low moments on the farm are dragging out a dead pig or calf. Anytime I lose an animal it bothers me. My peak moments include seeing a load of finished hogs go up the chute, because, when you farrow-to-finish, those hogs represent an awful lot of work.

One of my favorite memories on the farm is when the two oldest boys were about nine and seven, and they came around the corn crib carrying a bag of popcorn they had picked all by themselves. They were grinning from ear to ear. Cindy and I didn't know they were picking the popcorn. They could barely lift the bag, which was the first bag of the year, and they had carried it quite a ways. Both had looks of joy, pride and a sense of accomplishment.

In 30 years, my goals for the farm include: improving soil conservation, biodiversity, and water and air quality on the farm. To have helped make my heirs more financially stable through the sale of or rental income from the farm. And to keep the farmland together as a working farm. These goals are medium priorities.

However, my top farm goal for the future is to keep family harmony, to keep my family from fighting about what happens to or on the farm. My second goal is to provide a home for a family to live on the farm and work the ground. A farm is a wonderful place for children. Looking at the farm in 30 years, I'd like to see little kids running around. A farm is more complete when there are little kids on it. I enjoy that so much. ■

Vic Madsen
Audubon, Iowa



Vic and Cindy Madsen

Mark Your Calendars for "Mapping Our Future" Join Us January 23-24, 2015

Where are we? Where do we want to go?

In this spot on Earth called Iowa, soil maps reveal some of the highest quality topsoils in the world. Rainfall charts and physical maps show plentiful water (usually) that others envy. But on other maps our fingers follow routes of unsustainable erosion levels from uncovered soil and tile lines. Still other maps show rapidly declining biodiversity.

We need to draw Iowa's map anew, so that – from the Mississippi to the Missouri – we find an agriculture that supports farms prized for their diversity of crops and livestock, food celebrated for its connections, and communities alive with diverse connections between farmers and friends of farmers.

The 2015 Annual Conference will foster discussion on longer crop rotations, cover crops, pollinator habitat, weather resiliency, soil preservation, perennial crops, diverse crop mixes and irrigation. We will also explore how to tackle low profit margins and volatile market prices, and how to chart a profitable future. Learn from discussions between beginning farmers navigating future farming careers, and experienced farmers helping them reach their destinations through farm succession, mentorship and education.

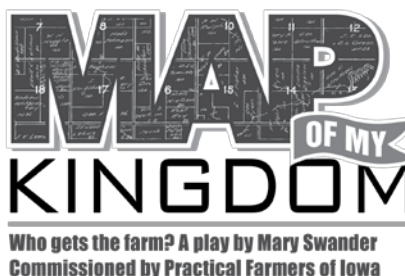
Find your way to Practical Farmers' 2015 annual conference and set your path.

Featuring: "Map of My Kingdom"

A play by MARY SWANDER, former Poet Laureate of Iowa, author and co-founder of AgArts, a national organization that imagines and promotes healthy food systems through the arts.

Fifty-six percent of Iowa farmland is owned by people over the age of 65, according to a report by retired Iowa State University economist Mike Duffy. Thirty percent of Iowa farmland is owned by those more than 75 years old.

Who's going to get the farm? And what are they going to do with it? Will your future plans for your land create harmony or strife for your family? Or have you even started to think that far ahead? "Map of My Kingdom," tackles the critical issue of land transition. In the play, Angela Martin, a lawyer and mediator in land transition disputes, shares stories of how farmers and landowners she has worked with over the years approached their land successions. Some families almost came to blows, struggling to resolve the sale or transfer of their land, dissolving relationships. Others found peacefully rational solutions that focused not only on the viability of the family, but also of the land.



Blake Vince



Chris Henning

PFI Potluck

A FREE event to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. Please bring food or beverages to share. **Please note:** Outlets for crockpots are limited, but refrigeration will be available starting Friday morning. Practical Farmers will provide bratwurst (plus condiments), water and tableware. Thank you to Niman Ranch for donating bratwurst. Potluck Party Hosts: Donna Prizgintas and Lonna Nachtigal from the "DonnaLonna Kitchen Show." Held at CPMI Event Center, 2321 North Loop Drive in Ames (just a few blocks from Best Western Hotel).

Practical Farmers Update

Join us at 4:45 p.m. on Friday for the latest on Practical Farmers' programming, finances, staffing and more (before the "Map of My Kingdom" showing at 5:30 p.m.).

TWO PRE-CONFERENCE SHORT COURSES

JAN. 22, 1-7 P.M. AND JAN. 23, 8-11:30 A.M., OAKWOOD ROAD CHURCH, AMES

1). Healthy Soil for Healthy Crops

Soil health describes the capacity of soil to function as a vibrant, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans. We'll explore the dynamic components of healthy soils: stability and support, nutrient cycling, water regulation and biodiversity. Navigate ways to assess your soils and manage your land to improve soil function. Discover how to optimize crop production now while building soil for the future!

Taught by **Cindy Cambardella**, soil scientist at the USDA National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment; **Mike Castellano**, agronomy professor at ISU; **Rick Cruse**, assistant agronomy professor at ISU; and **Andrew Hoiberg**, who oversees research and product development with Calcium Products.

2). Tell Your Story: The Farm Legacy Letter

Come document what matters most about your farm. You will leave this course having written or recorded a "farm legacy letter," capturing farm memories along with your values and hopes for your farm's future. Hear two PFI members share their letters, then use yours to help guide your legal and financial farm transition.

Limited to 20 participants

Led by **Vic Madsen**, who, with his wife Cindy and son Eric, raises field crops, beef cattle, hogs, chickens and aronia berries in Audubon County; and **Chris Henning**, who lives in Cooper and is the farm manager of 320 acres of farmland she owns in Greene County.

FRIDAY IN-DEPTH WORKSHOPS

Get the Dirt on Soil Ecology

Learn from Jill Clapperton about soil as habitat, managing soil health from this vantage, and how the results of on-farm research can lead to improved environmental and food quality. Then hear farmer Vince Blake's perspective on how cover crops can improve soil health, and what he believes is the biggest barrier to adding cover crops: fear of change.



Jill Clapperton

JILL is principal scientist at and co-founder of Rhizoterra Inc. BLAKE is a 5th-generation farmer from Merlin, Ontario, and director of the Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario.

Multi-Species Grazing with Cows & Pigs

Learn from Jim Van Der Pol how grazing cattle and brood sows on the same pastures can cut bloat risk, control flies and lead to more pound of animal per acre grazed. Jim will also cover some tools needed and the economics of feeding sows that have access to pastures. JIM VAN DER POL grew up on his family farm near Kerkhoven, Minn. He and his wife have farmed there since 1977.



*LeeAnn
&
Jim
Van Der Pol*

Cards on the Table: Putting Farm Financial Statements in Context

Join presenters Melissa Dunham and Craig Chase as they analyze and discuss three years of financial data from several PFI members' farms. The farmers will participate and provide context to the documents, from financial decision-making to farm business goals. MELISSA has an accounting degree and runs Grinnell Heritage Farm, an 80-acre certified organic vegetable farm, with her husband, Andy. CRAIG leads the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative Research Program at the Leopold Center.

WANTED: Silent Auction Donations

Please donate baked goods, farm-raised products, hand-crafted items, books, farm supplies and more!



*Laura Jackson
(Re-Establishing On-Farm Prairie)*

Beginning Organic: Transitioning, Certifying and Q&A

Hear panelists from both sides of the organic transition process share stories and expertise. Bring your questions! The Q&A is about getting your questions answered. Led by SCOTT SHRIVER, organic field crop farmer near Jefferson; MORGAN HOENIG, organic vegetable farmer near Mount Pleasant; JACK KNIGHT, organic inspector; and JOE LALLY, certified crop adviser and technical services provider in Denison.

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

Start with Saturday Breakfast!

Join us for FREE breakfast, networking and discussion on a variety of topics.

Then choose from the following SATURDAY WORKSHOPS:

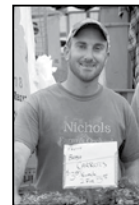
- Growing and Marketing Non-GMO Crops
- Housing for All (Species): Livestock Facility Options and Designs
- Recordkeeping Analysis Platforms for Crop and Livestock Farmers
- Recipe for Success: Making Quality Compost
- In-Field Practices for Organic Vegetable Production
- Real-Life Business Plan Vetting
- Innovative Landowner-Farmer Partnerships
- Iowa Farms in a Changing Climate
- Rotations and Diversity – How to Shake it Up
- What's the Deal with Cover Crops, Livestock and Herbicides?
- He's a Rebel: Grazing Management for Resiliency
- Working Together to Reduce Drift
- Tangled Up in Drift Tape: Irrigation Set-up and Strategy for Vegetable Crops
- Back to Our Roots – Re-Establishing On-Farm Prairie for Multiple Goals
- "Map of My Kingdom": Follow-Up Discussion
- An Iowa Perspective on Cover Crop Species
- Niche Pork Marketing
- Taking a Global View of Farmland Conservation and Biodiversity
- The Right Tool for the Right Job ... and for You!
- Don't Give It Away! Vegetable Pricing and Philosophy
- Walk-In Cooler Construction and Efficiency
- Farm Transfer with Farming and Non-Farming Heirs
- U-Pick Sessions

Nose-to-Tail Cooking and Dining

Have you ever wondered what to do with unusual cuts of meat you receive in a meat bundle? Don't miss out on great culinary opportunities! Learn the best ways to use the whole animal. The presenters will share tips, recipes – and of course, delicious samples! Led by TY and BOBBIE GUSTAFSON, owners of Story City Locker; their chef, BRIAN MALONE; ETHAN BOOK, who raises pastured livestock at Crooked Gap Farm in Knoxville; and BRETT MCCLAVY, of The Cheese Shop in Des Moines.

Up on the Rooftop: Energy Conservation and Solar PV

Join PFI farmers as they partner with energy professionals to discuss energy conservation and solar PV on their farms. Learn about home energy audits, weatherizing a chicken coop, common issues seen in older homes, and the best materials and practices for energy conservation. Financing, planning and installing solar PV will also be covered. Led by MARTHA MCFARLAND, of Hawkeye Buffalo Ranch near Fredericksburg; ASHLEY CRAFT, program director for Green Iowa AmeriCorps, based at University of Northern Iowa; TIM LANDGRAF, of One Step at a Time Gardens in Kanawha; and STEVEN GUYER, president and founder of GWA International LLC.



Todd Nichols



Martha McFarland



*Jacob Petersen
(Business Plan Vetting)*

Crop and Market Diversity for a Profitable Farm

Imagine this scenario: a farm so diverse it raises 1,000 different types of fruits and vegetables and successfully markets to 30 high-end restaurants, 16 farmers markets and 26 CSA drop sites. Unrealistic vision? Not for Todd Nichols and his family. Hear how they use crop and market diversity to stay successful in a competitive environment. TODD manages Nichols Farms, his family's 400-acre fruit and vegetable farm, which serves diverse markets in the Chicago area.

SPECIAL: Attendee Photo Display!

See what PFI farm, family and friend-of-farmer life is like! We're inviting all members to submit photos for a special conference display. See pg. 28 for more details.

From the Same Pot: Support Groups Help PFI Farmers Build Community

by Liz Kolbe

In Japan, when you are close to someone, you are said to “eat from the same pot.”

In the dark, cold winter of 2011 a group of farmers at the annual conference realized they were always gravitating toward each other at PFI events, but never had enough time to talk. “Let’s visit each other’s farms,” one suggested (it was Rob Faux). They had a good time. They worked, they cooked, their kids played together. They did it again, and again. Soon they had a name: The Gang of Four.

A central goal of Practical Farmers is to build community in Iowa, especially among farmers. Field days, retreats, the annual conference (get ready!), email discussion lists, workshops with plenty of time for networking and visiting: PFI is a big, broad network of possibilities for community. But building relationship can take more than merely attending events.

This article highlights two examples of such camaraderie: The Gang of Four (Blue Gate Farm, Genuine Faux Farm, Grinnell Heritage Farm and Scattergood Farm), and The Quin (Grade A Gardens, Middle Way Farm, Mustard Seed Community Farm, Lacewing Acres, TableTop Farm, Wabi Sabi Farm and New Family Farm).

The Gang of Four

The Gang aims to meet seven times each year: four work days, two weekend retreats and one big winter feast. Group members also email each other a lot, order supplies together and help fill in CSA shares in case of crop failures. Work days have included removing an old barn roof, constructing an onion curing table, cleaning hardneck garlic, strawberry harvesting, clearing beds, planting sweet potatoes, pruning tomatoes, installing fence posts – and weeding, weeding, weeding. Some tasks are mundane, but gang members agree that good company makes them go quickly. And as with any farm job, trusting the people around you is essential. Those are the nuts and bolts, but here’s a more detailed sneak peek inside the Gang’s goings-on:

Rob Faux (Genuine Faux Farm):

“THE GROWING SEASON in 2010 was one of the worst many of us had experienced. Mother Nature provided us with absurd amounts of rain and many vegetable growers in the region were struggling to keep their heads above water, literally and figuratively. We were all exhausted with worry, and from continuous efforts to try to get any sort of crop going

– or to keep going. And, on top of all this, most of us had little to no contact with other growers. The distance between farms like ours, along with the intense labor requirements during the growing season, enforced this feeling of isolation. Our customers, while supportive, really didn’t have a full understanding of what we were going through.

So, what happens when you work hard but things keep going wrong? You question

your abilities. You ask if you should be doing what you are doing. Right or wrong, you become sure that anyone and everyone else is probably fine and you are the only one who can’t figure it out. There is no one to go to for help because you’re the only one in the area that does what you do. In short, our isolation from others who had operations with similar characteristics was making it harder for us to continue than it needed to be.

The most positive thing we’ve gained from the Gang of Four is knowing that we are not alone in what we do. There is companionship, support and, perhaps most importantly, understanding. If there is any complaint to be made, it is the fact that there is simply too much good food to eat. Hey, I didn’t say it was a reasonable complaint. ”

Sean Skeehan (Blue Gate Farm):

“FARMERS HAVE ALWAYS gathered to share work. This is not a new idea at all – it’s just our version of it. Usually those farmers were closer together, geographically. That makes ours, inherently, a little more difficult because we have to drive farther. But the long drive is always worth it. If other folks were going to try to start something



Gang of Four members at Blue Gate Farm. On the left side of the table: Tammy Faux, Rob Faux and Dana Foster. On the right side (excluding the children): Mark Quee, Melissa Dunham and Andy Dunham.



similar, I would advise them not to force it or have strict rules, but to be proactive. Even though we make a schedule, things happen and sometimes someone can't make it. It'll happen to you eventually. But keep active, keep scheduling dates. We gravitated toward each other initially because we were all sort of doing the same thing, but I bet people would learn a lot by teaming up with neighboring farms that had different enterprises.

I love going to other people's farms. I'm probably more productive than when I'm on my own farm, because I want to do a good job for them! But one of my favorite memories was from a Gang's visit to my farm. In 2012 I became very sick. One day we got an email, out of the blue, from the Gang. They said, 'We're coming to weed all of your vegetable beds. All of them. We're coming.' And they came and got it done. They even brought their own lunch! It was magical and wonderful. ”

The Quin

Using the Gang of Four as a model, The Quin originally formed when Luke Gran of TableTop Farm, in Nevada, reached out to four other farms in the Ames and Des Moines areas. Since then, The Quin has grown to include seven farms, but group members didn't want to change the name. Like The Gang of Four, The Quin couples a work day with a potluck. Starting this year, the group plans to organize additional gatherings in the winter strictly for socializing. Group members also combine supply orders, help fill each other's shares and stands during harvest gaps, collaborate to fill large produce orders and refer customers for specific products. Here are some additional insights from Quin members:

Jordan Scheibel (Middle Way Farm):

“**M**Y PARTNER EMILY could tell you how glowingly I talk about The Quin. It's so easy to say 'I don't have time' – but when you feel a sense of obligation to a group, you get over the to-do list. Without this group, we would not get together during the growing season and it's very refreshing and recharging to spend time with other young farmers, catch



Some members of The Quin from left to right: Alice McGary, Nicholas Leete, Jordan Clasen (standing), Sally Gran and Luke Gran.

up, compare notes, commiserate. Those relationships are just as important as the things you need to get done.

As young vegetable farmers, we have such similar experiences, difficulties, questions, and joys, but the differences between us are also important. I would say there is even a productive and respectful tension between different scales of operation and production approaches. I have so much respect for everyone in this group. If forming a group like this is possible for other farmers to do, I highly, highly recommend it. ”

Julia Slocum (Lacewing Acres):

“**I** REMEMBER HOW MUCH calmer I felt when I drove home from our last gathering. It's like having a support group. We get together and process our frustrations and anxieties, do some group problem-solving, and explore new ways of doing things in a really open and supportive space. I think it helps me to think positively and creatively during

the season, when it's easy to get in a rut of harvest, washing, packing and weeding.

I am farming on my own, and I love that I have this network of people to call when I need help or have questions. If I just wait to talk to other farmers at the annual conference and beginning farmers retreat, we have conversations like, 'How was your season?' When you see people every few weeks, we can talk about our specific problems – in the garlic, with drainage, how their sweet potato trials are going, how they like the new soybean mulch they're trying out, what they think about the different potato varieties. It makes the conversations much more productive and relevant.

The name? I think each farmer responds differently to a label. We're not all "joiners," and giving [the group] a label with a set schedule could feel too formal for some. But I do think it boosts the importance: I belong to this group and want to maintain it. And as time goes on, the more I see the value of it. ”

The PFI members who host field days and other events are doing a great service to the rest of the membership, as they run to get a clean shirt while the mower blades cool down. Take advantage of their hospitality (and thank them!); maybe you'll find some folks to share work, stress, meals and sunsets with – if only for one Sunday a month. ■

Mark Your Calendars: Fall Farminars Start Nov. 11!

Stay tuned for an announcement with speakers and topics for the upcoming 2014 fall farminar series, which starts on Tuesday, Nov. 11 and runs weekly from 7 – 8:30 p.m. CST through Dec. 23. Dates are as follows:

- Nov. 11
- Nov. 18
- Nov. 25
- Dec. 2
- Dec. 9
- Dec. 16
- Dec. 23

Farminars are free, interactive webinars led by farmers. Many are presented in a "fish-bowl" format where attendees listen as an experienced farmer answers a beginning farmer's questions. We hope to "see" you there!

Connecting Through Corn

Dan Specht's "blue sweet" unites PFI members in learning and purpose by Tomoko Ogawa

It was a pleasant surprise when I saw the sign that said "Dan's Blue Blond Sweet Corn" and a beautiful blue corn that John Whitson brought to Alix and Mary Jane Paez's field day in early September. Just a few days earlier, I had seen some corn grown at Red Earth Gardens in Tama that was the product of a cross with Dan Specht's blue sweet corn. One of the many legacies that Dan left, open-pollinated corn that he developed continues to connect Practical Farmers members.

Jack Knight, a longtime friend of Dan, helped him with the breeding process and learned about it alongside him. He continues to share Dan's seed corn with those interested in growing it, and in April posted a note to PFI's general discussion list offering some of Dan's open-pollinated sweet corn seeds to PFI members. John Whitson saw Jack's email and talked to Jordan Classen and Thomas Burkhead of Grade A Gardens about growing some of this corn together. They received the seeds and planted in two locations: Grade A Gardens in Johnston and Quilted Acres near Waukee, which is owned by PFI member Lisa Bean. John grows peppers for Sean and Becki Sullivan, owners of Juan O'Sullivan's Gourmet Salsa, at Quilted Acres. PFI members Cody Kilgore and Jennifer Miller also farm this land, raising produce for their Clarion Sage Market Garden & CSA.

A Hale (and Handsome) Heirloom

John, Jordan and Thomas planted Dan's corn on June 12 – later than is typical for corn, but intentionally in this case. They say their first season growing Dan's corn turned out well. "From past experience I knew that planting late could, with luck, avoid any chance of cross-pollination with field corn that had all been planted by mid-May," John says. "Cross-pollination with field corn was avoided as field tassels were all spent by the time our silks appeared." By planting



▲ From left to right: Jennifer Miller, Thomas Burkhead, Jordan Clasen, John Whitson and Cody Kilgore pose with some of Dan Specht's blue-blond sweet corn. John, Thomas and Jordan worked together on their first season of growing this heirloom variety developed by Dan.

in mid-June, they also avoided the heavy rains of early June, and John says that, by then, "the soil was warm enough, permitting very rapid growth." The team then hand-pollinated in late July, in order to preserve seed purity.

▼ John displays a braided corn-chili wreath he made with Dan's corn.



John noticed many special traits while growing Dan's corn. He has been growing different heirloom varieties of sweet corn for many years, and says they are usually very short plants that tend to be more susceptible to disease. But Dan's corn was tall and didn't have any issues with disease. Considering how wet this season was, John says he is impressed, with both the corn's resiliency and its taste. "The colors are amazing, and the flavor was predicted to be not so sweet – more useful in cooking as grits," he says. "So it was a surprise that the flavor was very sweet, while not sugary like the popular sweet corn."

John learned that the Iowa Food Co-op was holding a Sweet Corn Feed event on Aug. 24 in Des Moines, which was close to when he, Jordan and Thomas harvested, so he submitted some of Dan's blue sweet corn to be served at the event. The corn received many compliments.

This season, most of the fresh ears the trio grew went into Grade A Gardens CSA boxes. Grade A Gardens had 85 members, and each got two ears. Thomas says their CSA customers seemed happy with the corn. "They liked the fact that it was such a unique item, as most of them had never



▲ Thomas Burkhead reads a label on the heirloom corn, which John hand-pollinated in July, to ensure the seed is sorted properly during harvest.



▲ A close-up of the vibrant colors of Dan's blue-blond sweet corn. John plans to save the seed and continue growing the corn next year.

had blue sweet corn before," Thomas says. "My favorite way to prepare the corn was to cut it off the cob and lightly sauté or roast it and then use it as a topping for tacos. It was fantastic and had great flavor."

Courting New Cuisines

John also sent samples to restaurants around Des Moines to receive feedback from chefs. The chefs who tried the corn this year expressed interest in purchasing more, and wondered if the corn had been planted in successions to enable a long season on menus. While that was not the case this first year, John plans to do so next year. "With over 100 ears pollinated for seed there is good potential," he says.

Brett McClavy, head cheesemonger and manager at The Cheese Shop of Des Moines, is one of the chefs who tried Dan's corn. Brett has tremendous enthusiasm for heirloom foods and was eager to try and taste the corn. He and John have come to know each other through working with Grade A Gardens (The Cheese Shop is a drop site for Grade A Gardens' CSA). Brett bought 3 dozen ears from Jordan the day they were harvested, and says the first thing he noticed was the beautiful color. He steamed some corn to taste it and says "it was not as cloyingly sweet as some sweet corn, but had a wonderful corn flavor."

With the corn, Brett made a large batch of chicken, corn, black bean and roasted pepper soup. He didn't waste any part of the corn: With the cobs, he made a broth

ON THE MERITS OF DAN'S CORN

"With a great story behind it and support from the right people, this corn is artisanal and should be treated as such."

– Chef Zachary Gutweiler

that he used as the base for the soup. Brett says he thinks this type of sweet corn "lends itself to being cooked into soups, salsas, or as a vegetable side dish." He also recommends steaming the corn, as opposed to boiling it, as it takes less time and retains the flavor. "My advice – keeping things simple – is only possible when starting with the highest quality ingredients, and that means we need to continue supporting all these old varieties. As long as farmers like John, Jordan and Thomas are willing to grow this corn again, I will buy it."

Chef Zachary Gutweiler, of Hole in the Wall in Des Moines, also tried Dan's corn. He told John that at first glance, it struck him as decorative corn, with its "vibrant blues and light yellows," but further inspection revealed "a unique liveliness" that was unmistakable. "This corn was an amazing find for me as a chef. The more informed I become about this corn the more I like it," Zachary says. "With a great story behind it and support from the right people, this corn is artisanal and should be treated as such." He says he wants to use the corn in every

way possible, "from fresh to drying, milling and sifting in different stages for grits and corn meal."

Continuing a Story

Reflecting on his first year growing Dan's corn, John notes that he needs to learn a little more about harvest maturity. "When the kernels are first filled out they are very tender, juicy and sweet – but mostly white. I ate quite a few at that stage," he says. "As the ears sat on the plant, the kernels turned bluer but started to become starchier – though still very flavorful." In the coming years, he wants to figure out the balance between the corn's color appearance and associated flavors.

On Oct. 10, John, Jordan and Thomas gathered at Quilted Acres to harvest the seed corn. John had carefully marked each paper bag that covered an ear of corn to indicate whether it was self-pollinated or pollinated from a neighboring plant, and kept them separated. The area they harvested on this day had begun in June as a mere 2 to 3 cups of corn seed. John is planning to keep growing Dan's corn to share this culinary gem with more people – and to continue preserving the seeds that contain so many stories. ■

Learn how John hand-pollinated Dan's corn and see photos in this blog post:

<http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2014/10/24/hand-pollinating/>

2014 Field Day Photos



▲ **Top Left:** Attendees look for remaining cover crop residue in Bob and Linda Lynch's soybeans at their July 17 field day.

▲ **Top Right:** Susan Frye explains how her Drift Catcher works to attendees at her July 27 field day.

▶ **Above Left:** Happy cyclists pose after visiting Practical Farmers' tent in Independence, along the 2014 RAGBRAI route.

◀ **Above Right:** Ray Bratsch-Prince and Eldon Boswell, one of Ray's landlords, pose with some of Ray's cattle. He highlighted his cow and pasture management during his July 24 field day in Nevada.

◀ **Left:** Amber Mohr's (far right) baby is intrigued by Larry Harris' beard. Larry and partner Denise O'Brien (on Larry's right) hosted a field day on Aug. 3 highlighting their moveable high tunnel. Jordan Foster (next to Denise) has been working on the farm and shared his experience.



▲ **Top Left:** Young visitors to PFI's booth at the Blank Park Zoo pollinator education day, on July 26 in Des Moines, view a honeycomb while eating fresh fruit and learning about the role of pollinators in the ecosystem.

▲ **Top Right:** Grant Schultz (standing on truck) explains how the lower-cost, barrel-style root washer works that he built with funds from a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant to attendees at his July 22 event.

◀ **Left:** Barton Howard (left) chats with Rob Faux during the potluck meal at Rob and Tammy Faux's Aug. 17 event.

▼ **Bottom Left:** John Bakehouse (in green shirt with mic) discusses his annual grazing mix with attendees during his Aug. 26 event.

▼ **Bottom Right:** Guests attending Martha and Dan McFarland's Sept. 3 field day got to meet the McFarlands' bison herd and feed them corn – a treat they love – while learning about the different challenges of raising bison versus cattle.



2014 Field Day Photos



▲ **Top Left:** Tim Maibach (holding mic) discusses one of his family's hay mixes, used to supplement their organic, grass-fed dairy herd, during their Sept. 5 field day.

▲ **Top Right:** Two field day attendees at Mark Peterson's Sept. 12 event examine Mark's cover crop seed mix.

▲ **Above Left** Emma and Rodger Edgington study some heirloom corn grown at Red Earth Gardens in Tama, on the Meskwaki Nation Settlement, at the tribe's Sept. 9 field day.

▼ **Above Right:** Erin Wilson (seated, lower-left, in gray shirt) shows field day attendees how the Wilson family assesses pasture plant species diversity during the Seven W Farm field day on Sept. 26.

► **Right:** Rich Schuler (left) discusses the compost heat capture system at TableTop Farm on Sept. 13.





▲ **Above Left:** Alix Paez (center, blue hat) shows non-GMO corn hybrids developed by Genetic Enterprises Inc., the plant breeding company he runs with his wife, Mary Jane, to attendees at their Sept. 11 field day near Luther.

▲ **Above Right:** Attendees look at samples of grain-fed versus corn-fed pork, held by Irene Frantzen, at Ty and Bobbie Gustafson's field day and tasting event on Sept. 21, held at Story City Locker.

◀ **Left:** Bryant Bear (left) chats with Deb Draper at the Red Earth Gardens field day.

▶ **Right:** Mark Peterson gets help from his cat, Squawk, while discussing cover crops at his Sept. 12 field day.

▲ **Mid-Bottom Left:** Lois Reichert (right) pours samples of goat milk, collected from her dairy goat herd, for guests to try at her Oct. 13 field day near Knoxville.



▶ **Bottom Left:** Cured meats, such as salami and prosciutto, made by Herb and Kathy Eckhouse of La Quercia, were among the samples attendees got to taste on Sept. 21.

▼ **Bottom:** Two future farmers examine Dan and Lorna Wilsons' pigs with great interest during the Seven W Farm field day on Sept. 26.



Knoxville Sisters Chosen to Receive Farmland Owner Award from Practical Farmers

by Tamsyn Jones

Charlotte Shivers, Martha Shivers Skillman and Marietta Shivers Carr have been chosen as the recipients of the 2014 Farmland Owner Award, granted annually by Practical Farmers of Iowa to non-operator landowners who have shown a commitment to managing their land for long-term sustainability of farm businesses, environmental quality, soil productivity, rural communities and the next generation.

“They impressed me with their effort to educate themselves about more sustainable farming practices,” says Ann Cromwell, who farms near Williamsburg and serves on Practical Farmers’ board of directors, which selected the award recipients. “I was also impressed by their diligence in ensuring the land would be well cared for, such as searching for a farmer with the skills and interest, including language in the sales contract to clearly communicate this attitude and the family time needed to ensure their heirs were supportive.”

Charlotte, Martha and Marietta inherited 520 acres of land in the Knoxville area in 1990. From the start of their new role as landowners, the sisters sought to find a tenant who would farm the land sustainably. The search took them 12 years, but when they found the right person – James Petersen, the son of their first cousin – they set up fair rental terms for Jim to farm 160 acres of the land.

A few years later, the sisters sold that parcel to Jim at below-market rates in exchange for a contract that would enshrine their values of good stewardship and long-term conservation. In 2012, the sisters started renting their remaining 320 acres to Jim, and have since worked to understand and guide the farming practices used on the land.

“Receiving this award has been a lovely surprise,” says Charlotte, who lives with



Charlotte Shivers (left) and Martha Shivers Skillman stand by a blooming compass plant on their land near Knoxville. – (Photo courtesy of Luliel del Angel)

her husband, Bob Baker, on the farm in the house where she was born. “It’s nice to know that someone notices we’ve been working hard all these years to manage the land.”

She adds that the award is especially meaningful because now all three sisters have returned to Iowa. Oldest sister, Marietta, recently moved from Seattle to a memory care facility in Indianola. Middle sister, Martha, was the first to return and lives across the road from Charlotte in the former tenant house. All three had left the state after high school – Marietta to become a secretary, then medical administrator; Martha an occupational

therapist and landscape gardener; and Charlotte a realtor and Unitarian Universalist minister.

“Charlotte and I have been the ones most directly active with the farm,” says Martha, “but Marietta has been an integral piece. She put the final seal on selling the 160 acres to the Petersens, declaring that finding someone who would take care of the land, and putting some deed restrictions on it, was more important than getting top dollar.”

A Deeply Rooted Land Ethic

Charlotte and Martha both credit their parents with instilling in them a belief in caring for the land – a “land ethic” they say was passed through the generations to their father, John Shivers, and on to them.

“This ran deep in us. Our parents didn’t just repeat it from time to time, but it was obvious in the way we saw farming done,” Charlotte says. “My father was a leader in contour farming, terraces, rotating crops, new crops – and I can remember his joy coming to the side door and calling, ‘Vera, get the girls, come see, the flax is in bloom!’”

How did money alone get to be so important? Top dollar should not be the guide. You need to know you can trust the next person to be a good caretaker.

– MARTHA SHIVERS SKILLMAN

It was more than a mission to take care of the land; there was joy in it – joy in this relationship with the land.”

Martha recalls how her father would speak often, and with conviction, about his connection to the land: “We might be moving sheep, and he would get off his horse and stand looking over the land and say, ‘The land isn’t ours. It’s ours to use, and to pass on better than we got it.’ I took that first part consciously to heart, that you respect and take care of the land – like it’s your best friend.”

When the sisters inherited the land, they faced the same choice many landowners today grapple with: sell all or part of the land and walk away with the cash, or keep it and work to maintain the legacy of their ancestors. For the trio, there was no question. While each sister was living out of state at the time, they felt a strong connection to the farm. They formed the “Shivvers Fair Acres” partnership and took turns serving as managing partner. Martha served first and Charlotte is the current managing partner.

Fairness in Name and Deed

Charlotte says that in addition to teaching respect for the land, her parents believed in fairness. This value is captured, not just in the name of the sisters’ partnership, but in their approach to managing their land. “We were raised with that value too. It’s as if there are two meanings of the word ‘fair’ in ‘Fair Acres’: ‘fair’ as in beautiful land, and ‘fair’ as in considerate treatment of each other.”

Today, Jim and Julie Petersen and their children farm corn and soybeans, including both conventional and certified organic row crops in a five-year rotation; organic oats; hay; and pasture. The family also has a cow-calf operation and lambing ewes that are rotationally grazed.

But this success almost didn’t come to pass. During the farm crisis of the 1980s, Jim’s father, Folmer – the husband of the sisters’ first cousin, Norma – confided to Charlotte during a family reunion that they were in financial trouble and might lose the farm. Charlotte suggested he seek a loan from her mother, Vera Shivvers. The sisters helped, and because Folmer was looking to transition the farm to Jim, Vera loaned Jim the money needed to save the farm.

“We learned to trust Jim and Julie that way,” Martha says. “Then I discovered Jim was trying different sustainable farming methods that we hadn’t been able to get our farm operators to do, and his sons were interested in organic farming.” The sisters started renting to him in 2004. They created a lease whereby landlord and tenant shared the risks yet had a cash-rent arrangement.

When the sisters decided to sell that land to the Petersens with good stewardship provisions embedded in the sale contract, Martha recalls that the force of the second half of her father’s quote – about passing on the land – suddenly hit her.

“How did money alone get to be so important?” she says. “Top dollar should not be the guide. You need to know you can trust the next person to be a good caretaker.”

Be Patient, Persist and Communicate

Martha advises farmland owners to be patient, and to persevere in finding someone who shares their particular farm goals. “Don’t be satisfied with the first operator to express interest. It took us over 12 years to find a farm operator who shared our goals of sustainability – who wanted to produce abundance, but also to save good land and water.”

Both sisters emphasize the importance of good communication – between landowner and farm operator, but also between family members. When they first formed the Shivvers Fair Acres partnership, Martha insisted the trio go into counseling together to ensure that their differences did not get in the way of caring for the farm. “It was clarifying communication,” Charlotte says, “and it helped straighten things out each year.”

Martha adds that Jim’s openness to discussing ideas about the direction of the farm was a key factor in building trust with him. She believes that just as it’s vital for landowners to have an open back-and-forth with their farm operators, they also must have a reciprocal relationship with the land. “My land nourishes me as a landowner with food, beauty and money, and by the same token, I want to nourish the farm by seeking ideas for the best way to care for it.” ■

Thompson Legacy

by Drake Larsen



Legacy – it’s the enduring effect of actions that happened in the past. The term is often used to describe a

generous bequest or the lasting impact of a great athlete. But it can be far more. The agriculture of today is a legacy of land and people past. Ancient seas, glaciers, prairie and woodland ecosystems; great-grandfathers’ moldboard plow; policy decisions and technological advances – all have a lasting impact on the farms, farmers, communities and landscapes that comprise Iowa today.

As PFI co-founders, Dick and Sharon Thompson anchored Practical Farmers’ roots in a foundation of curiosity, rigorous research and a vision for Iowa that includes farms that are diverse and many. In recent issues of the newsletter, we’ve shared excerpts from “Thompson Agriculture Alternatives,” a report they updated annually about the workings of their farm. This report is just one part of the Thompsons’ legacy. The multitude of lives they’ve touched through PFI is another. The soil conserved and built on the Thompson farm yet another.

In this issue of *the Practical Farmer*, two stories in particular speak to this idea of legacy, and embody the core values the Thompsons diligently ascribed to. Vic Madsen’s farm legacy letter (pg. 8) is one. An exercise in reflection, a farm legacy letter can help farm families and landowners tackle tough financial and legal realities of farmland transfer, as well as clarify one’s hopes and dreams for the family farm. The other is the Farmland Owner Award story, which describes how three sisters sought for 12 years to find a tenant, and eventual buyer, who shared the land ethic conferred by their parents.

The success of tomorrow’s agriculture depends on the legacy we begin today. Cultures of both land and people must be nurtured and passed from one generation to the next. The productivity of land must be maintained and improved, while traditional farmer knowledge must be preserved to ensure future people know how to cultivate life from this land. What’s your farm legacy? ■

Baring All on Business-Plan Writing

Troublesome Creek Cattle Company shares challenges and perks

by Sally Worley

You wouldn't expect a long business plan to be entertaining, but Dave and Meg Schmidt's 68-page plan is a page-turner. The document is so detailed, you see their vision for Troublesome Creek Cattle Company play out over time, down to the grazing animals and ribeye steaks. While business plans need not be nearly this long to be successful, Ron Orth, business consultant, said of the Schmidts' business plan: "The plan is one of the most, if not the most, complete and comprehensive that I have had the opportunity to see. I can tell they did lots of research and gave lots of thought to the plan." Here is some feedback from Dave on writing the business plan and how it impacts their farm development.

What part of the business plan do you refer to most?

The enterprise budgets have been very helpful. They are useful for knowing whether we're profitable in an enterprise, and they help us keep track of expenses and set reasonable prices.

What is your favorite section?

My favorite section is the operations section. Meg and I have been going to conferences, field days, workshops and reading so many books and magazines that I had started to compile recurrent themes and ideas even before I started SIP (Dave is a recent graduate of PFI's Savings Incentive Program). Writing the operations section was fun because it helped me condense this knowledge and these ideas into useable production practices we use every day.

How hard was it to write? Favorite and least favorite sections to write?

I found it surprisingly difficult to complete this business plan. I enjoy reading and writing but it was not easy for me to stay focused and rein in my impulse to write a comprehensive literature review of small-scale livestock production. I have been

Dave and Meg Schmidt with their two dogs, Elbie (left) and Burl.



trying to write a business plan of some kind since early 2009, but there are so many resources available on business plan writing that I tried to do too much and could never finish it. The Savings Incentive Program forced me to keep the process under control and actually finish something. Marc Strobbe's gentle prodding and quirky sense of humor made the whole process much more pleasant.

My favorite section to write was the goals section. Meg and I already had lots of nebulous unwritten goals, but getting them documented on paper made those goals suddenly seem more concrete and achievable. There was something about the process that made it seem more official. I also enjoyed writing the mission statement and vision sections. Meg and I wrote a mission statement that summarizes

Troublesome Creek Cattle Company Mission Statement:

Striving to grow a profitable business in which we can find joy in the daily work of managing our resource base to its full potential.

1. Exercise stewardship of the natural and financial resources under our care.

Farm practices are in harmony with nature to preserve soil, air and water quality while catalyzing natural biological cycles; utilize financial resources to create value in a self-sufficient manner.

2. Exhibit a balanced work ethic.

Work hard to raise the best products possible, yet take time to enjoy life and build personal relationships.

3. Find contentment in our work

The work process itself is a source of contentment and joy, regardless of the end results.

4. Maintain perspective

Trust during hard times and strive to remain humble during good times because agriculture is an inherently unpredictable enterprise.



some of our deeply held personal beliefs and places them in a business context. The boundary between personal life and business in the context of agriculture can be very marginal, and that section helps us keep those dimensions in perspective. We used the holistic goal we developed during our Holistic Management training in our vision statement. If we are not running our business in a way that meshes with our vision statement, then it is time for a major re-evaluation.

My least favorite section to write was the marketing section. I'd much rather focus on production than trying to sell it!

How have you used the business plan?

I enrolled in SIP shortly after meeting my future wife, Meg, when I was living in eastern Iowa and just starting to buy a few cows. Now we've been married for more than two years and are living in western Iowa, expecting a baby and in the process of purchasing the land we had been renting from Meg's parents. While many of the specifics of the original business plan are no longer current or relevant, it still serves as a guiding document and a template for the development of our business. Having a business plan gave us the confidence to enter into a contract with my in-laws to buy land and take on debt. The original business plan spurred me into printing out key documents and records and keeping them in a binder that we can easily reference and carry around. Keeping things like maps and price lists organized has been very helpful.

How do you plan to use the business plan in the future?

I'd like to update our enterprise budgets and financial records yearly. I'd like to make small changes to the other sections to keep them up-to-date every few years. Eventually I think it will evolve into a hybrid business and Holistic Management plan.

Has creating a business plan made you a better farmer and business owner?

Absolutely. It forced me to confront things like marketing that are essential but not my natural inclination. Our business plan tells us where we currently are, what we hope to achieve and how we expect to get there. During the process of writing the business plan, my perception of my occupation subtly changed from that of farmer to small-business owner. ■

TROUBLESOME CREEK CATTLE COMPANY'S GOALS

Marketing Goals

	Short-Term (1-5 years)	Intermediate-Term (5-10 years)	Long-Term (10+ years)
Production	Annually produce 30 steers, 70 hogs, 16 lambs	(depends on land base)	(depends on land base)
Sales	Annually direct-market 15 steers (2 cull cows), 20 hogs (2 cull sows), 11 lambs (1 cull ewe) / wholesale 15 steers, 50 hogs, 4 lambs	Annually direct-market 30 steers, 25 hogs, 15 lambs, all cull animals / wholesale 45 hogs	More direct-market demand for products than we want to supply
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an attractive and effective internet presence • Encourage customers to promote our products via word-of-mouth 	Primary outlet remains direct marketing to customers, but wholesale as necessary	All new customers are referred to us by existing customers

Financial Goals

	Short-Term (1-5 years)	Intermediate-Term (5-10 years)	Long-Term (10+ years)
	Minimize debt and use of personal savings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate debt • Business is profitable 	Able to plow profit back into the business and pay ourselves a salary.
Annual Net Farm Income	Cattle: \$4,186 Hogs: \$5,140 Sheep: \$2,441	Cattle: \$11,870 Hogs: \$6,052 Sheep: \$4020	
Business Status	Exit start-up phase; make forward progress	Profitable: farm will support both Meg and Dave	Farm creates enough income to support additional family members

Meg's Perspective on the Business Plan

Numbers and business plans have never been my favorite part of farming. In fact I have always managed to give them minimal attention by spending my time on "fun stuff" like tending and observing livestock and forages, or working on infrastructure. However, going through this process with Dave has convinced me that every individual, especially farmers, should have to complete a business plan. It is difficult and seems unnecessary – until you finish it. Then it becomes the most powerful tool in your operation. Our minds may be our greatest asset, but their full potential is realized only when they are organized and harnessed to a productive end.

A business plan is our most powerful tool because it allows us to change and adapt anything and everything within our operation in a logical and organized manner. It can take a lot of unnecessary stress and uncertainty out of the decision-making process.

I teased Dave that the baby we are expecting will feel more like our second child, as the binder that houses our business plan travels everywhere with us and seems more like the first.

Climate Change, By Any Other Name...

by Liz Kolbe

“We don’t have enough conversation about climate change in agriculture yet – among farmers, that is. There’s a lot of conversation from the outside.” I had called up Fred Abels, a farmer in Grundy County, to talk about climate change. About halfway through our conversation I asked if he would be more comfortable discussing extreme weather events: He laughed and said he guessed so.

There’s no dancing around it – climate change is politicized. Even at PFI, we’ve fiddled with “appropriate wording” to try to minimize reactivity in conversations. But a lot of people are talking about climate change and agriculture. I latched onto Fred for this piece after hearing that he spoke up during a panel discussion called “Rural Voices for Climate Change,” hosted by academic and faith-based groups in Iowa.

“My pastor and I, and another man in the congregation, went to the panel on climate change,” Fred says. “The audience was a lot of clergy and other citizens. They were expressing their interest, their fears about climate change – their concern. There were only a handful of farmers. I was impressed that so many people were more concerned about climate change than the farmers who work the land. We’re the ones that these extreme weather events will affect – yet it’s consumers of our crop who are worried.

“The next 25 years are going to be years of extremes. I don’t remember so many weird weather events my first years of farming or growing up, and it’s the extreme weather that really affects us, as farmers. We should start thinking about our carbon footprint and what that could be doing to the environment around us. If climate change is driving these weather events it’s going to affect us all.”

A 2013 paper published by J. Arbuckle et al. at Iowa State University found that of 5,000 Iowa farmers surveyed about climate change, only 4.5 percent said climate change is not occurring. Sixty-seven percent



said climate change is occurring (with disagreement on the cause), and 27 percent said they were uncertain if climate change is occurring or not.

Many in the “uncertain” category may align with Fred’s message: They recognize something is different, and are concerned

“We don’t know how climate change is going to affect us for sure, but we’ll need to be able to adapt what we’re doing.”

for a future that will likely have higher prices for fossil fuels and extreme weather that increases soil erosion and wreaks havoc on field management decisions. “I’ve heard we’ll have weather like Kansas, and I’ve heard it’s going to be much wetter,” Fred says. “2012 was a drought, and in 2013 we got all the rain in two weeks of spring and then couldn’t buy a drop the rest of the year. This year, between June 16 and June

30, we got over 17 inches of rain. We don’t know how climate change is going to affect us for sure, but we’ll need to be able to adapt what we’re doing.”

Fred has long supported and used conservation practices on his farm. He experimented with no-till in 1988 and switched over completely in 1994. He has served as an assistant to the Grundy County Soil and Water Conservation District; has several soil conservation projects, including two new Conservation Reserve Program waterways going in this fall; and is experimenting with cover crops and managed intensive grazing systems.

No matter the politics of climate change from the outside, Fred thinks farmers need to be more willing to talk about risk management and conservation in the face of more frequent extreme weather events. “These large rainfall events are sending a lot of soil down the rivers and streams to the ocean. That’s our productivity – that’s how we feed everybody. I don’t know what it’s going to take for a wake-up call for some farmers to realize this.” ■

New Farm Bill Expands Conservation Stewardship Program; Sign-Ups this Winter

by Drake Larsen

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has grown to become the largest federal conservation program (based on acres covered). The recent farm bill has provided for new opportunities in the program, with 10 million new acres to be added in the next sign-up.

The program is designed to help farmers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional management. Participants are selected through a competitive process and earn CSP payments for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Iowa is ranked third in the country, behind Minnesota and Missouri, with 3,534 contracts covering 1,831,140 acres. If every PFI farmer member who was eligible enrolled in the program during the next round, Iowa could lead the nation! CSP is a great way for farmers to get additional support applying practices to meet Iowa's Nutrient Management Strategy.

Steve Leazer, who farms in Muscatine County, was in the first group of Conservation Stewardship Program contracts in 2009 and recently re-enrolled his contract for another five years. Steve's current contract obligations include rotational grazing of his heifer herd and split nitrogen application in his row crops. "CSP helps support the practices I'm already doing," he says, "and has encouraged me to do more."

Like Steve, 1,456 Iowa farmers had CSP contracts that were set to expire in 2014. Of these, more than 86 percent signed their intention to re-enroll with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. These farmers will get to skip some of the paperwork and the competitive bid process, but they will need to think of new, additional practices to bring to their farm in order to qualify.



Dick and Diana Sloan

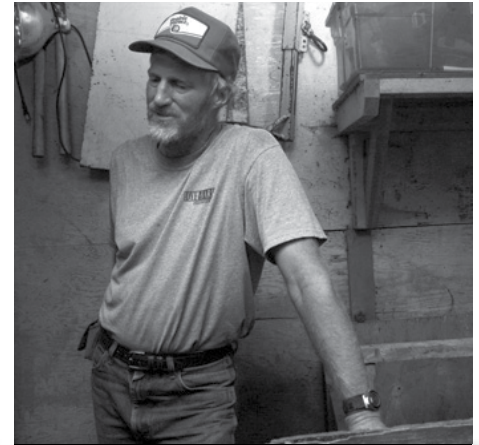
A main tenet of the program is to motivate constant innovation and improvement on the farm. Dick Sloan, who farms near Rowley, was already using cover crops when he first considered the Conservation Stewardship Program two years ago. "I had been using cereal rye cover crop and even started producing rye seed on my farm," Dick says. "The extended crop

What are Working Lands?

The Conservation Stewardship Program is described as being a "working lands program," but what are working lands?

"Working land" is a concept that draws attention to the idea that agricultural lands provide not only the traditional outputs of food, feed and fuel, but also a suite of benefits to society. Farmland can provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators, natural beauty, and recreational and spiritual opportunities. Soils provide fertility, hold water to mitigate flooding, and also store carbon.

The idea of working lands blurs the line between agriculture and conservation. With the whole-farm approach, every conservation feature (such as a buffer strip or waterway) or management decision (such as timing of fertilizer application or tillage) serves to help the farm provide multiple benefits to the farmer and beyond.



Steve Leazer – photo by The Daily Iowan

rotation, adding cereal rye small grain, was an eligible practice. But I had to step up my game with cover crops." His successful CSP application included expanding to use cover crop cocktails, including legumes.

Along with the increased acres, the recent farm bill also tasked CSP with becoming more streamlined and efficient. Some new rule changes are expected soon in draft form, and there will be a 60- or 90-day public comment period. During this time, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition will conduct a thorough analysis of the changes, and we will pass the news along through our policy email discussion list. Informed members and farmers familiar with the program are also encouraged to submit a comment during the public comment period.

The next enrollment period for the program will be announced sometime this winter. The program allows continuous sign-up, meaning you can submit the paperwork anytime, but new contracts are only enrolled once or twice a year. Not many farmers are visiting the NRCS office during harvest, but if you become familiar with the program now, sitting in the combine during harvest can be a perfect time to think about conservation innovations you could bring to your farm, and how CSP might help. ■

Steve Berger and Leigh Adcock are 2014 Spencer Award Winners

Based on a news release by Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

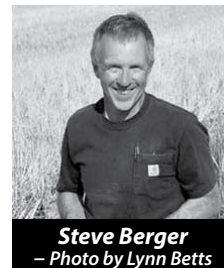
PFI members Steve Berger and Leigh Adcock have been chosen as the 2014 recipients of the Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture. The award is administered by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, and recognizes farmers, teachers and researchers who have made significant contributions to the environmental and economic stability of Iowa's family farms.

Steve Berger operates a corn-soybean and farrow-to-finish swine operation near Wellman with his father, Dennis. The Bergers have no-tilled for 35 years, built 14 miles of contour terraces and use cereal rye cover crops on all their acres.

Over the past 20 years, Steve has participated in 24 field trials on his farm with researchers from ISU, the Iowa Soybean Association, Pioneer Hi-Bred and Monsanto. Topics have been as diverse as nutrient uptake, fertilizer regimes for no-till systems, understanding phosphorus runoff in surface and tile water, and manure runoff and leaching characteristics of poultry or swine manure.

Jody Bailey, coordinator of the English River Watershed Management Authority, based in the area where Steve farms, nominated him. She noted that he has presented or hosted 66 field days, workshops and other events related to no-till and cover crops.

"When we asked Steve why learning and teaching about these sustainable farming



Steve Berger
— Photo by Lynn Betts



Leigh Adcock

practices is so important to him, he replied: 'Spencer (namesake of the award) and (Aldo) Leopold believe that a farmer doesn't really own his land; it belongs to God, and the farmer is the land's steward of his generation. Leopold's land ethic examines what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. Spencer approached his farm as a business, a science, and an art, much the same way we do.'

Leigh Adcock of Ames served as executive director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network from 2008 until retiring from the position in August. She was nominated by the group's board of directors.

"Her collaborative leadership and innovative approach to expanding support and resources has greatly benefitted agricultural women in Iowa; however, these benefits extend well beyond women," wrote PFI member Angie Carter, on behalf of the board. "Increasing the visibility and raising the voice of agricultural women creates new opportunities for Iowa's farming families, strengthens the social fabric and local economies of our rural communities, and improves the ecological health of the land for future generations."

During Leigh's tenure, WFAN membership grew from 300 to over 5,000 nationwide. Angie said Leigh was able to start new groups in California, Minnesota and Wisconsin while maintaining WFAN's Iowa roots. "Her leadership of WFAN has cultivated an increase in diversity, inclusivity and sustainability in Iowa's agricultural landscape," Angie wrote.

The Spencer Award will be presented during the annual Iowa Water Conference, to be held March 2-3, 2015, at ISU in Ames. ■

See the full Leopold Center news release at http://bit.ly/2014_Leopold_SpencerAward.

Leave A Legacy



"I believe in PFI's values and mission. I want to see it continue into the future."

— RICH PIROG

There are ways to provide for your loved ones AND leave a legacy for Practical Farmers of Iowa. You can do both, and it's easy.

- Designation of your retirement plan for PFI
- Leave a life insurance policy
- Make a gift through your will
- Make a gift now and receive income for life with a charitable gift annuity.

Many such gifts can help you and your family today as well as help our mission years into the future. You can put some in place today without affecting your cash flow during your lifetime.

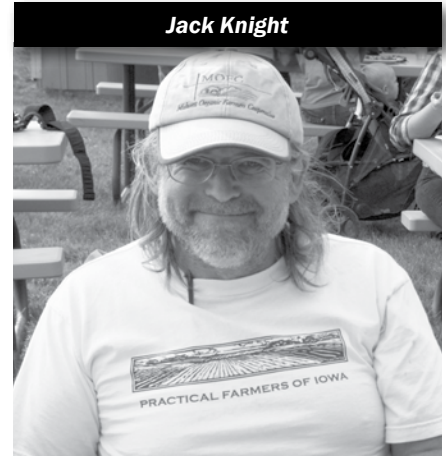
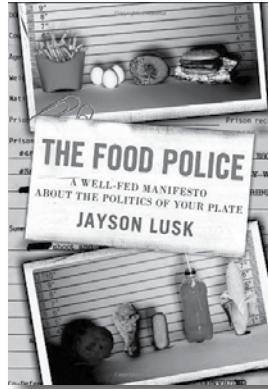
Want to learn more? Contact Teresa Opheim, executive director, at (515) 232-5661 or teresa@practicalfarmers.org.

** Important: Consult with your own legal and financial advisors before making any planned gift. **

"The Food Police: A Well-Fed Manifesto About the Politics of Your Plate"

by Jack Knight

The Food Police: A Well-Fed Manifesto about the Politics of Your Plate, by Oklahoma State University agricultural economics professor Jayson Lusk, is a systematic critique of every aspect of niche market agriculture.



Organic, natural, local – foodie fads of every kind, according to the author, will cause the poor to go hungry, hurt family farms and cause food safety catastrophes yet unseen. These fads, the author argues, reverse progress that conventional and industrial agriculture have made in environmental protection, energy use and farm profitability.

While never actually outwardly asserting that cheap food is desirable, this book struck me as simply that: a manifesto championing the idea that cheap food is good food. That position could be expected from an agricultural economist who dismisses or ignores externalities of industrial agriculture, such as the water pollution leading to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, spray drift, herbicide

resistance, or any of the issues that Practical Farmers members are working to address by improving conventional agriculture and developing alternatives to it at the same time.

I have always been puzzled by the scathing critiques that conventional agriculture pundits and spokespersons have for niche market agriculture, and professor Lusk gives us no insight into those, aside from an obvious distaste for the elite urban base of foodies such as Michael Pollan and celebrity chefs. Somewhere between the “we can save the world” rhetoric coming from the niche market camp and its

supporters, and the “we are the only way to save the world” rhetoric of industrial agriculture, lies the truth. That middle zone is what PFI is all about, and this author does nothing to reach that understanding. ■

Jack Knight lives in Luana and is a former organic inspector for the International Organic Inspectors Association.

WANTED: Book Reviewers (and Book Suggestions)!

Are you interested in reviewing a book for a future issue of *the Practical Farmer*? We're always looking for volunteers! **Contact Tamsyn at (515) 232-5661 or email tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org.**

Typically, I send out a request for a book reviewer on the PFI general email discussion list a few weeks before an issue is scheduled to go to print (*not on the general list? Email Erica Andorf at erica@practicalfarmers.org to subscribe*). If you're not subscribed to that list – or if you're only interested in books on specific subjects, or want to be considered only at certain times of the year – let me know!

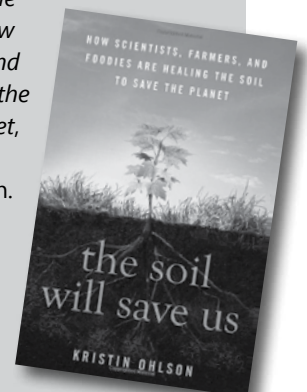
I'll add you to a list "go-to" PFI members interested in reviewing books and sharing their perspective with others.

Book Ideas? Let me know! We also appreciate your book suggestions. Is there a book you'd like to review, or see reviewed, in a future newsletter issue? The only criteria are that book topics must relate somehow to farming, food, agriculture or land stewardship – but they need not be new releases. We've had members review a range of materials, from 100-year-old farming books from a modern vantage, to farmer memoirs, to more technical material. Contact Tamsyn with your ideas!

Seeking Winter 2015 Book Reviewer:

We've already selected the book for the winter 2015 issue: *The Soil Will Save Us: How Scientists, Farmers and Foodies Are Healing the Soil to Save the Planet*, by journalist and author Kristin Ohlson.

Contact Tamsyn if you'd like to review this book! A 650-word review will be due by Jan. 5, 2015. ■



Calling All Photos! Send Us Yours for the 2015 Annual Conference!

Photos have started trickling in for the special display we're planning to feature at the 2015 annual conference – but we want more! What defines your farm? What gives you pride, joy, solace – or perhaps the occasional headache! – in your daily farm and field work? Show conference attendees what makes YOUR farm, garden, acreage or friend-of-farmer experience special or unique!

All member photos are welcome! Need some ideas or inspiration? Most images are fair game. Consider sharing photos of your:

- crops
- animals
- machinery
- pets
- vegetable fields
- family
- energy projects
- farm buildings
- orchards
- food
- gardens
- tools
- production practices
- farm activities
- and more!

We want to showcase the diversity of PFI members – and stimulate some interesting conversations! Whether you farm full- or part-time, manage a few acres, tend a backyard garden, own land that you rent out or simply enjoy the food that PFI farmers produce, we want to highlight your particular perspective.

Submit your photos by Jan. 5 to tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org. Send as many photos as you'd like; we'll print them to display in a special area at the conference. Include a brief description of the image if you want a caption to accompany it.

You can snap images with your cell phones, or use a standalone camera – whatever is easiest for you. Just keep in mind that higher-resolution images will look better when printed larger.

Questions? Contact Tamsyn by email or phone at (515) 232-5661. Happy shooting! ■

Mark Your Calendars: Direct-to-Consumer Marketing Workshop to be Held in February

Do you direct-market produce, livestock or other crops to consumers? Practical Farmers is organizing a day-long workshop on direct-to-consumer marketing for the third week of February 2015.

The workshop will be led by Elizabeth Millard and Karla Pankow of Bossy Acres, based in Northfield, Minn. On the farm, the two run Bossy Acres CSA, growing around 60 different crops and 110 varieties, with a focus on heirloom and unique cultivars. Elizabeth also has a background in journalism, PR and editing for 20 years,

and Karla worked for 10 years in corporate sales and marketing.

Details are still being finalized, but here are the basics:

- **Date:** Third week of February 2015 (specific date TBD)
- **Time:** 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. (tentatively)
- **Location:** TBD
- **Cost:** \$7 for members; \$20 for non-members

Watch the PFI member email discussion lists and on "Practical News" for more details. Questions? Contact Liz Kolbe at liz@practicalfarmers.org. ■

Attend a Livestock Planning Meeting this November!

Livestock farmers: How can PFI best help you? Practical Farmers is hosting a series of program planning meetings around the state this November. These meetings will be used to set priorities, brainstorm ideas and plan future programming. Meetings will start at 1 p.m. followed by a nearby pasture walk at 3 p.m. Bring your ideas!

Attend the meeting closest to you! Choose from five locations:

- **Central Iowa – Nov. 12 – 1-4 p.m.**
Meet at Farrar Church, 11180 NE 134th Ave. in Maxwell; pasture walk at Bruce and Connie Carney's farm will follow
- **Southwest Iowa – Nov. 14 – 1-5 p.m.**
Meet at Stanton Community Room, 205 Broad St. in Stanton; pasture walk at Mark and Melanie Peterson's farm will follow
- **Southeast Iowa – Nov. 18 – 1-4 p.m.**
Meet at the West Grove Township Hall, 22050 Eden Ave. in West Grove; pasture walk at Virgil Knobloch's farm will follow
- **Northeast Iowa – Nov. 19 – 1-4 p.m.**
Meet at Dan and Bonnie Beard's farm, 2954 Middle Sattre, near Decorah; a pasture walk at their home farm will follow
- **Northwest Iowa – Nov. 20 – 1-4 p.m.**
Meet at the Akron Public Library, 350 Reed St. in Akron; a pasture walk (location TBD) will follow

For more information, and to access a link to a map of locations, visit <http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2014/10/24/pfi-livestock-planning-meetings>.

Questions? Contact Lauren Zastrow at lauren@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661. ■

Cooperators' Meeting: Dec. 8-9 in Ames

Do you want to do research on your farm? Join us at this year's Cooperators' Meeting, at Quality Inn & Suites Starlite Village – 2601 East 13th St., in Ames. Hear farmers report about on-farm trials conducted in 2014 and plan for new projects in 2015.

First time doing research? Learn how you can get involved! **RSVP REQUIRED.** Contact Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or lauren@practicalfarmers.org by Friday, Nov. 7. Questions? Contact Stefan Gailans at stefan@practicalfarmers.org. ■

Meghan Filbert Joins PFI as New Livestock Coordinator

I grew up in Council Bluffs and always dreamt of being a vet, so attending Iowa State University was an easy decision. During my years at ISU, my interests shifted towards livestock nutrition and international animal agriculture. Through study abroad opportunities, I traveled to many different parts of the world studying animal production systems. After graduating, I worked in the nutrition lab at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, and then left Iowa to attend graduate school at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y.

I received a master's degree from Cornell in nutritional toxicology, studying mycotoxin contamination in peanuts and corn. During graduate school, I worked closely with agriculture extension staff and became interested in the diversity of farms in

the Northeast. After graduation, I took a position as a dairy and livestock extension educator in the Catskill Mountains. Working for extension in a rural county with many dairy farms, I became a dairy calf health specialist. The county I worked in is part of the New York City watershed, and my work on farms focused on manure and pathogen management for water quality. I helped dairy, beef, sheep and goat farmers plan and design livestock facilities, organized farmer education events, conducted on-farm research and collaborated on whole-farm management plans.

I couldn't be more excited to be back in Iowa and working for PFI, as I've been admiring the organization from afar for many years. I look forward to learning from



farmers and contributing to sustainable livestock production in the region I'm most passionate about. ■

Julie Wheelock Takes the Helm of PFI's Savings Incentive Program

Although I am not new to Practical Farmers of Iowa, I am new to the PFI staff. After being a member for a number of years, I began my position as the Savings Incentive Program Coordinator at the end of August. It has been a great way to get connected with many of PFI's members and keep up with beginning farmers who are part of our program.

I grew up on a small row crop and livestock farm in Calhoun County. Growing up, I enjoyed – yes, really enjoyed! – the day-to-day activities of the farm. Walking beans, detasseling corn, doing chores, cleaning out barns, hauling grain: All that good stuff helped to form the person I am today. I always tell my three kids they are missing out by not having to walk beans. There wasn't anything to do but pull weeds and get to know your crew. At least they get to experience picking up rocks (now that job hasn't changed much in the last 50 years!).

After graduating from high school I attended the University of Iowa and started on a biology degree. I started missing the agricultural side of things and after two years in the big city, I decided to transfer to Iowa State and get a degree in animal science and a minor in agronomy. Upon finishing college, I married my husband Ryan, a native of Independence. During college, Ryan was a part-time, over-the-road truck driver. Shortly after we were



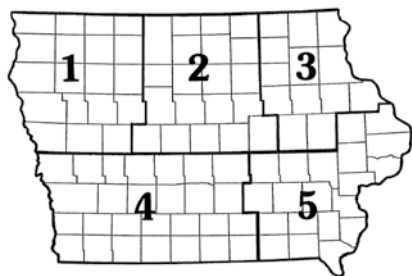
From left to right: Eli, Ryan, Adlen, Julie and Sadie Wheelock

married I surprised him and obtained my CDL so we could spend every minute together in a semi full-time! It was a good idea at the time (even to him), and traveling to California every week was a fun way to spend the first year together. But once again, I was itching to be back on the farm. In 2004, Ryan and I purchased a small acreage only a few miles from my home farm, which my dad and brother currently operate. I began raising pigs for Niman Ranch as well as direct-marketing pork to friends and neighbors. Over the past decade, we've also included pastured broilers and layers, as well as a pasture-based lambing system to our resume of farming experience.

In 2005, Ryan and I started our journey as parents when our son, Eli, was born. Ryan continued to truck and grow our small trucking business while I continued to be in charge of the farm. In 2007, we welcomed our daughter, Adlen, to the family, and in 2009, our second daughter, Sadie, arrived. I decided at this time to take a break from raising pigs and concentrate on raising kids. Currently, we still do pastured poultry and I co-manage a pasture lambing herd with my brother-in-law. Ryan is able to run his trucking business from home now and I enjoy working for an organization with which I share similar values.

Besides enjoying time together on our farm, our family likes to stay active with sports, biking, running, cooking healthy meals (okay that's mostly me, but if I cook it, everyone eats it) and being with our extended family. We have been blessed to be able to raise our three kids with the same traditions and ideals Ryan and I were wrapped in as young children.

Working now with beginning farmers for PFI, and seeing many of these farmers at a stage I remember well, has been a real joy. I am reminded often that it's never too late to become a beginning farmer. Thank you for your warm welcome, and I look forward to getting to know more PFI members! ■



Welcome, New Members!

District 1–Northwest

- Doug Bartels, Lytton
- Earl Bartels, Sac City
- Nadine Bruns, Aurelia
- Chris Carpenter, Carroll
- Aaron Dahlstrom, Albert City
- Luke Haffner, Lytton
- Mike and Eva Henderson, Marcus
- Alan and GERALYN Hoefling, Marcus
- Tom Irlmeier, Manning
- Annie McCabe, Sheldon
- Andrew Nees, Nemaha
- Magnum and Kelsey Peterson, Storm Lake
- Jeremy Rutter, Spencer
- Mitchell Sievers, Albert City

District 2–North Central

- Mary Adams, Des Moines
- Scott Ausborn, Ames
- Scott Blankenbaker and Scott Stroud, Charles City
- Mike Castellano, Ames
- Andrew Friend, Story City
- Ron and Diane Gasteiger, Saint Ansgar
- Aidan Hamilton, Thornton
- Bruce Harland, Marshalltown
- Denny Harrison, Nevada
- Bob Haug, Ames
- Marvin Hoffmann, Webster City
- Ryan Huffman, Boone
- Emily Kiewel, Charles City
- Mike Kohlhaas, West Bend
- Travis and Megan Kroneman, Osage
- Ryan Lage, Sheffield
- Nikole and Derek Marth, Rockford
- Edward Olson, Joice
- Jolene and TJ Schaefer, Jewell
- Alice Topaloff, Ames
- David Weisberger, Ames

District 3–Northeast

- Michael and Beverly Andorf, Brandon
- Landon Corlett, Monona
- Matthew Frana, Calmar
- Marty Grimm, Decorah
- Amy Holmgren, Decorah
- Kaylene Kroul, Mount Vernon
- Lowell and Rita Lyngaas, Postville
- Andrew Ridgway, Cedar Falls
- Steve Runde, Decorah
- Daniel and Karen Slagel, Dubuque
- Chris Soules, Arlington
- Brenna and Rogan Stoops, Lisbon

District 4–Southwest

- Narad Bastola, Grimes
- Colin Benson, Urbandale
- Kenneth Bratland, Ankeny
- Jerry and Ann Carter, Audubon
- Jason Cook, Creston
- John and Mary Filbert, Council Bluffs
- Richard Freedman, Urbandale
- Mukiza Gahetano, Des Moines
- Susan and Ron Hawk, Newton
- Sindra Jensen, Cumberland
- June Kopiasz, Harlan
- Torey Olson, Perry
- Jerald and Austin Palmquist, Stanton
- Irving Parker, Emerson
- Dallas and Lori Paulsen, Atlantic
- Peoples Company, Mollie Aronowitz, Clive
- Matt and Becki Peterson, Stanton
- Caleb Shinn, Osceola
- Dave, Tracy and Zach Van Arkel, Pella
- Ann Wolf, Des Moines
- Mark and Alana Yoder, Leon

District 5–Southeast

- Whitney Bailey, Blue Grass
- Linda Buswell, Marengo
- Tom Dalsing, West Liberty
- Rob Davis, Solon
- Dan Diehl, Ottumwa
- John Ferrell, Hedrick
- Tom Greene, Fairfield
- Chloe Hennesy, Fairfield
- Jamie Hostetler, Bellevue
- Madeline Martin, Iowa City
- Frank and Peg Mere, Monticello
- Howard Miller, Bellevue
- Todd Mills, Columbus Junction
- Ellen Pinnette, Grinnell
- Angie Scharnhorst, North Liberty
- Kyle and Jennifer Stahle, Solon
- Angela Winburn, Malcom

District 6–Out of State

- Severine Fleming, Cambridge, MA
- Gene Gage, Martell, NE
- Ellen Gallans, Mequon, WI
- gThrive, Janet Breuer, Santa Clara, CA
- David Hoekstra, San Pedro, CA
- Brian and Sara Moorhead, Empire, MI
- John Viertel, Tarrytown, NY
- Rebekah Winnes, Brownsville, MN

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

Nov. 14 – Play Performance: "Map of My Kingdom" | Grinnell, IA | Grinnell College | 7:30 p.m.

Commissioned by PFI and written by playwright Mary Swander. In the play, character Angela Martin, a lawyer and mediator in land transition disputes, shares stories of how farmers and landowners have approached their land transitions. A potluck meal will take place before the show. Those planning to take part in the meal are asked to bring a side dish or dessert to share. All guests are asked to RSVP to Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or lauren@practicalfarmers.org by Tuesday, Nov. 11. For more, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/mapofmykingdom>

Nov. 14-15 – Farmer Veterans Stakeholder Conference | Des Moines, IA | Drake University | \$150

The Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC), in coordination with the Drake University Agricultural Law Center, will host a first-of-its-kind national gathering for organizations that serve military veterans pursuing food, farming, and agricultural careers. The conference will be the first to convene local, state and national service providers to facilitate networking, partnering and educational opportunities. For more, visit: <http://iowafamerveteran.org/farmer-veteran-national-stakeholder-conference/>

Nov. 15 – PFI FIELD DAY: Milling Small Grains and Aquaponics Production | Panora, IA | 1-4 p.m.

Father-son team Earl and Jeff Hafner, of Early Morning Harvest, will show attendees their certified organic stone mill where they mill rye, buckwheat, wheat and corn. They will also lead a tour of their aquaponics production area, and request that attendees bring their high tunnel gardening expertise to share! For more, visit: practicalfarmers.org/news-events/events

Nov. 16-17 – Iowa Organic Conference | Iowa City, IA

The 14th Annual Iowa Organic Conference will be held on the University of Iowa as a joint effort between Iowa State University and the UI Office of Sustainability. Producers and experts from across the country will share tips for transitioning into organic production and methods to enhance your organic operations. The conference keynote speaker is Mary Berry, daughter of Wendell Berry, novelist, poet, environmental activist, cultural critic and farmer. For more, visit: sustainability.uiowa.edu/2014-iowa-organic-conference/

Nov. 25 – 2014 Iowa Forage and Grassland Council Conference | Des Moines, IA | Airport Holiday Inn

This annual event includes general and breakout sessions and specific times for visiting with exhibitors. The event is open to IFGC members and non-members. The keynote speaker is Dr. Peter Ballerstedt, forage production manager at Barenbrug USA. For more, visit: iowabeefcenter.org

Dec. 10 – ISU Extension Webinar: Feeds and Feeding of Pullets and Layers | 10 a.m.

Feed represents over 70% of the production costs in an egg production operation. Dr. Paul Patterson, a nutritionist from Penn State University, will discuss the feeding of replacement pullets and laying hens. The central theme of his extension and research programs is environmental poultry management. To register, visit: <https://connect.extension.iastate.edu/poultry>

For more events, visit www.practicalfarmers.org



Grow your farm with Practical Farmers. Join today!

This annual membership is a:

- New membership
- Renewal

I am joining at the level of:

- Student – \$20
- Individual – \$50
- Farm or Household – \$60
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups – \$110)
- Lifetime Member—\$1,000

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

- Farmer/grower
- Non-farmer – (You will have the opportunity to expand upon this when you receive your membership information form.)

How did you hear about Practical Farmers of Iowa?

..... Each membership includes one subscription to *the Practical Farmer*.

Sustain PFI

For the long-term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

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

JOIN OUR GIFT OF THE MONTH CLUB

The Gift of the Month Club is an easy way to support Practical Farmers of Iowa! Send in your pledge with your credit card information, and we will automatically deduct your donation the first of each month.

YES! I would like to give _____ per month to PFI, to be automatically charged to my credit card the first of the month. (\$10 per month minimum)

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

Thank you!

Individual, Farm or Organization Name*: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Street: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Primary Phone (with area code): _____

Alternate Phone (with area code): _____

Email: _____

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

Payment:

Total: \$_____ = \$_____ membership + \$_____ donation

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

TO PAY WITH A CREDIT CARD, PLEASE GO TO: <http://practicalfarmers.org/join-pfi.html>

Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



Diverse Farms

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



Healthy Food

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



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.

