

# the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 9, #3  
Fall 1994

## CELEBRATE PFI'S TEN YEARS JAN. 6-8!

Don't look now, but it's going to be a decade since Practical Farmers of Iowa came into being. On January 6-8, the annual PFI get-together will both celebrate the accomplishments of those ten years and look to the future. There will be presentations from nationally known figures, an old-time community dance, child care and youth activities, posters from PFI members, workshops, and more! **Please pre-register by December 1** to secure your place in the anniversary festivities (see form on page 3).

### National Figures to Participate

Some old friends will be returning to share their views and information. Featured speaker for the weekend is **Wendell Berry**, a writer of books and poetry that touch on agriculture, rural culture and values. His books include *What Are People For?*, *The Unsettling of America*, and many works of poetry and fiction (see page 29). His poems appeared in the first issue of this newsletter, in 1986.

Wendell Berry farms near Port Elizabeth,  
Kentucky, with his wife Tanya, and  
he teaches at the Univer-



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sity of Kentucky. He agreed to return to Iowa at the invitation of PFI members Richard and Sharon Thompson, who have known Berry for some years. His formal talk is to be on *Conserving Communities*. Along with rural sociologist Cornelia Flora, Wendell Berry will also take part in a workshop on sustainable rural communities, and he will be part of the ecumenical service Sunday morning.

**Paul Johnson** is Chief of the United States Soil Conservation Service (soon to be the Natural Resources Conservation Service). Before taking that post he farmed and served in the Iowa House of Representatives, where he was instrumental in developing the consensus that led to passage of the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act of 1987. That legislation has been a model nationally for its emphasis on research, education, and voluntary



**Paul Johnson, Chief of the Soil Conservation Service and former Iowa legislator.**

approaches to water quality. Johnson has been a PFI member since 1990. Mr. Johnson believes one of the most important challenges of our time is to learn to live in harmony with the land.

Paul Johnson will give the Saturday morning address. He will also lead a morning workshop on the future of the Conservation Reserve Program, and he will sit in on Dr. Doug Karlen's afternoon workshop on soil quality.

**Alan Henning** is a grazing consultant who, with his wife Gerardine, runs a 120-acre demonstration dairy farm near Madison, Wisconsin. Henning, who is originally from Illinois, learned the art of controlled grazing before it gained popularity in this country. After studying grass-based dairying in New Zealand, Asia, Russia, and Europe under a Fulbright Grant, Alan Henning farmed in New Zealand for sixteen years.

In 1988 Henning returned to the United States to promote grassland farming and low-cost ideas through on-farm consulting. Henning has done work for several PFI farmers in northeast Iowa and was featured at the 1993 field day of Lynn and Linda Stock, near Waukon. His presentation is *Creating Healthy Pastures*. He will also lead the controlled grazing workshop.

**Kentucky farmer and author Wendell Berry.**  
(Photo courtesy of Dan Carraco, Carrollton, KY)





## A Group Effort

This PFI annual meeting is more ambitious than anything we've undertaken before. It is only possible because of the wide membership involvement in planning and organization. There are people working on publicity, posters, youth activities, the dance, preregistration, and the ecumenical service, to name a few. Contact Donna Bauer (712-563-4084) if you want to lend a hand with the anniversary celebration. Donna has graciously agreed to serve as planning coordinator.

## Call for VCRs

Speaking of assistance, maybe you can help us record the talks and workshops. Videos of last year's featured speaker have been popular, and we would like to record all of this year's sessions if possible. If you have a camcorder and tripod that you would be willing to bring to the winter meeting, please give Donna a call.



Grazing consultant Alan Henning (at right) makes a point at Lynn and Linda Stock's 1993 field day.

## PFI "Scrapbook" Invites Contributions

Do you have a "PFI memory" you would be willing to share? Over lunch on Saturday, we'd like to show a few slides that recall the early days and development of Practical Farmers of Iowa. If you have a print photograph, we can have it made into

(Continued on next page.)

## PLEASE PRE-REGISTER BY DECEMBER 1!

(please print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-registration Fee: \$5.00 per person or \$10.00 per family ..... = \_\_\_\_\_  
(Registration at the door will be \$10.00 per person & \$15.00 per family.)

Annual Membership Fee: \$10.00 per person or family ..... = \_\_\_\_\_  
(There will be the usual \$10 door charge for nonmembers and PFI memberships not current.)

Please pay in advance for the meals you wish to eat at the Starlite Best Western Motel:

	Adults		Children	
Sat. Noon Buffet	_____ x \$7.00	+	_____ x \$4.00	= _____
Sat. Pork Dinner	_____ x \$12.00	+	_____ x \$8.00	= _____

(Children under three eat free.)

CHECK ENCLOSED FOR TOTAL ..... = \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form to: Sharon Thompson, 2035 190<sup>th</sup> St., Boone, IA, 50036.

For more information call: Sharon Thompson (515) 432-1560, or Rick Exner or Gary Huber (515) 294-1923.

Hotel Reservations (by Dec. 15): Starlite Village, Ames (515) 232-9260 or (800) 903-0009. (Request PFI group rate.)

Check if interested in bringing a poster or display illustrating a sustainable agriculture idea or project: \_\_\_\_\_

If you will be bringing children or are just interested in helping with youth activities or daycare, see reverse side!

a projection slide. Please contact Rick Exner (2104 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, IA, 50011, 515-294-1923).

### *A Family Affair!*

PFI is making this an event for every member of the family. Workshops include topics of broad interest. On Saturday, child care and youth activities will be provided for infant through high school. (When you preregister for youth activities you will receive more information on options for different ages.) On Saturday evening, the *Pretty Good Band* will play for a community dance, with caller Mary Jo Brearley teaching each dance. The Sunday morning ecumenical service will provide a space for everyone to join together before hitting the road.

### Posters

This year there will be an expanded poster session that will bring in PFI cooperators, *Sustainable Projects* participants, young people, and any other PFI member who has something to share. There will be a special hour for viewing posters and talking to poster presenters. If you would like to bring a poster, contact Gayle Olson (319-257-6967).

### WEEKEND AGENDA

Place: Ames, Starlite Village Best Western, 13<sup>th</sup> & Dayton Rd.

Friday (January 6)

Evening: (Check-in)

7:00 – Reception, grazing videos

Saturday (January 7)

7:30 – Registration Opens

8:30 – 9:15: Welcome by PFI President  
Vic Madsen

9:15 – 9:30: Sustainable Ag Achievement  
Award

9:30 – 10:30: Paul Johnson, Morning  
Address

10:30 – 11:00: Break

11:00 – 12:00: Workshops (select one)

12:00 – 1:30: Lunch and Retrospective

1:30 – 2:30: Alan Henning

2:30 – 3:30: Posters and Displays

3:30 – 5:00: Workshops (select one)

5:00 – 6:00: Break

6:00 – 7:00: Dinner

7:00 – 8:00: Wendell Berry, Featured  
Speaker

8:30 – 10:30: Community Dance

Sunday (January 8)

8:30 – 10:00: Brunch on Your Own

10:00 – 11:00: Ecumenical Service

11:00 – 12:00: Business Meeting

## YOUTH ACTIVITIES REGISTRATION FORM

Ages Infant through High School \*

Youth Activities on Saturday, Jan. 7 include:

Farm Safety, Field Trips, Swimming, Craft and Activity Tables, Games, Snacks, Pizza Party, Youth Poster Presentations and Roundtable Talks, Skits, and Movies.

\* Child care will be provided for infants and toddlers on Saturday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm.

We will send you more information about the youth activities and poster exhibit.

Name and ages of youth: \_\_\_\_\_

Name, address, and phone number of parents: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to help with youth activities and/or child care. (You need not be a parent yourself to help.)

\_\_\_\_\_ I will be bringing a poster or display for the youth exhibit.



## Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award

This recognition has been awarded annually since 1989 to someone whose work has advanced the cause of profitable, environmentally-sound farming in Iowa. Past recipients have been Alfred Blackmer ('89), John Pesek ('90), Jerry DeWitt ('91), Larry Kallem ('92), and Richard Cruse ('93).

The Sustainable Ag Achievement Award was conceived as a way for PFI to honor those outside of the organization, not as a way for the organization to "pat itself on the back." However, as the tenth anniversary of PFI's founding approaches, the board of directors has unanimously made an exception to this policy in order to recognize the

(Continued on next page.)

## WORKSHOPS

**A Decade of CRP:** Paul Johnson (moderator: Ron Rosmann)

As the first Conservation Reserve Program contracts approach expiration, questions surround the program. How was it good? How was it harmful? Will it be continued in some form? As Chief of the SCS, Johnson oversees the agency that administers the CRP. He will share his insights and discuss with participants their own experiences.

**Sustainable Communities:** Wendell Berry, Cornelia Flora (moderator: Gary Huber)

How do communities build on their strengths to make a future? What are Iowans doing to strengthen their community through the *Shared Visions* program? Wendell Berry is a national voice for rural life. Cornelia Flora is a rural sociologist who has helped place the issue of community viability into the context of sustainable agriculture (see page 6). Gary Huber is PFI project director for *Shared Visions: Farming for Better Communities*.

**Cropping Systems for Integrated Farming:** Mohammed Ghaffarzadeh, Rick Cruse (moderator: Rick Exner)

Mo Ghaffarzadeh and Rick Cruse have been among the Midwest's most visible researchers, conducting on-farm research into berseem clover, narrow strip intercropping, and other technologies that reward the management and skills of Iowa producers. Come join them for a "cutting edge," update and offer your own experiences and discoveries.

**Transition to Sustainable Farming Systems: Women's Experiences** Regina Striegel, Irene Frantzen, Pam Cowles, Sheryl Wilson (moderator: Margaret Smith)

What different roles do women assume when families make changes to alternative farming systems? How do these changes affect family relationships, personal stress levels, women's involvement in the farming operation, and interactions within the community?

**Controlled Grazing:** Alan Henning (moderator: Tom Frantzen)

Grazing can benefit almost any kind of stock. Alan Henning says whatever your livestock, the principles of good grazing are much the same. Come and discuss the ins and outs of putting pasture to work.

**Alternative Pork Production Systems:** Dave Stender, Dan Wilson (moderator: Vic Madsen)

Dave Stender is an Extension swine field specialist in northwest Iowa. His comments appeared recently in *National Hog Farmer Magazine*. Dan Wilson is a PFI member who pasture farrows in O'Brien County. In September he travelled to Sweden to learn about low-stress confinement systems used there (see page 22).

**Soil Quality:** Doug Karlen (moderator: Jeff Olson)

The term "soil quality" is heard a good deal, but what do we really mean by it? What do we know about the benefits of soil microbial life, earthworms, and tilth, and how can we manage to achieve those benefits? Dr. Doug Karlen is a soil scientist with the USDA National Soil Tilth Laboratory who has worked on studies comparing farming systems – including one that involved PFI members Dick and Sharon Thompson. He will describe what the Tilth Lab is learning about soil quality.





**Richard and Sharon Thompson will be the 1994 recipients of the PFI Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award.**

two people who, more than anyone else, deserve credit for Practical Farmers of Iowa and the farmer-based sustainable agriculture movement that we have in this state. Richard and Sharon Thompson, of Boone, will be the 1994 recipients of the Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award. They served on the provisional board of directors of PFI, which met in their home. Dick was the organization's first president, and he now serves as treasurer and Executive Vice President.

### *Please Pre-register by December 1!*

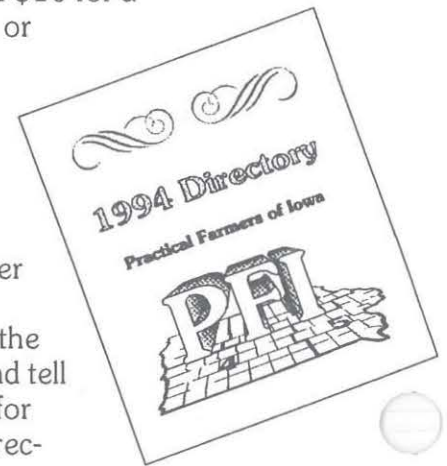
This is the most ambitious meeting we have ever organized, so we need to have a good idea who's coming. To make it easier on the PFI volunteers and save you time (and money) at the door, please send in your pre-registration before December 1!



## **PFI FALL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL!**

You will soon receive a letter from the President! Vic Madsen, PFI president, will be inviting PFI members to update their membership information and, if necessary, renew. Why is that information important? Well, did you get a look at the new PFI Member Directory? It's our newest networking tool for those who choose to take part – 36 pages of who's doing what in sustainable farming. The contents come from the Membership Agreement and Information forms returned by PFI members.

PFI still costs just \$10 for a year's membership, or \$25 for three years. Three years is a good renewal option for those of us who tend to be forgetful. But even if Vic's letter says you're current, you can still send in the information form and tell us to put you down for the next member directory. Don't forget!



***Three years is a good renewal option for those of us who tend to be forgetful.***

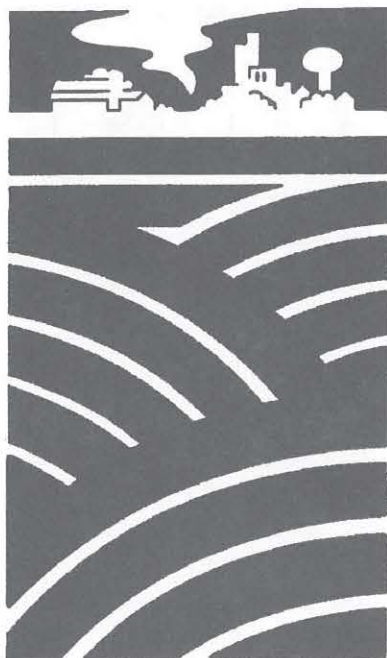
## **CORNELIA FLORA JOINS RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

Cornelia Flora is the new Director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, located at Iowa State University. This is one of four such centers and covers the twelve North Central states. Previously she was head of the Sociology Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, a University Distinguished Professor at Kansas State University, and a program officer for the Ford Foundation. She has consulted for the Northwest Area Foundation's sustainable

(Continued on page 16.)



# SHARED VISIONS



*farming for better communities*

This section of the newsletter includes:

- updates on *Shared Visions*' groups;
- a description of *Shared Visions*' materials;
- a report on the Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) networking conference held in Iowa this summer;
- an article on a visit by IFS conference participants to the Eldora area; and
- a transcript of a talk by Clark BreDahl during a visit by IFS conference participants to Greenfield.



## GROUP UPDATES

### AG2020 Group (Poweshiek County)

During meetings last February and March, the AG2020 group identified these areas of interest: 1) helping beginning farmers, 2) developing farm-community relationships, and 3) incorporating livestock into farming systems using alternative practices, such as rotational grazing.

The group also identified the 46,646 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Poweshiek County as an opportunity to bring these areas of interest together in a project. A goal for the group, subsequently noted in a letter to CRP owners, is to "build a system in which Poweshiek CRP owners, new farmers, current farmers, and town and business people can work together to further the use of this land for pasture, hay, livestock, and organic crops, and to further the service and marketing of these products."

This letter was sent in advance of a survey that was funded as a first step for the group's project. Of the 511 surveys sent to owners of CRP land in Poweshiek County, 356 were returned for a response rate of 70 percent. Sixty-three percent of respondents want information on alternative uses of their CRP land, and 9 percent, or 30 respondents, were interested in talking with beginning farmers.

(Continued on next page.)



**Rick Swanson, who farms near Malcolm in Poweshiek County, describes CRP demonstrations being conducted on his land to IFS networking conference participants.**

Survey responses provided information on the status of facilities needed to support livestock on CRP land in the county. For example, 71 percent have water sources on their CRP land, while 66 percent have livestock fences and 20 percent have useable livestock buildings.

The group will use these data, other information from the survey, and input from resource persons to determine next steps. One possibility is to bring retired, soon to be retired, and non-farming landowners together with beginning or expanding small farmers to explore mutually beneficial options for the use of this land.

### Ag Committee, Davis County Development Corporation

The Davis County group, which formed as an agriculture committee of the Davis County Development Corporation, submitted a project application to the PFI board at the end of July.

The application described educational initiatives to be conducted throughout the year: 1) sponsoring speakers on livestock production at the second annual Fall Classic Round-Up at the Davis County Fairgrounds in Bloomfield; 2) coordinating speakers and farm tours with the local high school vocational agriculture program; and 3) conducting a farmer mentoring program.

The board reviewed the application at their September meeting and decided not to fund the project as submitted. The board recommended that the project be more focused and that the application specify the kinds of farming systems and practices to be encouraged. The group plans to meet with *Shared Visions* staff after harvest to consider the board's recommendations and determine next steps.

### Grundy-Hardin County Group

The PFI board approved the Grundy-Hardin County group's project application for a community-based beginning farmer initiative in



SHARED VISIONS  
PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY GROUPS

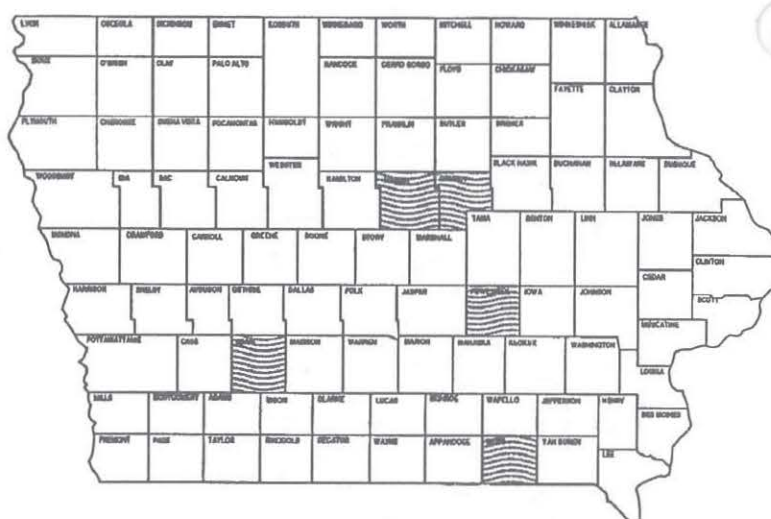


Figure 1. Location of 1994 *Shared Vision* groups.

July. The group has begun developing the operational details of their initiative.

The group has shifted its focus from finding owners of land who are interested in making their land available to a beginner to developing a process that will help insure the success of the beginners, thus increasing the comfort level of owners of land so that it is easier for them to become involved.

Insuring the success of beginners requires careful selection and screening of candidates. Development plans for beginners will identify needed skills and outline steps to acquire these skills.

Part of the process will involve documenting beginners' resources and experiences for use during the matching process. Where a beginner is in terms of resources and experiences will affect the possible arrangements, ranging from working as hired help to entering into some kind of agreement to buy land.

A multi-step matching process will involve identifying the goals of both parties, assessing compatibility on a personal level, and developing an agreeable business plan. Farming practices that will generate adequate income while



keeping input costs under control will be detailed. Another component of the matching process may involve a mechanism to insure on-going communication between participants occurs so that matches proceed smoothly.

Once these processes have been outlined, the group will approach others in the community for input in order to: 1) further refine the process; 2) get others in the community involved; and, 3) identify resources in the community that can be mobilized for the initiative. This step will be part of a "Community Awareness Campaign."

The group will next put their work into action through a "Pilot Operation" to prove the initiative in a real-life situation. Documenting the experience will allow for necessary adjustments in the initiative.

These adjustments will help insure the achievement of the ultimate goal of the group – the establishment of a system of opportunities and supports for beginning farmers that will become a normal part of the area's economic and social vitality.



Glen Draper of rural Eldora describes his pesticide-free soybeans to IFS networking conference participants.



## Neely-Kinyon Farm Project Committee (Adair County)

The Neely-Kinyon Farm Project Committee was accepted into *Shared Visions* at the April 9 PFI board meeting. The group has initially been involved as a cooperator in the on-farm research network. The group will move from the *Shared Visions* on-farm research network into the community groups network at the end of this year's growing season.

## SHARED VISIONS MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Tamara Pfantz is currently assisting *Shared Visions* while a search is being conducted for a Community Groups Coordinator. Tamara has been developing three sets of materials – a "Program Manual," a "Facilitator's Guide to Group and Project Development," and a "Project Planning Workbook" – to further the implementation of *Shared Visions*.

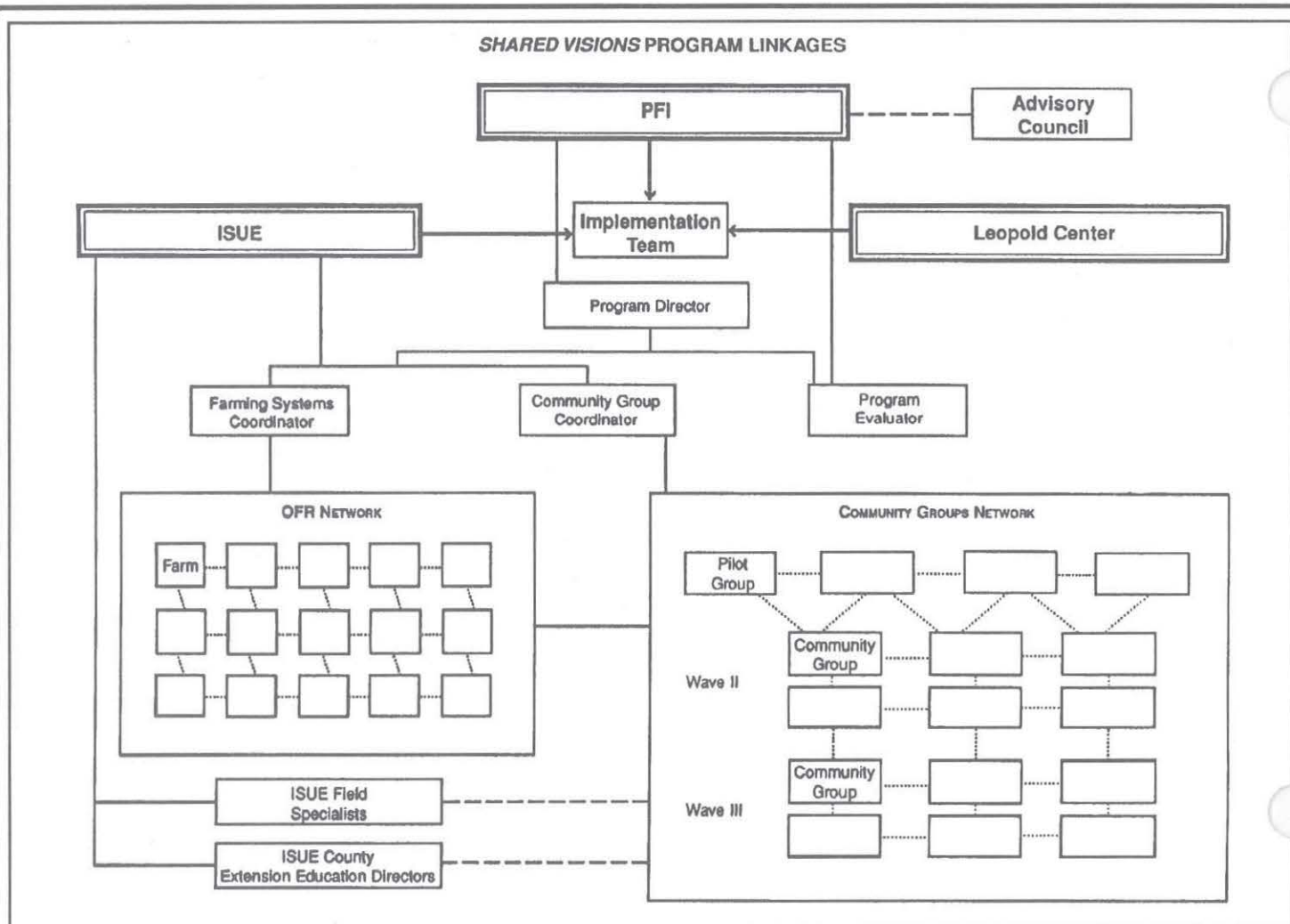
The Program Manual is a compendium of information about *Shared Visions*. Tamara has also developed flow charts for the Program Manual to clarify the processes involved, including the one on the top of the next page titled, "*Shared Visions* Program Linkages."

Note that the lines connecting various groups and individuals in this chart are not lines of authority, as is typically the case with organizational charts, but represent linkages.

At the top are the three collaborating organizations. Connected to PFI is the *Shared Visions* Advisory Council, which provides input on program operations and makes recommendations to the PFI Board on selecting groups and group projects.

Arrows from each collaborating organization point to the Implementation Team, which is where the main work of the collaboration takes place. Immediately below the

(Continued on next page.)



three collaborators and the Implementation Team are program staff. Gary Huber works half-time for PFI as the Program Director. Rick Exner works full-time for ISU Extension as the Farming Systems Coordinator. The Community Group Coordinator is a full-time position with ISU Extension for which a search is being conducted. Tamara Pfantz will begin work as the Program Evaluator when the Community Groups Coordinator position is filled, with this being a quarter-time position.

Immediately below program staff are two large boxes representing the two networks being supported through *Shared Visions*. One represents the On-Farm Research Network, which has been the foundation of PFI almost since its inception. The fifteen boxes here represent the fifteen cooperators

being supported through *Shared Visions*.

The other large box represents the Community Groups Network, which is new. The four boxes at the top represent the groups now involved in *Shared Visions*, and the two sets of six boxes represent the sets of groups that are planned for 1995 and 1996.

Finally, the boxes at the bottom left of the chart represent ISU Extension Field Specialists and County Extension Education Directors. ISU Extension is contributing important support to *Shared Visions*, both with leadership at the state level and with the staff time of Extension Field Staff. This support, as well as that being given by the Leopold Center, demonstrate the commitment these collaborators have made to *Shared Visions*.





## SHARED VISIONS HOSTS NET-WORKING CONFERENCE

Earlier this year the W.K. Kellogg Foundation added nine projects to those that were funded through the Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) Initiative last year (see next page). Three to four representatives from each of these 18 projects participated in a networking conference held in Ames during the first week of August.

Networking conferences occur twice a year to encourage mutual learning and the development of strategies and skills for use in each of our projects. The conference last summer in Montana focused on developing leadership skills. The conference in Washington, D.C., last February focused on policy issues.

This summer's conference focused on community building. Participants used a variety of techniques to explore community. Michael Cotter, a story teller and farmer from Austin, Minnesota, helped the group understand the importance of telling stories in exploring community. His input led into an exercise where participants told stories of their experiences with community.

Another powerful exercise involved letting people of different "voices" talk among themselves about what it was like to be a part of that voice



Participants in the IFS networking conference and members of the Greenfield community discuss farming and rural community issues.



while the rest of the participants listened. Learning about what people faced by virtue of who they were helped understanding the importance of diversity for healthy community.

Participants also visited the Dick and Sharon Thompson farm to learn about doing on-farm research and about developing relationships between non-profit groups and land-grant universities.

They next divided into three separate groups to visit *Shared Visions* communities – Greenfield, the Eldora area, and Poweshiek County – to learn more about the efforts of these groups at community building. The Greenfield visit began with a breakfast and a discussion among local leaders about farming and rural communities. The group also visited the Greenfield square and the Neely-Kinyon Research Farm.

The Eldora area visit involved a stop at the Hardin County courthouse, a breakfast and discussion at a rural church in the area, and a visit to the Glen Draper farm. (See the following article for a description of this visit.) The Poweshiek County visit included a stop at a local CRP demonstration site, a breakfast at a local Bed & Breakfast business, and a visit to the Russ Hughes farm.

## FARMERS MEET, SHARE CONCERNS

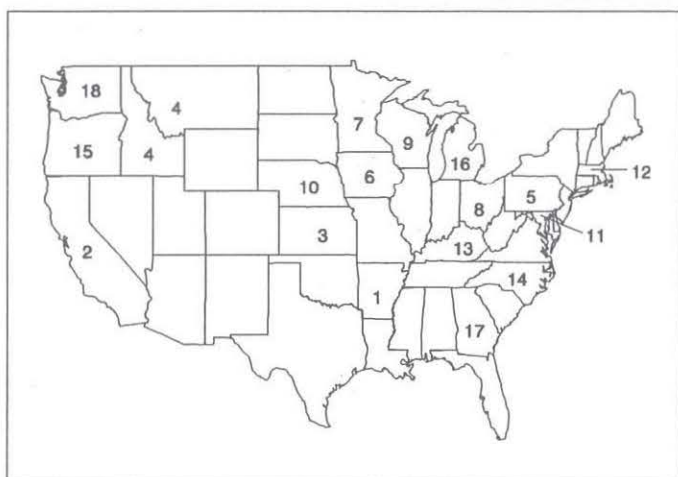
by Rebecca Peterson

(Editors' note: The following article is reprinted with permission from the Saturday, August 6, 1994 edition of the Iowa Falls *Times-Citizen*.)

Farmers from the southeast to the northwest, and everywhere in between, have just one concern in mind: to be good stewards of the land, feed the nation and earn a decent living. Thursday, three dozen of them ate breakfast at the Ivester Church in rural Eldora, finding out just how alike farmers are no matter what they produce.

Afterwards, they drew their chairs in a circle and discussed shared con-

(Continued on next page.)



Location of Integrated Farming Systems projects:

1. Arkansas - Grantee: Arkansas Land & Farm Development Corporation
2. California (*California Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture*) - Grantee: University of California-Santa Cruz
3. Kansas (*The Heartland Network*) - Grantee: Kansas Rural Center
4. Montana/Idaho (*Ag Options Network*) - Grantee: Alternative Energy Resources Organization
5. Pennsylvania (*Regional Infrastructure for Sustaining Agriculture*) - Grantee: Rodale Institute Research Center
6. Iowa (*Shared Visions: Farming for Better Communities*) - Grantee: Practical Farmers of Iowa

7. Minnesota (*Stewardship Farming Program*) - Grantee: Land Stewardship Project

8. Ohio (*The Darby Project*) - Grantee: The Nature Conservancy

9. Wisconsin (*Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial*) - Grantee: The University of Wisconsin

10. Nebraska - Grantee: Center for Rural Affairs

11. Maryland (*Future Harvest: Farming for Profit and Sustainability*) - Grantee: Chesapeake Bay Foundation

12. Massachusetts (*Connecticut River Valley Community Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture*) - Grantee: Hampshire College

13. Kentucky (*Kentucky Leadership for Agricultural and Environmental Sustainability*) - Grantee: Community Farm Alliance

14. North Carolina - Grantee: North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers

15. Oregon (*Marketing and Production Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture*) - Grantee: Oregon State University

16. Michigan (*Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems*) - Grantee: Michigan Agricultural Stewardship Association

17. Georgia (*The Southwest Georgia Alternative Agriculture Project*) - Grantee: University of Georgia

18. Washington (*A Holistic Decision-Making Model for the Development of Sustainable Crop/Livestock and Natural Resource Systems*) - Grantee: Washington State University

(Continued from page 11.)

cerns about trends in agriculture. It seems the Arkansas rice growers are just as worried as Iowans about the increasing age of the average farmer (over 50 in both states).

The sweet corn and green bean farmers in Oregon are afraid corporate farming will lay waste to small towns.

The Kentucky dairy and tobacco farmers aren't sure they can earn a decent living any more producing traditional products.

There were cattle ranchers from Washington, trout producers from North Carolina and winegrape growers from California as well, all trying

to do something about the state of agriculture in the breadbasket of the world.

They were three dozen farmers, representing 18 agriculture groups which recently received W.K. Kellogg Foundation grants, joined by representatives of the Kellogg Foundation from Battle Creek Mich.

Other farmers from the Chesapeake Bay area of Massachusetts, Ohio, Montana, Nebraska, and Georgia came, too. They were among those who traveled to Ames to attend the Kellogg

Foundation's "Building Community" conference. As a side-trip, one third of the conference-goers came to Hardin County to share discussion, and also to hear more about a group







**John Gilbert, a member of the Shared Visions group from the Grundy-Hardin County area, visits Claude Gordon (center) of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Georgia, and Joe Bryant, an Arkansas farmer, during a community visit that was part of the IFS networking conference this summer.**

of Hardin County farmers and ag professionals who won a Kellogg grant themselves.

Farmers from around the country were struck by the numbers presented to them by Hardin County Extension Director Jim Johnson. Between 1987 and 1992 the number of Hardin County farms in the 260-499 acre range in size decreased from 265 to 206.

While large farms increased in numbers, the overall number of farms here declined from 1,065 to 986. Just as alarming, the number of farmers who list farming as their primary source of income dropped by more than 10 percent – in just five years.

These farmers from the mountains and clay soils of other regions of the nation had thought that Iowa and the cornbelt represented the pinnacle of successful agriculture.

They were surprised to learn that the family farm is indeed threatened here and beginning farmers find it nearly impossible to find the capital for the huge start-up costs associated with farming.

While there are government programs that offer financial assis-

tance to beginning farmers, a handful of Hardin County farmers are trying to do more.

The goal of the group is to, first, develop a handbook for new farmers that covers everything a newcomer needs to know to be financially successful. Secondly, the group will try to match young farmers with established farmers who might be willing to share equipment in exchange for labor, or who might sell a farm on contract, for example.

The group offered suggestions and took notes on the points they might take home to their own organizations.

One final point farmers from around the country agreed upon – local ownership and preservation of family-farm lifestyle is a community issue. It is a cause that all economic development interests, merchants and residents must join if they wish to preserve the small-town way of life, representatives said.

And when they left, these varied farmers left gifts representative of their farms – apples from the 1994 Washington crop, rice from Arkansas, cherries and blueberries from Michigan, Georgia pecans and mayhaw jelly, smoked brown trout from North Carolina and wheat from Montana.

Perhaps they took home a better understanding of the common threads among U.S. farmers. 🌾

## **SHARED VISIONS COMMUNITY WORKSHOP PRESENTATION – GREENFIELD, IOWA – AUGUST 4, 1994**

Clark BreDahl

(Editors' note: This is text from a presentation by Clark BreDahl during the visit to Greenfield. Clark farms and is on the Neely-Kinyon Farm Project Committee.)

To share a vision, each of us must first have a vision of our own; a vision of where we would like our business to

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be a few years hence; a vision of what we would like our community to look like, and a perspective as to where our community will fit into the grand scheme of things years down the road. Finally, after we have planted those visions clearly in our minds, we need a plan as to how we will achieve our goals....Without a plan, our visions will never become realities.

From an agricultural perspective, life has perhaps changed more in the past twenty years than it did in the previous two hundred of our nation's existence. And though technology has been frequently mentioned as the culprit, I think it has to be viewed as a two-edged sword that can either help or hinder us. One thing is certain. Technology will not go away. If we do not use it, others will.

The key is getting technology and research to solve problems for us, rather than create new ones. It follows then that to come up with the right answers, we must first ask the right questions. That is where a *Shared Visions* approach can help.

When I survey the changes that have occurred in farming since I came back to the area in 1974, I don't notice the technological or mechanical differences nearly as much as I do the structural changes. When we talk about ninety percent of all fresh vegetables consumed in the United States now being grown in the San Joaquin Valley of California, rather than on scattered farms throughout each state in the Union, that is a fundamental, structural change of overwhelming proportions.

When we talk about chicken surpassing pork and beef to become the most popular meat in the U.S., and six huge conglomerates producing seventy-five percent of all consumption – and controlling all facets of production and processing from hatch to retail meat counter – that is fundamental.

When we talk about California taking over as the leading dairy producing state, and over 50 percent of all dairy production in this country now coming from herds of five hundred head or more – that's fundamental.

How many farmers in Adair County still raise chickens? How



**Clark BreDahl describes research being done on the Neely-Kinyon farm to participants in the IFS networking conference.**

many farmers in Adair County still milk cows? And how many of you came from farm homes like mine where forty years ago the egg check and cream check used to provide the lion's share of our family's spending money? That's fundamental change.

How many times in recent years have you heard someone say, "Somebody's going to farm the land and raise the livestock...What difference does it make who it is?" To me it makes all the difference in the world regarding the quality of life we in rural Iowa will have. For us, people and prosperity may be inseparable. I think we will not have one without the other.

If I am still a farmer 20 years from now – perhaps by some stroke of luck even a wealthy farmer – but my wife has to drive thirty miles for groceries, sixty miles to buy parts for my tractor, twenty miles to the nearest church or school, seventy-five miles to the nearest doctor, hospital or movie theater, or five miles down the road to the nearest neighbor's house, then our own personal financial success will have been a mighty hollow victory. If at that time the local "retirement" home is the largest employer in town, as it is already in some, we will know we have probably passed the point of no return as a viable economic community.

Our federal government has struggled for fifty years to implement





policies to aid in the conservation of our soil and water resources. And regardless of how effective you think those programs have been, it seems to me they have continually overlooked the most obvious solution – the pride involved in maintaining families on the land. I continually marvel that where there is a plan to hand the land down from generation to the next, there is also a plan, usually well implemented, to hand the land down in as good or better shape than it was received.

I heard it once said that, “the difference between family farms and corporate agriculture is that corporations don’t have grandkids!” It’s a simplistic definition, but it’s a profound impact statement.

No question about it, our most valuable crop or resource is not our corn, beans, hogs or cattle, or even our rich fertile soil. It is our young people. And unfortunately they are also our biggest export. We raise bright kids around here. We have good schools, dedicated teachers; parents, friends and churches who teach real values, and communities where a strong work ethic is ingrained early as part of our heritage.

Talk about producing a product the market wants....The big cities gobble up our best and brightest as fast as we can ship them out – and usually pay a handsome premium for quality!

I’m convinced some of those young people would like to stay or return to this area’s farms and small business communities. Many, I think, would even take a substantial pay cut to do it. But when you tell a young couple that in addition, they are going to have to each hold down two

full time jobs (as some economists have suggested as a route to get into farming), the city usually wins the competition hands down.

***I continually marvel that where there is a plan to hand the land down from generation to the next, there is also a plan, usually well implemented, to hand the land down in as good or better shape than it was received.***

our plans accordingly.

What started out as low input farming didn’t stay that way very long. People came to quickly realize there is no such thing as low input farming. The best we can do is substitute inputs: labor for capital, management for capital, marketing skills for production volume. The list could be lengthy. The exciting part is that there are countless ways we can foster economic growth and efficiency on family farms and in small communities without investing millions of dollars at a time to do it. Maybe it shows my conservative streak, but I like that approach much better than the more common corporate philosophy these days of substituting capital for virtually every other tool in the production chain.

***...there is no such thing as low input farming. The best we can do is substitute inputs: labor for capital, management for capital, marketing skills for production volume.***

I am very excited about the prospects for research, education and demonstration at both the Neely and Armstrong farms here in southwest Iowa. We have strong individual and commu-

nity support, combined with Iowa State University’s technology and strong financial commitment. These farms and their accompanying facilities will be powerful tools to give us all the right answers. Hopefully a powerful vision for the future of this area’s farms and communities will first help us ask all the right questions. ☛





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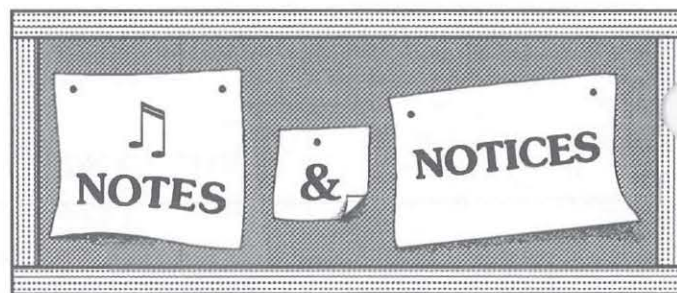
agriculture initiative, in which PFI has been involved the last five years. As past president of the Rural Sociological Society, she is author and editor of a number of recent books, including *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, *Rural Policies for the 1990s*, and *Sustainable Agriculture in Temperate Zones*.



Rural sociologist Cornelia Flora.

Flora was instrumental in developing the 13-part PBS video course on rural America and was also part of the course team for the PBS series *Americas*, which focused on Latin America. She is currently chair of the Technical Committee of the Sustainable Agricultural and Natural Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Project. She has published over 150 book chapters and articles, primarily on rural development in the United States and developing countries, is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and serves as the American Sociological Society's liaison to that organization. Her current research addresses alternative strategies of community development and the relation of those strategies to different forms of community organization and leadership. Cornelia Flora will take part in the workshop on sustainable communities at the PFI winter meeting.

The mission of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) is to encourage rural development research and education programs to improve the social and economic well-being of rural people in the 12-state north central region of the U.S. The NCRCRD also provides leadership by identifying, developing, and supporting programs on the vanguard of emerging issues.



### ♪ IPM Cooperators Sought

If you're bugged by bugs, then take note. As reported in the summer newsletter, PFI will carry out on-farm research and demonstration of Integrated Pest Management in corn and alfalfa. There are still openings for cooperators in this project. Contact Rick Exner at 515-294-1923.

### ♪ Conference Set for Dec. 2-3: The CRP and the Future of Iowa Communities

Farmers and other rural citizens who are concerned about the future of their communities will be gathering in southwest Iowa for a two-day grassroots conference this December. The conference, entitled: *The Conservation Reserve Program and The Future of Rural Communities*, is being sponsored by Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI) and Southwestern Community College (SWCC). It will be held on the campus of SWCC in Creston, IA (the northwest part of town) on Friday and Saturday, December 2 and 3, 1994. The public is encouraged to attend.

In addition to attending workshops on farm practices and government policies, participants in the conference will have the opportunity to give input on the 1995 Farm Bill, President Clinton's Ag Summit, and The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture during an open-microphone session on Friday evening.

Several of the conference workshops will be about practical alternatives for highly erodible land, such as that enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. They include: Rotational Grazing, Low-input Cropping Systems, Organic Farming, and government farm programs that enable farmers to start a crop rotation without losing program ben-



efits. The conference will also feature workshops on Sustainable Start-Up Strategies for Beginning Farmers, Future Legislation Regarding Corporate Hog Facilities, Family Farm Loan Programs, and Policy Recommendations for Government Agencies. The workshop speakers and panelists represent a variety of organizations, networks, and institutions.

For more information about the conference, including a brochure, registration materials, and a list of featured speakers, people can contact Iowa CCI at (515) 266-5213. Conference fees for those who register by November 23<sup>rd</sup> are \$6 per person and \$10 per family. After November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the fees are \$10 per person and \$15 per family.

### ♪ **Soil Health Conference Set**

*Soil Health: The Basis of Current and Future Production* is the title of a Conference to be held December 6-7, in Decatur, Illinois. Researchers and farmers will address a variety of topics and issues in presentations and panel discussions. The program is designed to help participants understand the challenges of measuring soil health and the practical opportunities for improving soil health.

Keynote speakers are Tom Frantzen, past president of Practical Farmers of Iowa, and Pete Nowak, professor in the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a soil and water conservation specialist. Jim Kinsella, an Illinois no-till farmer will speak at the Tuesday dinner. Other presenters include microbiologist John Doran, inventor of the soil health test kit, and earthworm researcher Eileen Kladvko. The conference will conclude with a demonstration and discussion of the soil health test kit on Wednesday afternoon.

Registration is requested by November 18. Cost is \$45 per person until the 18<sup>th</sup>, and \$65 thereafter. To register, send your check to: Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, ISAN, P.O. Box 410, Greenvew, IL 62642 (217-968-5512). You must make your own arrangements for overnight accommodations. The conference will take place at the Holiday Inn Conference Hotel, U.S. Route 36 West

& Wycles Rd., Decatur, IL 62522 (217-422-8800).

### ♪ **IFGC Annual Meeting November 29 in Des Moines**

The annual meeting of the Iowa Forage & Grasslands Council will be November 29, 1994, at the Crystal Inn in Des Moines, which is located directly across from the airport on Fleur Drive. Some presentation titles include "Early Challenges of Short Duration Grazing" and "Preventing Livestock Losses to Predators." The registration fee is \$15. For more information call Joan O'Brien at 1-800-383-1682.

### ♪ **November 30 Conference on Large-Scale Hog Production in Des Moines**

The Church Land Project is sponsoring a conference titled *Community, Church, and Large-Scale Hog Production: Theology and Resolution of Hog Production Conflicts in Rural Communities* in Des Moines on November 30, 1994. The conference is intended to give pastors, church workers, and others tools to address the issue of intensive hog production constructively. Limited space is available. The registration fee is \$9 until November 18, which includes meals, and \$15 at the door, which does not include meals. For information call Joe Dever at 515-270-2634.

### ♪ **December 7 Conference on 1995 Farm Bill in Mason City**

*Changes and Choices for Agriculture and Rural Communities: Impacts of the 1995 Farm Bill* will be held Wednesday, December 7, 1994, at North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) in Mason City. Speakers include: Bob Nash, USDA Under Secretary for Community/Rural Development; Marty Strange, Center for Rural Affairs; Merlin Plagge, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation; Ann Robinson, Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.



Sponsors include the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), ISU Extension, and the ISU Outreach Center on the NIACC campus. Registration fee is \$35 through November 28 and \$40 thereafter. For questions about the program agenda, call Judith Gildner (515-294-6257) or Rich Pirog (515-294-1854). For questions about registration, call the NIACC registration desk (515-421-4358).

### ♪ **January 11 Grazing Workshop Set for Dordt College in Sioux Center**

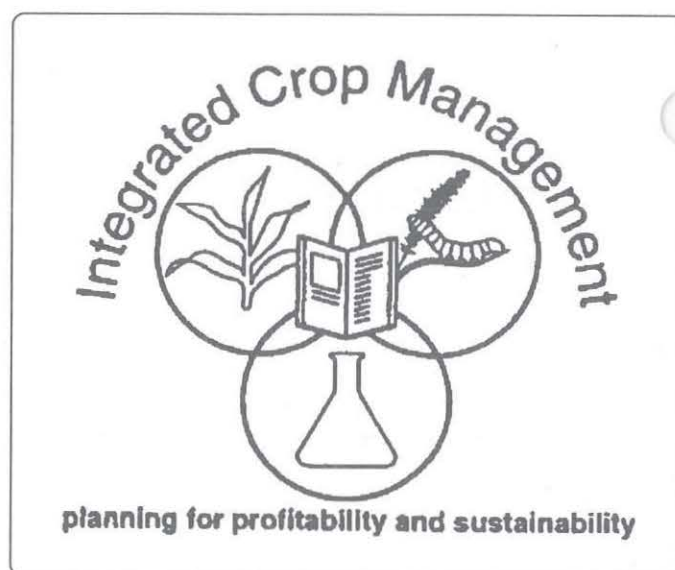
Dordt College is the location of a grazing workshop to be held January 11, 1995. Ben Bartlett, a district dairy/livestock specialist for Michigan State University, will be the keynote speaker and will discuss his experiences with grazing management in Michigan's upper peninsula. There will be a \$15 registration fee. For more information call Joel DeJong at 712-276-2157.

### ♪ **January 17 Forestry Meeting for Farmers in Ames**

The Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners, in cooperation with a variety of agencies and organizations, will sponsor a forestry shortcourse for farmers on January 17, 1995, titled *Alternative Opportunities for Farmers: Opening New Markets*. The shortcourse, which will be held in the Scheman Building at the Iowa State Center in Ames, will feature a variety of concurrent sessions and keynote presentations. Registration fee is \$28 through January 10 and \$35 thereafter. For program information, call Eldon Weber (515-294-0893). For registration information, call Deb Schmidt (515-294-5961).

### ♪ **New ISU Video on Integrated Crop Management Available**

A new 18-minute video on Integrated Crop Management (ICM) is available from Iowa State University. The video provides an overview of ICM and is aimed at producers, crop consultants, and agribusiness retailers. Although the video is free, there is a shipping charge of \$2.19 for in-state



orders and \$2.85 for out-of-state orders. Send a check with orders to ISU Extension Distribution Center, 119 Printing and Publication Building, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 50011-3171.

### ♪ **Two-Day ICM Conference Set for Ames**

An Integrated Crop Management (ICM) conference is set for Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 in the Scheman Building at the Iowa State Center in Ames. The general session will focus on site specific management. Workshops will cover results of innovative research and provide hands-on laboratory sessions. Audiences are agribusiness personnel, crop consultants, soil conservationists, farm managers, agronomists, and persons interested in crop production and protection.

Sponsors are Iowa State University Extension and the departments of Agronomy, Entomology, Plant Pathology, and Agricultural & Biosystems Engineering. Fees, which include refreshments and lunch for both days, are \$100 if postmarked by November 18 and \$110 thereafter. For information call Elaine Hall (515-294-6329).

### ♪ **Ponds, Prairies, and PFI Summer Camp a Success**

Twenty-four youth and six parents attended the three-day *Ponds, Prairies and PFI* camp at the



Iowa 4-H Education and Natural Resources Center in August. Comments from both the parents and the youth were positive. For example, one adult noted, *"Even as a farmer, I learned things I never learned in school about agriculture and how things are interrelated."* Most of the young people simply noted, *"It was fun."* Special thanks to Shelly Gradwell, Molly Havlik, Mike Abbas, and Dan Brouse for making the camp a success. 🌿

## VISION 2020

Ann M. Schultz and Bill Silag

(Editors' note: Ann Schultz is Project Coordinator and Bill Silag is Associate Coordinator of VISION 2020, which is part of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Food Systems Professions Education Initiative.)

VISION 2020 started over a year ago when Kellogg challenged all universities with Colleges of Agriculture to accept their request for proposals for creating a new vision for Food Systems Professions Education (FSPE). Each proposal had to include a design for the visioning process and a partner institution. Iowa State University established a partnership with the Iowa Community Colleges and their partnership was ultimately selected to receive the grant, as well as eleven other land-grant institutions.

Practical Farmers of Iowa was asked to become involved with the project as an external member. Maria Vakulskas Rosmann, as a representative of PFI, attended a symposium in Bloomington, MN, where all twelve institutions met to discuss the project. A Steering Committee made up of twenty members, including Mark Tjelmeland of PFI, will act as an advisory board and a link to their representative groups. Mark farms near McCallsburg in central Iowa. (See the PFI Profile that follows.)

VISION 2020 is designing a visioning process and encourages all interested entities to participate



Participants and counselors for the Ponds, Prairies, and PFI summer camp posed for a group picture.

in this process. In order to be a valid vision, we need your help and support. Opportunities to help include forums at each of Iowa's fifteen community colleges from 7:00 to 9:30 pm on Monday, January 9, 1995, as well as a focus group interview of PFI members that will occur sometime next February.

We will be working with the PFI leadership to facilitate your involvement in these forums and the focus group interview. Also, you can contact Ann Schultz or Bill Silag directly for more information by writing to VISION 2020 at 1126 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, IA, 50011, or by calling 515-294-2092. 🌿

## PFI PROFILES: MARK, CONNIE AND JOHNNY TJELMELAND

Gary Huber

"The first thing that comes to mind is Johnny," Mark Tjelmeland said, glancing to the bright, happy toddler playing on the kitchen floor. "I wonder what the future will hold for him and other kids." Mark's

(Continued on next page.)



thoughts of children were in response to a question about why he is involved with VISION 2020, a project aimed at planning an education system to prepare people for the food systems of the next century. (See the previous article.)

Mark and Connie Tjelmeland clearly feel that family is an important part of the farming life they have chosen. "A whole lot of life's lessons can be learned by working alongside mom and dad on the farm," Connie noted. "For example, our chickens are a good teaching tool," she continued. "They're safe for children to be around, and when Johnny is with me when I take care of them, there are so many things he learns about."

Johnny's fondness for the chickens was obvious as we walked around yard. "Mine," he noted with the innocence of a two-year-old as he pointed to the hens near the fenceline.

Connie continued, "For example, he is learning to count. As I pick eggs I count them out loud, and he repeats after me, 'six, two, four'. The chickens are also a nice way to teach a child about working together as a family, as well as about appreciating animals."

Mark and Connie farm 600 acres of row crops near McCallsburg, which is about 20 miles north-east of Ames. They have been PFI members since the group started ten years ago, though Mark noted, "We're not nearly as far along as a lot of the PFI farmers."



Connie, Mark and Johnny Tjelmeland of rural McCallsburg

"Our biggest success," Mark continued, "and the thing we are most proud of is our efforts at nitrogen management. We've been using the late spring nitrate test ever since it came out. We put on half – about 70 pounds – pre-plant with the herbicide, and we use the test to see if we need to sidedress."

***"The chickens are also a nice way to teach a child about working together as a family, as well as about appreciating animals."***

In the seven years they've used the test, twice no additional nitrogen was needed and twice the nitrogen they applied pre-plant was essentially gone, meaning they needed to sidedress at a full rate. "It works both ways," Mark noted. "In wet years it tells you if you need to up your sidedress rates, and in dry years it tells you if you don't need any additional nitrogen."

As a check, the Tjelmeland's have put on additional nitrogen even though the test said none was needed, and they were unable to find any yield differences. "I have a major degree of confidence in the test," Mark continued, "and it has lots of potential, but it is way underutilized."

Other row crop practices are fairly typical of Iowa farmers. Tillage involves chisel plowing or disking depending on the field, using a pre-plant herbicide for grass control, and banding or broadcasting for broadleaf weeds depending on the situation.

Mark and Connie also have 20 acres in CRP, and their long-term plans for this land are not as typical. A small area near their buildings was bid into CRP under the wetlands provisions, and here they want to restore a wetland. One tile through the pothole has already been plugged. They have since identified another, which they plan to replace with solid tile.

The hoped-for result would be a nice, easily observable wildlife area. An additional hope of Connie's, which probably is an outgrowth of her



work in environmental education, is to see the wetland used for educational purposes for local young people. "An appreciation for the environment and the importance of creating wildlife habitat should be encouraged in young people" she noted, "as well as an understanding of why it is

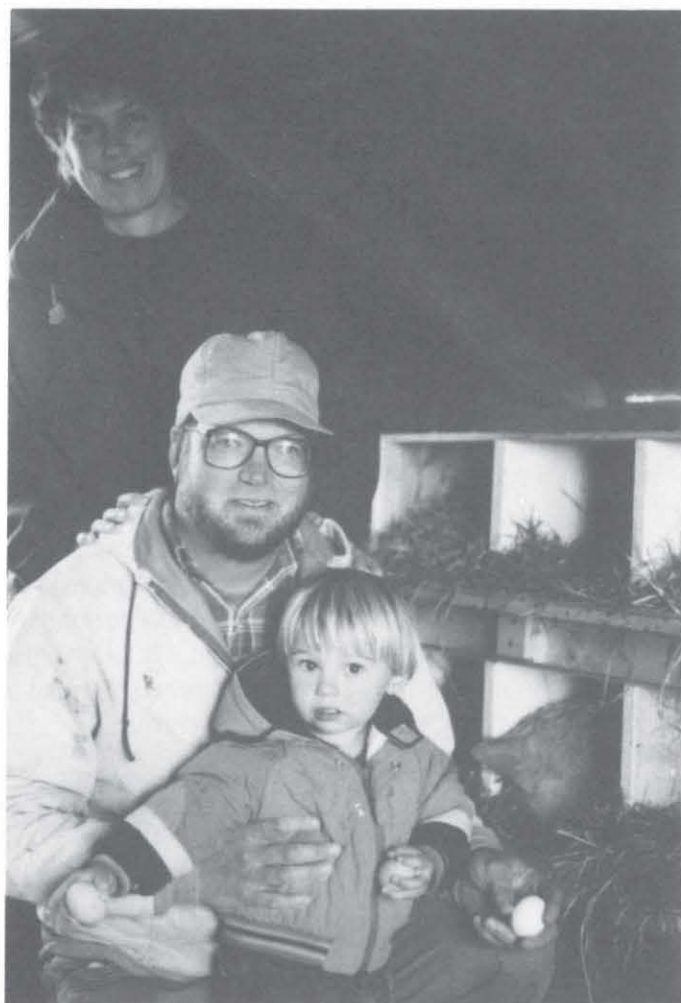
***"With all the enjoyment we've had out of these CRP acres, we'd like to try to maintain some of that diversity."***

important not to use every square inch of land for production."

The Tjelmelands other CRP land is in switchgrass, and for this Mark and Connie are thinking about grazing options. They've bought some holstein steers to get some experience with cattle, and their goal is to maintain these CRP acres in forage through grazing. As Mark noted, "With all the enjoyment we've had out of these CRP acres, we'd like to try to maintain some of that diversity."

The Tjelmelands have added diversity to their operation this year with 100 laying hens. They are selling eggs to local customers, and they are giving some thought to marketing eggs on a wider basis, taking advantage of the fact that their chickens are free-range and are not fed antibiotics. They've done some investigating of USDA requirements for marketing through area retail outlets. However, Connie noted, "We need to see if there is a market that would support the extra work required."

Connie and Mark, like a lot of Iowa farmers, are uncertain about the future of raising hogs. They typically buy feeder pigs twice a year – in early March and again in July or August – and finish them out. For the group they have now, they figured they needed \$36 per hundredweight to get a \$7 return to labor and management per head. Right now it doesn't look like they'll recover their costs. They aren't sure what they'll do next spring, though Mark notes that the facilities they have can be used for something else if buying feeder pigs doesn't pencil out.



**The Tjelmelands with their chickens.**

Mark and Connie both pointed to the key role their parents have played in helping them get established in farming, as well as the continuing role they play. They noted that there were five adults involved in the harvest this fall – Mark and Connie, Mark's mom and dad, and Connie's mom. "There is something about having all those people involved that is pleasing," Connie explained. Mark continued by noting, "Intergenerational farming is a real valuable asset, but it's often lost because of difficulties in working out relationships."

***"Intergenerational farming is a real valuable asset, but it's often lost because of difficulties in working out relationships."***

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Mark noted how he and his dad had gone to a seminar on intergenerational farming where the speaker told how time and again former students would come to talk, sometimes nearly in tears, about how they had gone home to farm, but things didn't work out. The speaker went on to note the importance of realistic expectations involving matters such as shared management and meshing the new knowledge of the sons or daughters into the practices of the operation. Careful listening was also stressed as a key need for successful intergenerational farming. "We and our parents have taken what he said to heart," Mark noted, "and it has really been a help."

The Tjelmeland's recognize this is a time of transition for farming, but they find many pleasures in their chosen way of life. "Farming will probably never be real profitable," Mark noted, "but benefits like the enjoyment of nature and the environment make up for some of what it lacks in terms of money."

Mark and Connie also feel strongly about being engaged in efforts to try to shape a better future for the next generation of farmers. "The university has an important role in helping enhance some of the better aspects of life in rural Iowa," added Mark in response to why he is involved in VISION 2020.



## A VISIT TO THE SWEDISH HOG SYSTEM

Dan Wilson, Paullina

(Editors' note: Brothers Dan and Colin Wilson and their wives Lorna and Carla farm in O'Brien County, in northwest Iowa, where they raise hogs using both pasture farrowing and some confinement.)

On Sept. 19, 1994, nine farmers and university personnel from Iowa and Minnesota, along with our tour organizer, Marlene Halverson, flew out of Minneapolis on our way to Stockholm, Sweden. Why were we going to Sweden? First of all we were going to see what the Västgötamodell hog system was all about. We were also going to see what the Swedish hog industry as a whole looked like after not being able to use feed grade antibiotics or

(Continued on page 25.)

## PFI SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS 1995 TO FUND GOOD IDEAS

Good ideas are seldom in short supply on PFI farms, but sometimes they need a little nudge to turn them into reality. That is where *PFI Sustainable Projects* is designed to help. The program makes small grants to Iowans with ideas – ideas for projects, educational efforts, on-farm trials, and so on. About the only thing off limits in the program

***Sustainable Projects will accept proposals until Feb. 1, 1995.***

is major input and equipment purchases (see guidelines on the application form, opposite).

*Sustainable Projects* will accept proposals until Feb. 1, 1995. (You won't get a reminder before then, so put this application form somewhere handy!) A committee of PFI members and ISU collaborators will review these proposals and determine by March 1 which ones will be accepted. Since 1990, *Sustainable Projects* has approved 34 project proposals from Iowans. In 1994, seven projects were accepted, for a total of \$3,150. Here are the 1994 projects:

- Dan Specht, McGregor – Prairie Legume Nursery
- John and Rosie Wurpts, Ogden – Biological vs. Conventional Fertilizer
- Dordt College, Sioux Center – Controlled Grazing vs. Feedlot
- Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone – Night Planting to Reduce Weeds
- Steve Hopkins and Sarah Andreasen, Decorah – Intensive Rotational Grazing Study
- Jeff and Gayle Olson, Winfield – Management Intensive Grazing in Narrow Strip Intercropping
- Jim Green, Riceville Community Schools – Corn Population and Soybean Tillage Comparisons





# SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS 1995

## PROPOSAL FORM

### PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA

*Sustainable Projects* is designed to help citizens of Iowa carry out activities that focus on agriculture and the environment. Sustainable agriculture has been described as preserving the soil and water resources as well as the people involved in agriculture. What could a Sustainable Project be? Maybe you want to undertake an on-farm trial like those used by the farmer cooperators in Practical Farmers of Iowa. Maybe you would like to create a specific program for the local school or FFA that teaches about the relationship of farming to the environment. Perhaps you are part of a group that needs some support to have an educational booth at the county fair. Maybe you could use some funding to bring your community leaders together on a related issue. Be creative!

Proposals for up to several hundred dollars will be accepted. (PFI cooperators, for example, receive up to \$400 for an on-farm trial.) It is legitimate to include in the proposal payment for your own time. Itemize labor and other costs in the budget you submit. Large equipment purchases will *not* be funded; however, equipment leasing may be used in proposals to defray equipment costs.

In return for funding your Sustainable Project, we ask that you agree to share both the results and the *process* that you went through carrying out the project. That will help us to build on past experience and share the successes of the program. A credible "feedback," or reporting plan is one of the criteria on which proposals will be evaluated! Plan on sharing your project with a poster or display at the PFI annual meeting.

Projects will be chosen by a committee consisting of PFI members and board representatives, the PFI coordinators, and representatives of ISU and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Proposals for 1995 are due by Feb. 1. Committee decisions will be announced by March 1. Project reimbursement will be made upon receipt of a final report.

Please return this proposal form to: Practical Farmers of Iowa, 2104 Agronomy Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Name of Project \_\_\_\_\_

Name Submitting \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

(OVER, PLEASE)

Please print or type. Use additional paper if needed.  
Please include an itemized budget.

Please describe the problem that this project will address and why there is a need for the project.

Please describe what you will do in the planned project. Be specific.

How will you communicate to the public about the project? What kind of reporting to Sustainable Projects will you carry out?

What is the amount of money you need to carry out the proposed project? Please itemize.



(Wilson, continued from page 22.)

growth promotants since 1986. Sweden also has much stricter animal rights and environmental laws than we have in this country.

So what is the Västgötamodell system? This system is commonly referred to as the "family pen." There are two versions of the system: the Ljungström version and the Thorstensson version. In the Thorstensson version, sows farrow in temporary wooden pens that are about 6 ft. by 8 ft. and 4 ft. high, with a door in the short side. The pen doors have thresholds that are about 14 inches high, with a roller on top to protect the sow's udder. These pens are set up along the outside walls of the nursery rooms. These rooms provide 70 to 80 square feet of floor space per sow and litter (family). In each room there are 8 to 16 families. We did see one farm where they had 22 sows per room, which was too many sows in one group, so they had divided the room into an area for 10 families and an area for 12 families.

Even numbers of sows seem to work better than odd numbers per group. The sows are introduced to the farrowing boxes (pens) about five days before they are to farrow. When the sows are first introduced to the boxes, the boxes are the only area of the room that has been bedded. The boxes are bedded quite deeply by our standards, eight to ten inches of straw to start with. Along one side of the room there is a five-foot-wide raised platform where the sow feeders and a creep for the pigs is located. When all sows in one room have farrowed, the entire pen is bedded. The farrowing period per room



Along one side of the room there is a five-foot-wide raised platform where the sow feeders and a creep for the pigs is located.

should never be longer than one week. When the pigs are ten to fourteen days old, or when the pigs start to jump out of the boxes, the boxes are removed and the families have access to the entire room.

***Most gestating sows in Sweden are housed in large, deep-bedded pens because gestation stalls are outlawed.***

Each room receives one or two (depending on room size) 800 lb. round bales of straw per week until the pigs are removed from the room. No manure is removed from the room until the room is cleaned between groups. Each room is operated on an all-in/all-out basis.

The sows stay with their pigs for five to six weeks, at which time the pigs are weaned. When the pigs are weaned, the sows are removed and the pigs stay where they are until they reach 50 lbs. One of the ladies whose farm we visited told us it is very easy to wean pigs in this system; you simply let the sow feeders go empty, and when the sows get hungry you open the door, sprinkle some feed in the walkway, the sows come out after the feed, and the pigs stay where they are – a very easy way to move sows.

In the Ljungström version, the farrowing takes place in a separate room, where the sows farrow in permanent pens or farrowing stalls. The families are then moved into the family rooms when the pigs are about 14 days old. Where the sows farrow is the only difference between the two versions; other than that they are identical.

Most gestating sows in Sweden are housed in large, deep-bedded pens because gestation stalls are outlawed. In the family pen system all sows and boars are also kept in deep-bedded pens, with anywhere from eight to 35 sows per pen. There are different parities of sows kept in the same pen. This is done on purpose, because the Swedes feel the older sows teach the younger ones the ways of the system. Along one side of the sow pens there are feeding stalls; all of the gestating sows that we saw were fed in stalls.

(Continued on next page.)



That is a brief description of the physical layout of the facilities. Now let me give you some personal observations and opinions about the family pen system. There were several things that really caught my attention when I first walked into each of the different buildings. In the Thorstensson version the first thing that impressed me was how quiet it was. There were no rattling gates and no fan noise (the fans were in the attic so there would be no noise). The only sounds that you heard were sows talking to their pigs and the occasional sound of a sow eating at the feeder or drinking.

In all the buildings the hogs seemed very contented and very thrifty. All of the sows were very tame. I walked into one of the family rooms, and an old sow walked up to me and leaned against me. She wanted to have her ears scratched. We saw very little fighting in the sow pens, even though there were eighth parity sows and second parity sows in the same pen. There also was very little dust in any of the buildings. But the thing that really caught your attention was that there was NO SMELL in any of the buildings. Ask anyone that was there, and they will agree there was no smell. We went from the hog barns into a restaurant – no shower in between and no one could tell where we had been.

***We went from the hog barns into a restaurant – no shower in between and no one could tell where we had been.***

So can this system be used in the U.S.? I think so, if you do some adapting. First of all, we cannot spend as much on building costs as the Swedes do because we do not have the profit margins that they have. The place where I think this system will work the best is where you have older buildings that can be remodeled. We saw two older dairy barns where this system fit in nicely and was working well. If you are going to build new, you are going to have to be very creative in keeping your building as inexpensive as possible (hoop houses might work for everything from farrowing to finishing).

The gestating part of the system would probably be where you could use the most creativity in building design and pen layout. Planning the pens



**Pen doors have thresholds that are about 14 inches high, with a roller on top to protect the sow's udder.**

so more than one group of sows could use each feeding stall would be one way to cut expense. Another hurdle that has to be crossed is the whole area of where do you get enough bedding. In Sweden they figure two tons of straw per sow per year in a feeder pig-producing operation. In the Midwest we can probably substitute cornstalks or maybe paper. If you live in an area where there are lots of small grains grown, straw is no problem. It may even be beneficial for all of our farms if we just planned on growing more small grains.

So why even try to make the family pen system work in this country? Because if you can make it work you have a system that is VERY FRIENDLY to the herdsman, the pig, the environment, the neighbors, and, hopefully, your pocket book.

If this article raises more questions than it answers, come to the PFI annual meeting, where there will be a panel discussion on alternative methods of raising hogs. The family pen system will be presented as one of the options. 🐷

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF BUYING IOWA-GROWN FOOD**

Kamyar Enshayan, Cedar Falls

**(Editors' note: Kamyar Enshayan, a PFI member, teaches at the University of Northern Iowa.)**

I remember my childhood years in a small town in northern Iran, I rode my bicycle to the market



two or three times a week to buy food for our family. Almost all of the produce and other food sold at the market were locally-grown, in-season, and very delicious. The money spent on food circulated in the community and supported local farmers and other local businesses.

Until a few years ago, when I worked as a farm apprentice at a vegetable farm in Maine, I used to think that our food choices were limited to what was shipped in from distant places. I now know that it is possible to grow a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, and other food right here in Iowa, even with minimal or no need for agrochemicals,

From mid-May to early November, Iowa farmers markets offer a vast array of fresh food: asparagus, peas, lettuce, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, maple syrup, and all kinds of flower and vegetable seedlings early in the season to pumpkins, winter squash, apples and a fall crop of greens in late October.

The variety, freshness, nutritional quality and taste of these fresh-picked, locally grown foods cannot be matched. There is no substitute for locally grown food. Artificially cheap, subsidized oil has made it possible for us to ignore our local food economy in favor of shipped-in food.

Students who take my class at University of Northern Iowa keep track of what they eat and where it comes from. They quickly discover that very little of what they eat comes from Iowa. An average food item served in our homes in Iowa has travelled some 2,000 miles, by-passing the local food economy.

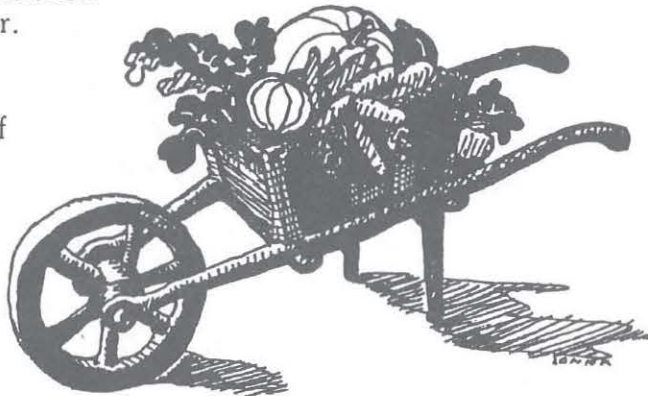
When we buy locally grown food, we support our local and regional farms, farmers, and rural communities. Our food dollars are circulated in our region. Let's assume that some 50,000 households in Blackhawk County and surrounding counties decided to spend \$20 (of their weekly \$70 grocery expenditure) buying locally grown food. That would be \$1,000,000 every week poured into the local

***When we buy locally grown food, we support our local and regional farms, farmers, and rural communities. Our food dollars are circulated in our region.***

economy, supporting farmers, businesses and communities.

That is \$1,000,000 which does not leak out of northeast Iowa and instead circulates in our local economy every week. In addition, if hospitals, churches, colleges, restaurants and other institutional food buyers make a point of buying Iowa-grown food as much possible, we will have even more wealth and support for our local

food economy. At a time when our communities are reduced to accepting various forms of gambling (including assembly-line hog factories) as "economic development," keeping our food dollars in our community seems far more attractive and logical than bingo.



There are many ways that we Iowans can support and strengthen our regional food economy:

- As much as you can, buy locally-grown food at our many farmers markets.
- Get to know some of your local farmers and buy eggs, meat, and produce directly from them.
- When possible, you may wish to buy larger quantities of fresh produce from farmers markets for canning or freezing and enjoy them in winter months.
- If you can, grow a garden to develop a connection to soil and plants and to nurture your spirit while growing fresh produce of your own.

But what sort-of Iowa-grown food could we eat here in winter months? A partial list of fresh, Iowa-

(Continued on next page.)



grown food for October through April could include: potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots and a host of other root crops, dry beans, onions, garlic, dried fruit, dried herbs, chickens, pork, beef, lamb, wheat, eggs, milk, cheese, . . . a modest list indeed. Needless to say, home canning and freezing can extend the season for regionally grown food. Re-establishment of small-scale, local canneries can help us strengthen our regional food economy by allowing farmers and home gardeners to market their products beyond the growing season.

When we support regional food production, we in a direct way encourage a more diversified form of agriculture which is not entirely dependent on corn, soybeans and hogs with their vulnerable markets controlled by absentee corporations. A diversified agriculture that produces a wide variety of food (not just feed) is a practical necessity for our region. It would be good for Iowa, good for our health, good for our land and our communities, and therefore good for our economy. 🌱

## UNNECESSARY FERTILIZATION: A SILENT DRAIN OF DOLLARS FROM FARM COMMUNITIES

Alfred M. Blackmer

**(Editors' note: This article by ISU professor of agronomy Fred Blackmer continues our series on the study coordinated by the Northwest Area Foundation. Blackmer's team did much of the on-farm data collection for the Iowa component of the project. This essay will appear in a book summarizing the study results, *Planting the Future: Developing an Agriculture That Sustains Land and Community* (ISU Press, \$14.95, available after January).**

Recent agronomic studies in Iowa show that most corn producers could increase their profits by applying less commercial fertilizer. The studies utilized new soil and plant tissue tests calibrated to objectively determine the extent to which nutrient availability exceeds crop needs.

Surveys of randomly selected fields have documented the frequency and magnitude of the problem. About half of the cornfields sampled had soil nitrate concentrations greater than twice those needed to attain maximum yields.

Integration of the new soil and tissue tests into on-farm experiments revealed that farmers tend to apply commercial fertilizer in situations where none is needed. Most farmers are surprised to learn that it is not profitable to apply commercially prepared nitrogen fertilizers for corn grown after alfalfa or to soils receiving normal applications of animal manures.

Implementation of the new tests into production agriculture would enable Iowa corn producers to increase their profits while reducing inputs of nitrogen fertilizers by at least \$100 million per year. No change in cropping systems would be required. Inputs of phosphorus and potassium fertilizers could be reduced by tens of millions of dollars per year in Iowa alone.

It could be argued that the savings on fertilizer are relatively unimportant, especially if farmers must pay the costs for the soil and tissue tests. However, dollars spent for local consulting services tend to remain and circulate in farm communities. Dollars spent for fertilizer materials tend to flow from farm communities to large corporations outside of farm communities.

The new soil and tissue tests should promote changes in farming systems, as farmers gain the ability to determine fertilizer needs in alternative systems on their fields. For example, farmers who learn that manured cornfields require little or no commercial fertilizer may reconsider the merits of integrating crop and animal production.

Perhaps the most important information provided by studies with the new tests is that farmers do not know the amounts of fertilizer needed on their fields. Without diagnostic tools like the new soil and

**. . . dollars spent for local consulting services tend to remain and circulate in farm communities. Dollars spent for fertilizer materials tend to flow from farm communities to large corporations outside of farm communities.**



tissue tests, farmers have no reasonable means of detecting when unnecessary fertilizers are applied. Unnecessary fertilization cannot be seen or heard by farmers.

Current perceptions concerning fertilizer needs are the product of several decades of cooperation between government and industry to develop new fertilizers and promote their use. These programs have been very effective and have greatly increased the amounts of fertilizer used. The potential beneficial effects of fertilizers on farm productivity and profitability have been widely touted. Relatively little effort has been directed toward evaluating the extent of unnecessary fertilization or assessing its costs to farm communities.

Widespread concern about environmental pollution has generated support for publicly funded programs to improve fertilization practices. These programs have helped farmers recognize the problems caused by inefficient fertilization practices. Much of the effort, however, has been directed toward developing and promoting products that can be sold to farmers. Examples include chemical additives designed to inhibit transformations of the fertilizer in soils. Use of these products often increases the cost of crop production and accelerates the flow of dollars from farm communities.

Many local fertilizer dealers and consultants in Iowa have demonstrated great willingness to offer the new soil and tissue tests as a service to their customers. Recent reports indicate that average rates of nitrogen fertilization in Iowa have decreased by 19% during the past few years. However, most farmers still prefer to pay for extra fertilizer rather than for the tests. The large corporations that manufacture fertilizers have shown little interest in developing or promoting such tests.

The results of the studies point to a clear need for redirecting publicly funded programs toward developing and promoting tools that enable better management decisions on farms. Although it is extremely difficult for farmers and small businesses to develop and promote new technologies that effectively reduce sales of fertilizers and chemicals, they can utilize and advance these new technologies after they are developed and accepted.

## ***The flow of information and technologies made available to farmers clearly has great impact on how dollars flow through farms and farm communities.***

The flow of information and technologies made available to farmers clearly has great impact on how dollars flow through farms and farm communities. Continued lack of public funding for programs that target unnecessary fertilization will undoubtedly result in a continuing silent drain of dollars from farm communities.

### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Blackmer, A. M., T. F. Morris, and G. D. Binford. 1992. Predicting N [nitrogen] fertilizer needs for corn in humid regions: Advances in Iowa. In *Predicting N fertilizer needs in humid regions*, ed. B.R. Bock and K.R. Kelley. Bulletin V226. National Fertilizer and Environmental Research Center, Tennessee Valley Authority, Muscle Shoals, AL 35660.



## **CONSERVING COMMUNITIES**

Wendell Berry

**(Editors' note: The following is from a talk entitled *Conserving Communities*, given by Wendell Berry at the 1994 campout at Seed Savers Exchange, in Decorah. We reprint it here with their kind permission. The entire address appears in the *Seed Savers 1994 Harvest Edition*.)**

... the old opposition of country and city, which was never useful, is now more useless than ever. It is, in fact, damaging to everybody involved, as is the opposition of producers and consumers. These are not differences but divisions – divisions that ought not to exist because they are to a considerable extent artificial, trumped up for the sake of illegitimate advantages. The so-called urban

**(Continued on next page.)**



economy has been just as hard on urban communities as it has been on rural ones.

These conventional affiliations are now meaningless, useful only to those in a position to profit from public bewilderment. A new political scheme of opposed parties, however, is beginning to take form. This is essentially a two-party system, and it divides over the fundamental issue of community. One of these parties holds that community has no value, the other holds that it does. One is the party of the global economy; the other I would call simply the party of local community. The global party is large, though not populous, immensely powerful and wealthy, self-aware, purposeful and tightly organized. The community party is only now becoming aware of itself, it is widely scattered, highly diverse, small though potentially numerous, weak though latently powerful, and poor though by no means without resources.

We know pretty well the makeup of the party of the global economy, but who are the members of the party of local community? They are people who take a generous and neighborly view of self-preservation; they do not believe that they can survive and flourish by the rule of dog-eat-dog; they do not believe that they can succeed by defeating or destroying or using up everything but themselves. They want to preserve the precious things of nature

***...who are the members of the party of local community? They are people who take a generous and neighborly view of self-preservation;***

and of human culture, and pass them on to their children. They want the world's fields and forests to be productive; they do not want them to be destroyed for the sake of production. They know you cannot be a democrat (small d) or a conservationist and at the same time a proponent of the supranational corporate economy. They believe – they know from their experience – that the neighborhood, the local community, is the proper place and reference of responsible life and work. They see that no commonwealth or community of interest can be defined by greed. They know that things connect – that farming, for example, is connected

to nature, and food to farming, and health to food – and they want to preserve the connections. They know that a healthy local community cannot be replaced by a market or an entertainment industry or an information highway. They know that, contrary to all the unmeaning and unmeant political talk about “job creation,” work ought not to be merely a bone thrown to the otherwise unemployed. They know that work ought to be necessary – it ought to be good, it ought to be satisfying and dignifying to the people who do it, and genuinely useful and pleasing to the people for whom it is done.

The party of local community, then, is a real party with a real platform and an agenda of real and doable work. And it has, we might add, a respectable history in the hundreds of efforts, over several decades, to preserve local nature or local health or to sell local products to local consumers. Now such efforts appear to be coming into their own, attracting interest and energy in a way they have not done before. People are seeing more clearly all the time the connections between conservation and economics. They are seeing that a community's health is largely determined by the way it makes its living. The natural membership of the community party consists of small farmers, ranchers and market gardeners, worried consumers, owners and employees of small shops, stores and other small businesses, community banks, self-employed people, religious people and conservationists. The aims of this party really are only two: the preservation of ecological diversity and integrity, and the renewal, on sound cultural and ecological principles, of local economies and local communities.

And now we must ask how a sustainable local community (which is to say a sustainable local economy) might function. I am going to suggest a set of rules that I think such a community would have to follow. And I hasten to say that I do not understand these rules as predictions; I am not interested in foretelling the future. If these rules have any validity, that is because they apply now.

Supposing that the members of a local community wanted their community to cohere, to flourish, and to last, they would:

- (1) Always ask of any proposed change or innovation: What, will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?



***People are seeing more clearly all the time the connections between conservation and economics. They are seeing that a community's health is largely determined by the way it makes its living.***

- (2) Always include local nature – the land, the water, the air, the native creatures – within the membership of the community.
- (3) Always ask how local needs might be supplied from local sources, including the mutual help of neighbors.
- (4) Always supply local needs first, and only then think of exporting products.
- (5) The community must understand the ultimate unsoundness of the industrial doctrine of “labor saving” if that implies poor work, unemployment, or any kind of pollution or contamination.
- (6) If it is not to be merely a colony of the national or the global economy, the community must develop properly scaled value-adding industries for local products.
- (7) It must also develop small-scale industries and businesses to support the local farm and/or forest economy.
- (8) It must strive to produce as much of its own energy as possible.
- (9) It must strive to increase earnings (in whatever form) within the community, and decrease expenditures outside the community.
- (10) Money paid into the local economy should circulate within the community for as long as possible before it is paid out.
- (11) If it is to last, a community must be able to afford to invest in itself – it must maintain its properties, keep itself clean (without dirtying some other place), care for its old people, teach its children.
- (12) The old and the young must take care of one another. The young must learn from the old, not necessarily and not always in school. There must be no institutionalized “child care” and “homes for the aged.” The community knows and remembers itself by the association of old and young.
- (13) Costs now conventionally hidden or “externalized” must be accounted for. Whenever possible they must be debited against monetary income.
- (14) Community members must look into the possible uses of local currency, community-funded loan programs, systems of barter, and the like.
- (15) They should always be aware of the economic value of neighborliness – as help, insurance, and so on. They must realize that in our time the costs of living are greatly increased by the loss of neighborhood, leaving people to face their calamities alone.
- (16) A rural community should always be acquainted with, and complexly connected with, community-minded people in nearby towns and cities.
- (17) A sustainable rural economy will be dependent on urban consumers loyal to local products. Therefore, we are talking about an economy that will always be more cooperative than competitive.

These rules are derived from western political and religious traditions, from the promptings of ecologists and certain agriculturists, and from common sense. They may seem radical, but only because the modern, national and global economies have been formed in almost perfect disregard of community and ecological interests. A community economy is not an economy in which well-placed persons can make a “killing.” It is not a killer economy. It is an economy whose aim is generosity and a well distributed and safeguarded abundance. If it seems unusual for modern people to hope and work for such an economy, then we must remind ourselves that a willingness to put the good of the community ahead of profit is hardly unprecedented among community business people and local banks.



## FROM THE KITCHEN

Marj Stonecypher, Floyd, Iowa

Beans are harvested and now we are full swing into harvesting our corn. Tony is hauling corn for me, so I can give you all a couple of my "busy farm wife" recipes.

### CHICKEN or SIRLOIN STEAK CASSEROLE

- 1 can chicken noodle soup
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 can Swanson Chicken or  
1 to 1½ cup left-over chicken
- 1 cup evaporated milk or cream
- 2 cups chow mein noodles

For sirloin steak I use 1½ cup of baked or grilled sirloin steak in place of chicken and 1 can cream of mushroom soup in place of cream of chicken.

Mix all together and put on casserole. Sprinkle with desired melted butter mix in seasoned bread crumbs.




Bake 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes or until set in center.

### Microwave: CRAZY MIXED UP CAKE

- 1 ⅓ cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 Tbsp. cocoa
- 1 tsp. soda
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ¼ cup oil
- 1 Tbsp. vinegar
- ¾ cup water or coffee

Sift dry ingredients into round baking dish. Make 3 holes. Pour vanilla in one, oil in one and vinegar in third. Pour water or coffee overall. Stir very well with fork till blended. Smooth batter higher toward outside edges (I place a "shot glass" in the center to conduct the heat more evenly). Bake on half power 4-5 minutes, then full power 2-3 minutes or till top springs back when touched. (time depends on the power of your microwave). Serve plain, dust with powdered sugar, whip cream or a la mode.

Have a safe harvest. Take a break, go to the house for meals. We do. 

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**2035 190<sup>th</sup> St.**  
**Boone, IA 50036-9632**



## FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

### Thinking About the Weak Link

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

In my last *Footprints* article, the value of using a positive mental attitude in developing a sustainable agriculture was highlighted. This positive attitude enables us to vision a sustainable farm as a tract of land that captures the energy of the sun and somehow converts it into saleable products in a lasting fashion. This concept can become a valuable management tool for farmers.

When sunlight falls upon our rich soil, plants grow. Whether these plants are traditional crops, like corn and soybeans, forages, woody crops, or even weeds, this growing process is energy conversion. Two important points should be kept in mind. One is that the sun is our only truly sustainable energy form. The other is that when the sun falls upon bare soil during the growing season, energy is lost forever. Energy conversion from the sunlight is the first link in the solar chain. This chain can eventually lead to a saleable product.

Upon reaching a certain stage of maturity, plants are ready for us to harvest them. Forage plants can be converted directly into meat or milk production by the animal. Grain crops are usually mechanically harvested, then either fed to livestock (product conversion) or sold as a cash crop. Efficient conversion of bulk plant growth into a saleable product is the central link in any profitable farm.

Marketing is the third link in this process. Our best efforts to grow and convert bulk grains and forages into saleable products fall short when we cannot market this production at enough of a profit to sustain our families. In addition to our family financial needs, enough profit must be generated to allow for reinvestment.

These connected chain links now form a complete production circle. A more detailed explanation of this concept can be found in Alan Savory's *Holistic Resource Management* (Island Press, 1988). We can observe our farming activities and measure their performance with this concept.

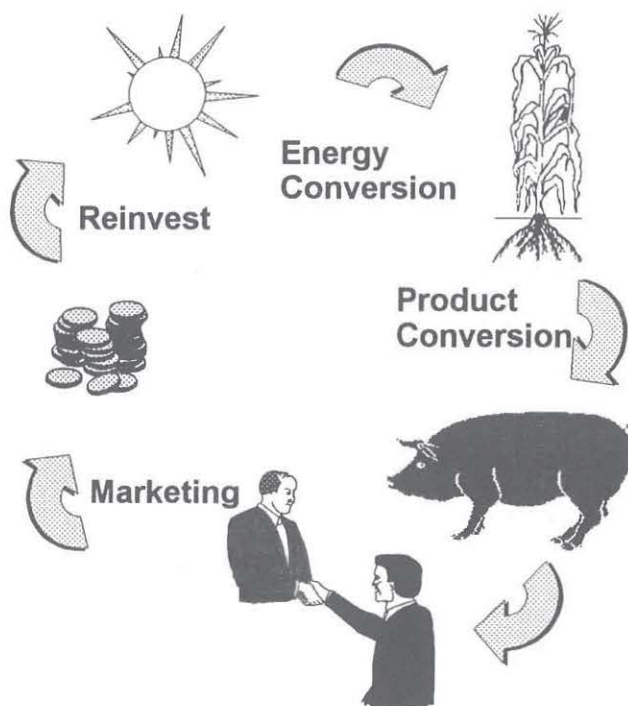
How can we use this model to develop the sustainable agriculture that we want on our farms? We can begin by examining our farm's sunlight-to-

reinvestment chain for its weak link. Any chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Investments of our capital and our labor must be directed towards this weakest link once it has been uncovered. For example, an investment to grow higher yielding crops would do little good if these crops were not efficiently converted into a product that can be sold. Here the weak link would be product conversion.

On our farm, the weak link has been converting grown crops into products. We identified this characteristic of our operation shortly after completing the basic course in Holistic Resource Management (HRM) three years ago. To address this weak link, we improved feed efficiency with better swine genetics, reduced processing cost by eliminating the grinding of sow feed, and began routine weight checks of growing pigs to track their performance. Co-mingled, planned grazing of purchased stocker cattle with the gestating sow herd also improved the conversion of existing forages into livestock product.

Attention to this weak link improved the financial performance of our farm. However, a basic principle of HRM is that a weak link can shift. During the past months, there is little doubt in my mind that it has definitely shifted to marketing. We are currently directing our resources to address this situation. My next column will detail this more.

## Solar Chain





## CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence to the PFI directors' addresses is always welcome. Member contributions to *the Practical Farmer* are also welcome and will be reviewed by the PFI board of directors.

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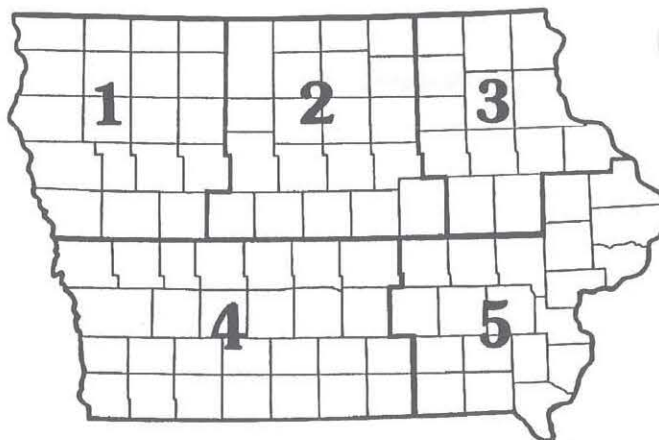
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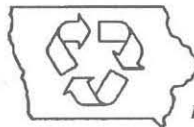
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