

# the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa newsletter

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## PFI BOARD MEETS

On September 5, the Practical Farmers of Iowa board of directors met, in Ames. The major development since the previous meeting was the receipt, in August, of a \$25,000 grant for general support of Practical Farmers of Iowa. The donor of this money is Mrs. Jean Wallace Douglas.

PFI can now do more of the things it would like to do. For example, the on-farm research program will be sustained with this financing. Additionally, this money should be a magnet to attract funding from other sources as well. Some of these other sources were the subject of most of the discussion at the board meeting.

It was the consensus of the board that this grant justifies a reduction in the annual PFI membership dues from \$30 to \$10. The strength of the organization is its membership, and it is easier for most people to be members at \$10 than at \$30. As one board member put it, "We need the warm bodies more than the cold cash!"

The board also began to plan winter meetings. In addition to

the annual meeting, which will be in Ames, in December, workshops will be held around the state. These will be comparable to the summer PFI workshops of 1985 and 1986, but may be tailored to the location. The board is looking around for some hot topics to cover in these workshops. If you have an idea, let your district PFI representative know. More information on these winter events will appear in the next issue of The Practical Farmer.

## PFI FARM FIELD DAYS HELD

This year there were thirteen PFI farms cooperating in on-farm research. In all, nine of the cooperators held farm tours this summer to show the progress of research trials and of the operations as-a-whole. The tours in the southeast district were reported in the last newsletter.

Among other things, the experience was a lesson in publicity. Cooperators and board reps got to know their local (and not-so-local) newspaper, radio and TV reporters a lot better.

The families really put themselves out to make their guests

welcome. Attendance for these field days reflected the "leg work", the weather and the amount of time that was available to get out the story ahead of time.

Tom and Irene Frantzen, in northeast Iowa, had 65 people on their farm August 19.

On August 21, Ron and Maria Rosmann hosted 75 on their place, in the southwest district.

August 26 saw a "triple-header" in the northwest district: Todd and Linda Hartsock; Bob and Diane Graaf; and Harlan and Sharon Grau. Each farm had attendance in the 20's, with most folks apparently choosing to attend only one of the three.

On September 9, Tom and Maria Hanks held a tour that drew ?? people, including several ISU Extension specialists.

September 11 and 12, Dick and Sharon Thompson's field days were attended by 550 people.

Three kinds of trials were prominent this year: reduction of nitrogen use in corn; elimination of herbicides in ridge-tilled fields; and fall cover crops. In each case, two practices are compared side-by-side, and these pairs are replicated across the field.

The nitrogen experiments compared the grower's customary rate with a reduced level of fertilization, or in one case, with an alternative source (hog manure). For some PFI farmers, that customary rate is 160-180 pounds of N; for others it is 50 lbs. The reduced rates are 22-50 lbs. less. Visual differences were not obvious between the two treatments on any

of the farms. Yields will tell more of the story.

Likewise, with the +/- herbicide trials, great differences were not evident. Where there was good weed control in the field, both treatments had good control. Where weed control was so-so, it was that way whether herbicide was used or not. Most participating ridge-tillers are still working to improve their set-up and methods. It will be interesting to follow these trials in future years.

The fall cover crops have been flown-on or seeded with a drill. Interestingly, two cooperators independently figured out how to use drills with single-disk openers to seed ridges. Yields and weed control will be observed in the fields next year.

More complete results of the on-farm research will be presented at the PFI winter meetings. Several more cooperators have expressed an interest in holding field days next year. In addition, the PFI board intends to increase the number of cooperating farms.

#### FIRST ALLEE EXPERIMENT FARM FIELD DAY

On July 1, Iowa State University held its first tour at the now-famous Newell farm. Long-term trials, begun this year, will compare three farming systems representing different kinds of inputs. The three systems can loosely be called conventional, reduced-input, and organic.

It was clear from the personnel present that this is a multidisciplinary project. The 100-or-so visitors that day heard presentations from agronomist Keith Whigam, weed specialist Richard Fawcett, IPM entomologist Dean

Grundeman, and economist Mike Duffy, among others.

It being the first year of the trials, there wasn't yet much to show. It was evident that all three treatments had inherited a healthy buttonweed population. In the inception of these trials many design problems have been overcome. One that has not is that the low-input system is restricted to conventional tillage. Without herbicides, ridge-tillage would control weeds much more reliably, but it is only the "middle" system that is allowed to use ridges. Ridges were apparently inconvenient in the rotation practiced within the low-input system. Elsewhere on the farm is a demonstration of ridge-till-without-herbicides; however, the "organic" system remains handicapped.

Participants were treated to a hearty lunch provided by the people of Newell. Residents of the area obviously take some pride and interest in the work of the Allee Experimental Farm. It is evident that ISU and Extension do as well. The enthusiasm shown and the good attendance are signs that this study will be a learning experience for everyone.

#### PFI FARMERS IN THE NEWS

Several PFI members have recently appeared in agricultural news stories. These features have been very helpful when the reporters are truly interested in understanding what's going on down on the farm.

This summer PFI president Dick Thompson sustained a sunburned forehead from a six-hour interview with ABC Evening News. The network aired 10-15 seconds and allowed Dick one sentence -- using this out of context in a story that had a

different focus altogether.

More positive coverage came in the form of a Sioux City TV station's story on the farm of Harlan and Sharon Grau. Although the newscasters didn't seem to grasp the significance of the subject, the station should be credited for the effort. It was especially helpful because the piece appeared before the Graus' field day.

Ron and Maria Rosmann were interviewed by the Omaha World Herald, and an upbeat article appeared in the paper before their field day. Several farmers in Nebraska were surprised and amused; the World Herald has not been nearly so receptive to alternative farming methods within the state of Nebraska itself.

The Audubon Society special "Common Ground" has appeared several times on cable and Iowa Public Television this summer, and it features PFI farmer Dick Thompson. The program focuses on three or four farms and on the Chesapeake Bay watershed, showing the "common ground" between farmers trying to care for the land and other people concerned for wildlife and the ecosystem. The segment on the Thompson operation was shot at the 1986 Thompson Farm Field Days.

Besides these news stories, there has been a host of other features and notices in local papers and on local radio and TV. These were excellent advertising for field days, and they let people know that there are folks in the neighborhood actually demonstrating some alternatives.

#### NOTES AND NOTICES

Funny how those little homegrown activities gather momentum. For

example, PFI cooperators Vic and Cindy Madsen went to town recently for 25 chicks, to start a project with their kids. The people in the store talked them into taking 100, saying they'd be happy to buy back any extra for their own use.

No sooner did they arrive back home than the phone began ringing:

"Say, I hear you're raising chickens. Will you set some aside for us?"

By the end of the week the 25 chicks had become 300. This fall the Madsens expect to have 800 chickens!

They could just keep expanding, but they don't desire to. It's not as if they have nothing else to do, and they want to keep the project "family-sized." Even though they aren't making a lot of money on the venture, Vic says, he values the relationships it brings with people in the community. To him, it feels right to be filling a local need with clean, high quality, locally-grown birds.

Autumn is the season for renewing Practical Farmers of Iowa memberships. You will be receiving a reminder of this in the mail, if it hasn't already arrived. This year, the cost of membership has been reduced to \$10, to make it easier for you to belong to PFI. Don't forget us!

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence to the PFI directors' addresses is always welcome.

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