

# the **Practical Farmer**

**Annual  
Conference  
Jan. 9 & 10  
in Des Moines!**  
See pages 3-4.

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Cover photo by Rick Exner: Oats discussion at Steve and June Weis field day, 1999

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## Annual Conference January 9 & 10 in Des Moines!

### Judy Heffernan to deliver keynote

That's right, the PFI Annual Conference is coming right up. Yes, the dates are now Jan. 9 and 10 and the location is now the lovely Airport Holiday Inn in Des Moines! You will get full details and registration info in your annual conference flyer, which you should receive in just a few weeks. But here are a few glimpses to whet your appetite:

#### The keynote

Rural sociologist Judy Heffernan will kick off Saturday's program with a keynote address on the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities. Judy is a nationally renowned speaker and author on the economic crisis in rural America; the concentration of power within the food industry; and how communities can help make changes.

In 1989, Judy became the executive director of the newly formed Heartland Network for Town and Rural Ministries, a mission agency of the United Methodist Church. In this role, Judy resources, consults with, advocates for and networks on behalf of town and rural clergy, churches and communities in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa and Minnesota.

Judy is a Magna cum laude graduate of Hanover College (IN). She was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at the



University of Wisconsin (Madison) where she completed work beyond her M.A. Following extensive teaching experiences in colleges and universities, Judy served as a research associate in the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri. Her major research interest has focused on farm women, farm families and the farm and rural crisis. Former Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland named her to a national farm women's advisory committee in 1979.

Judy and her husband, fellow sociologist Bill Heffernan, have worked closely with many local, state and national organizations dedicated to finding solutions to the problems of rural America. ☼

### Workshops galore!

Here are some of the workshop topics that are shaping up for the annual conference. Full details will come with your conference flyer in a few weeks.

#### Friday workshops

- ❖ Market Opportunities for Raising Niche Pork
- ❖ Addressing Herd Health Issues in Alternative Swine Production Systems
- ❖ Eco-labels in Iowa: What are the Opportunities?
- ❖ Vegetable Production Seminar
- ❖ Opportunities for Farmers in the New Bioeconomy

#### Saturday workshops

- ❖ Tapping Niche Markets for Traditional and Small Grains
- ❖ Networking Session on Crop Rotations and Cover Crops
- ❖ Organic Weed Control Strategies
- ❖ Whole Farm Landscape Design
- ❖ The Latest on Grass-Based Marketing, Health Claims and CLA Research
- ❖ Improve Your Soils with the Organic Matter Budgeter
- ❖ On-Farm Food Safety for the Small Farmer
- ❖ Networking Session on Small Livestock and Poultry
- ❖ On-Farm Research: Why and How?
- ❖ Generating Sales through the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Campaign
- ❖ Land Ownership in Iowa: Trends and Opportunities
- ❖ Making Progress? An Update on Developments in Federal Food and Farm Policy
- ❖ Networking Session for Small Farm Entrepreneurs
- ❖ From Sustainable Farms to Sustainable Communities
- ❖ Everything You Wanted to Know about the Benefits of Local Food
- ❖ Celebrity Chef Cooking Class

Full details and registration info coming soon to your mailbox in the Conference Flyer!

## Friday Night Music!

### Farmer troubadour Chuck Suchy



North Dakota farmer/singer/songwriter Chuck Suchy will provide musical entertainment following a Friday evening reception. *Crossroads Magazine* called Suchy “one of the shining lights of the Upper Great Plains folk scene for many years now. His well-crafted songs deal with the family, home, and working the land.”

Suchy was born and raised in the blue hills along the Missouri River south of Mandan, North Dakota. After performing for years in area halls, clubs and lounges, he heard a tape of Canadian troubadour Stan Rogers singing his classic, *Field Behind The Plow*. “It was at that moment,” Suchy says, “that I realized that the life I was immersed in was worthy of song.” He began writing his own ballads and songs, slipping them into his performances and it was soon obvious that he was on to something quite unique—sensitive and honest portrayals of contemporary American farm life, but from an insider’s point of view.

Suchy’s songs have since reflected changes in rural life, including farm crises, loss of population, and a major restructuring of the agricultural economy. Chuck remains an astute observer of it all, and his songs chronicle not only the events, but the emotions that accompany them. ☞

## New Location!

### Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines

Reserve your rooms now at the incredible rate of \$69 a night! The Airport Holiday Inn is the most family-friendly venue we have ever had for the conference, with a large indoor pool and play area under a sunlit dome, ping pong and other games for kids, and very friendly staff. The meeting rooms are superb as well. This is a great hotel that has been locally owned by the same family for over 30 years. And with the new by-pass around Des Moines it is very easy to get to. Call now to reserve your rooms at 1-800-248-4013. ☞



### Discuss PFI’s role in policy and politics at the PFI Business Meeting on Friday, Jan. 9 at 5 pm!

PFI board and staff have been working on a document that will guide any PFI involvement in public policy-related activities. A draft of this document (included on the facing page) will be discussed at the annual business meeting. A revised set of strategic directions for the organization will also be shared and discussed. This will be a great chance for members to communicate ideas and perspectives to PFI board and staff. Don’t miss it!

## Achieving a good balance:

# PFI & Policy Work

*The following document grew out of the Aug. 28–29 PFI board/staff retreat. The next step is to let members weigh in on the subject at the Annual Conference Business Meeting on Friday, Jan. 9 at 5 pm. Take some time to look the draft over and formulate some comments and questions to bring with you to the January meeting.*

PFI wishes, foremost, to be an organization that puts practical tools in the hands of farmers seeking alternatives. To do this, we need to be a non-dogmatic organization that is seen as welcoming by any farmer or other person who is seeking alternatives. Our credibility and growth have been enhanced by focusing on this task and staying out of politics.

At the same time, we recognize that there is a difference between policy and politics, and we recognize that government policy and programs play an immense role in the lives of our members and in the shape of modern agriculture. We also recognize that our members' research, knowledge and experiences have much to contribute to the formation of policy and government programs and that we have a responsibility to share this knowledge actively with the world and, at times, with policy makers. There is clearly a role for PFI in influencing public policy, albeit a role secondary to our primary program work.

Acceptable PFI policy work must reflect the organization's history and values of supporting positive alternatives for farmers, rather than working

against negative farming practices and policies. PFI will not take stands on or support campaigns, regulations or actions against specific agricultural practices, policies or entities. Organizations already exist in Iowa and across the nation that engage effectively in this type of policy work as their focus. PFI members are free to participate in and support these organization, and many already do.

We will, however, at times:

- ❖ Encourage and inform government or university policies and programs that support the positive efforts of farmers involved in sustainable agriculture;
- ❖ Share research, knowledge and perspectives that inform relevant current debates on agriculture;
- ❖ Take actions in support of local, state and federal funding for organizations and programs that support sustainable agriculture;
- ❖ Be a member of organizations that are active in sustainable agriculture-related policy work.

In general, PFI policy work must:

- ❖ Be constructive and respectful of diverse viewpoints;
- ❖ Directly reflect our mission and areas of organizational expertise;
- ❖ Be strategic and focused on a limited set of issues or activities that the board has selected for policy work;
- ❖ Be positive and of a nature to not polarize or alienate parties in a debate.

The following actions, under certain circumstances, are considered to be acceptable policy actions to be engaged in by PFI in support of board-chosen policy focus areas:

- ❖ Participating on policy councils and issue-focused task forces;
- ❖ Providing information to legislators;
- ❖ Providing information to members on government programs;
- ❖ Assisting implementation of government programs;
- ❖ Information-based action alerts;
- ❖ Op-Ed pieces in support of specific practices and programs;
- ❖ Joining policy focused alliances;
- ❖ Lobbying on a specific piece of legislation.

The following actions, under no circumstances, do we consider to be acceptable policy actions to be engaged in by PFI:

- ❖ Making the PFI mailing list available to policy advocacy groups;
- ❖ Campaigning for a specific legislator or local elected official of any kind;
- ❖ Participating in public protests;
- ❖ Action alerts of a coercive or negative nature;
- ❖ Op-Ed pieces against specific policies or practices.

Ongoing policy-related projects, actions and membership in policy organizations must be board approved. Staff action in support of board-approved policy-related projects must conform with the PFI policy framework.

(continued on pg 7)

PFI Board:

# Overseeing Growth, Seeking Input

By Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, PFI board president



*This is the first in a semi-regular section that we hope will help keep members better abreast of the work of the PFI Board of Directors.*

As many of you know, the last two-and-half years have brought a lot of change to PFI, from the hiring of our first ever executive director, to the growth of the organization, to new programs and more staff. All of this has required a lot of growth and education on the part of the PFI Board.

To help all members better understand our work, I have outlined below some of the major responsibilities of a board of directors of a non-profit organization, along with some of the current and recently past activities of the PFI Board in these different areas.

1) **In the first place, our job is set overall direction for PFI and its programs.** It is the job of the staff, on the other hand, to figure out how to take us in those directions. Think of a taxi driver and a passenger: The passenger (board) says where he wants to go, but it is the job of the driver (staff) to figure out how to get there. Over the last few years, for example, the board has devoted quite a bit of time to clarifying PFI's overall direction: We have crafted a vision statement for the organization and we have developed a set of key strategic directions, which we update and prioritize every year at our annual retreat.

To carry out this responsibility, each board member must try to stay in touch with the needs of the members and represent those needs at board meetings. It also helps when members

take the initiative to let their district directors know what they feel are important activities and priorities. The latest set of strategic directions will be shared again at this year's business meeting at the annual conference (See page 4 for more info).

2) **Secondly, it is the board's job to hire and supervise an executive director, who in turn hires and supervises the other staff.** An important aspect of our job in this regard is to conduct an annual "performance evaluation" of the executive director. As this process was quite new for the board, we got some help creating a good process from a consulting organization for non-profits called the Institute for Conservation Leadership.

For the past two years, our performance evaluation of Robert has included getting input from all staff, as well as the board. This has been a good process that has provided Robert with valuable feedback and helped the board better understand the work and challenges faced by our executive director.

3) **Thirdly, it is our job to be sure the organization is fiscally sound and fulfilling all its legal requirements.** We do this by reviewing financial reports at every board meeting and by having the books reviewed annually by a professional accountant. Non-profit accounting, however, is very complicated, and Robert has been working hard to put in place a more sophisticated accounting system and to provide the board with more detailed financial statements. Board training on reading and

## Want to contribute your 2 cents?

Call or email PFI directors anytime. Your input is always welcome. Complete contact information listed on page 2.

understanding complex statements is a task we see as important for the coming year. The good news is that PFI's finances have improved steadily in the last three years.

**4) A fourth responsibility is to advise the staff on the development of the different on-going programs.** At each board meeting, we get updates on various PFI projects, and we ask questions and help the staff make decisions on questions they are facing with their program work. Sometimes, for example, a question arises about what organizations we should be trying to partner with in order to further the impact of our work. Board members are often helpful in this regard through their connections with other organizations.

**5) Another responsibility of the board involves setting organizational policies and procedures.** For example, it was a board decision a year or so ago to submit a ballot to the membership asking whether we should give all members—farmers and non-farmers alike—voting rights in the organization.

In addition, the board is currently at work setting a board policy on when, if and how PFI will involve itself in efforts to influence public policy. This is an area that PFI has become more involved with in the last several years, but we have been lacking a clear set of policies, goals and values to guide these efforts.

Members will have a chance to give input on this document at our annual business meeting at the annual conference.

**6) Another responsibility of the board is to maintain a healthy board and strong board leadership.** We are currently in the process of putting in place a new nominating procedure for board members (see inset), and trying to do a better job of identifying the type of skills and experience we need in new board members.

The health of PFI ultimately depends on creative individuals willing to step up to the plate and share their time and skills on the PFI Board. We also continue to explore ways to get more non-farmer input on the board.

I hope this update has been helpful; please don't hesitate to contact me or another district director with your thoughts, comments or concerns about PFI. Our names and contact information are listed on page 2 of every PFI newsletter. ☺

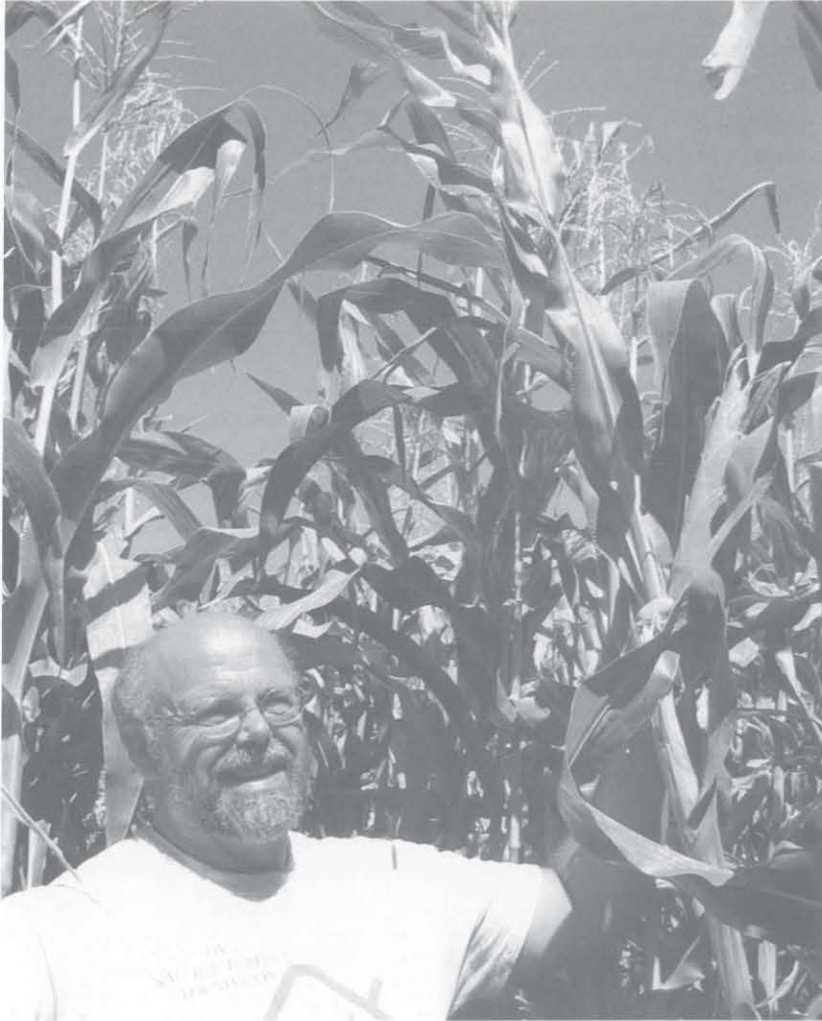
## PFI Board Seeks Strong Leaders

The PFI Board is seeking names of people from across the state who may be interested in serving on the PFI Board in the coming years. You don't have to be a full-time farmer to serve. What we need are people with enthusiasm for the mission of PFI and the future of Iowa agriculture, the time to come to four or five meetings a year and work on tasks between meetings, and some understanding or interest in the challenges faced by non-profit organizations. If you are interested or would like to nominate someone, please contact Mark Tjelmeland by phone or email at 515-434-2440, [ctjelmeland@midiaowa.net](mailto:ctjelmeland@midiaowa.net).

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## PFI Policy (continued from pg 5)

Requests to the PFI staff to engage in specific policy-related actions that fall outside of ongoing projects, such as signing a letter in support of a certain federal program that is in danger of funding cuts, can be acted upon by the PFI executive director, if in his or her judgment, the action falls clearly in the scope of the PFI policy framework and the PFI mission. The director is encouraged, however, when time permits, to gain agreement or advice from the Executive Committee of the board or other board or advisory board members, or the full board, when possible. ☺



# The OP Corn Kid

By Todd Kimm

**NE Iowa PFI farmer Dan Specht went from being the 'Atrazine Kid' to one of the most well-known organic researchers and activists in the Midwest. Now he's out on the cutting edge of research in open-pollinated corn and grass-fed beef.**

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"I liked the idea of being able to grow my own seed. I heard Walter Goldstein was looking for farmers to give it a try, so I decided to see if there was any truth to it."

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A pair of fawns block the Bloody Run Creek bridge, slowing me to a rightful backroad pace as I approach Dan Specht's farm. Though I don't know it yet, I'm driving through something called the Giard Claim, a three-by-five-mile tract of land surveyed by French Canadian fur trader Basil Giard in the late 1700s. This and two other parcels were the first to be surveyed in what would eventually become Iowa, land that ended up as exclusions to the great Louisiana Purchase. The Giard claim makes up the south end of Dan's property, adding to the rarified air of an all-organic, diversified farm that seamlessly integrates corn, beans, cattle, hogs, wildlife, dog Amber and Dan himself.

Dan is the type of guy who will tell you he can't spare an hour to sit down and chat, then when you finally arrive, generously give you twice that...and a handful of heirloom cherry tomatoes and a great story about a Native American cave painting just up the road (according to myth, when the giant serpent disappears from the cave wall it was painted on, the world will end).

Dan is braced against a visit from his organic inspector later today and an early afternoon flight to D.C. the day after to attend the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group's (MSAWG) Farmer Fly-in, where he will



lobby USDA and congressional officials on ag-related issues such as the Conservation Security Program (see story on page 17).

But you'd never know. Time and flavor are a little elastic here in Northeast Iowa—part of the Driftless Zone, where glaciers never set foot—expanding to accommodate both basic need and wild extravagance. The small tomatoes, popped into the mouth straight off the vine, explode with flavor, humbling the Styrofoam plate of creamed potatoes and ham I felt lucky to find for lunch in nearby Monona. One open-pollinated tomato variety is called Mexico Midgents, another, hailing from the Czech Republic area of Eastern Europe, goes by Stupice.

Dan says he scored them from the vast stock of heirloom seeds locked away for safe-keeping at Seed Savers in nearby Decorah. The tomatoes are planted right up against his test plot of open-pollinated corn—our destination.

### Everything depends on the other

Although the corn trials are Dan's current source of pride, excitement and hope for the future, they are closely connected with the other aspects of his operation, much like you have to dodge a hog wallow and wade through a maze of tomato vines to reach the test plot. It's hard for one thing to stand out as more important than another on a farm like this. So many things overlap: When Dan had a barn blow over, he took the finely weathered boards and sided his pre-turn-of-the-century house with them.

This marks Dan's fifth year of working with OP corn. His goal is to come up with a food-grade seed corn he can sell to other organic farmers. And Dan will be arriving on an organic seed corn market ready to explode; beginning in 2005, all organic growers will be required to use organic seed.

Much of the genetic material Dan has at his disposal, comes courtesy of Walter Goldstein



Left: Dan checks an ear of Nokomis Gold in the plot of corn he plans to harvest and market to Integrity Mills in Cresco this fall.

of the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in Wisconsin. Walter is working with PFI farmers like Dan, and Don Adams and Nan Bonfils, to take his corn-breeding research out into the real world. [See related stories on pages 11 & 24.]

"I liked the idea of being able to grow my own seed, what with the monopolistic trends in the seed industry," Dan says. "I heard Walter had new-generation varieties that didn't have some of the problems that the older varieties had [the biggest being anemic stalks]. He was looking for farmers to give it a try, so I decided to see if there was any truth to it."

Five years later, Dan is enthusiastic. A plot of Nokomis Gold will yield his first sale to Integrity Mills in nearby Cresco. The bright orange, flint type corn with white cobs boasts what millers want: a high test weight, low starch and sweet taste. Dan invites me to sample a kernal, and the taste *is* sweet, almost buttery. Sometimes, Dan says, he'll eat it like sweet corn. "It's about as good," he says. The white cobs are desirable because the so-called bee wings in this variety are transparent and don't end up looking like insect parts when they get baked into organic tortilla chips.

Dan measures his selection progress by checking 10 random ears for cob color: 10 for 10 are white. Five years ago the count was only one in 20. The kernals, he says, are so hard that ear worms, a common corn pest, can't even break them open to eat.

He expects to get \$4 a bushel for the OP

## Member Profile

field corn this year and up to 10 times that when the seed corn is ready.

Walter Goldstein's work has involved a quest for a diverse bank of desirable genetic qualities and their careful refinement into premium lines. Goldstein built Nokomis Gold out of three different Native American varieties and an open pollinated 'synthetic' variety developed by the late Albert Arens, a private corn breeder from North-eastern Nebraska.

"Walter has used tough selection pressure to breed out problems like poor standability," Dan explains, like pulling over mature plants with dairy scales, and such. Dan has innovated techniques of his own, such as turning 80-pound pigs into his plot and then harvesting what remained standing for seed. Another technique involved leaving a plot of corn standing through the winter and then selecting from the stalks that weathered through to spring.

"Part of the reason you can make breeding progress with Walter's corn is because it has such a broad, diverse background," Dan explains. "With all that diversity you get a lot of choices to make for selection, everything from kernal color, to kernal type, to height." Other selection criteria include seedling vigor, disease resistance and ear moisture content.

We head off to inspect some corn whose seed source originated in Cuba. Along the way, Dan points out some souvenirs left by a black bear that glutted itself on one of his cherry trees and then high in another tree, the distinctive nest of a Baltimore oriole. The Cuban corn is an outcome of the USDA's GEM (Genetic Enhancement of Maize) project, based at Iowa State University, which is undertaking experimental crosses of Latin American corn to boost nutritional content. And that's not all it boosts. In this plot, even the runts stand 7-foot-tall.

### The threat of GMO contamination

All isn't bucolic in Dan's world, though. He confesses some anxiety about the possibility of pollen drift from surrounding GMO corn contaminating the unique gene pool he's worked so hard refining to local conditions. "Contamination is forever," he says. "It's a scary deal." Linn County PFI member Laura Krouse discovered this firsthand when traces of GMO corn turned up in her organic corn crop two years ago.

Happily, Dan has negotiated with neighbors to keep fields bordering his



Some of the open pollinated tomatoes that Dan grows alongside his corn.

GMO-free. The rough topography of the area also guarantees that much of the area just isn't farmed. The tree-covered Mississippi bluffs lie a stone's throw to the east and the Bloody Run Valley to the south is just as rugged.

And finally, Dan's busy schedule often means that crops get planted late. Although neighbors often tease him about it, the practice works to his advantage. "One way to avoid drift is to avoid it in time, not just in space," he explains. Late planting ensures pollination cycles in his fields are out of synch with those of surrounding fields.

But even with all these safeguards in place, Dan isn't resting easy. "No one knows how far pollen can travel," he says, evoking a movement even more mysterious than the raptors and turkey vultures that wheel overhead.

### With PFI from the start

Dan Specht's name was there at the top of the sign-up sheet at that first meeting in Ames to gauge interest in a grassroots farming organization—what eventually became PFI. "I've always been real interested in wildlife and hunting and fishing," he says.

What drew him to the meeting was a DNR speaker who talked about how the health and fertility of game on organic land was so much better than on land farmed conventionally.

"That gave me a pretty strong push in that direction," he says.

Growing up on a farm near Monticello, Dan was known among family members as the "Atrazine Kid." He was in the 10th grade when intensive chemical use was catching on, a good age to master something his dad would just as soon not have to bother with.

Although Dan adopted no-till practices out of necessity on the steep

hills of Northeast Iowa when he set out farming with his brothers in the '70s, his conversion to organic farming was an almost complete about face.

Now he's a seasoned practitioner, researcher and activist, integrating those roles so well that he can simultaneously talk economic realities, political dope and production logistics without betraying a seam or contradiction.

"Nobody has to think anymore to farm," he says. "You just call up the co-op and they do all the decision-making for you, what to spray and when. I like this way of doing things because it's more the traditional farming experience. You have to think on your feet and be flexible."

Having 100 acres of row crops keeps his work load and stress levels relatively low.

"It's enjoyable to be outside, a part of nature," he says, "working with animals."

Dan shows me his pasture-far-

rowed pigs. He's familiar with each animal's temperament and personality, and attempts to flush one of the more independent sows and her piglets from their palatial thicket.

### Grass-fed beef research

Dan's favorite part of the day is moving the rotationally grazed cattle in the early mornings or evenings.

This forage-fed herd is now the subject of the next big thing on the Specht farm. Dan is working with other area beef and dairy farmers on a SARE-funded study to test the health benefits of grass-fed meat and dairy. Early results show that levels of beneficial fatty acids measure "off the chart" in the milk. Grass-fed beef is also showing encouraging levels, but the accumulation is slower and levels decline when the cattle switch to grain.

"Look at all the problems with the American diet right now, with obesity

and heart problems," Dan says. "Then you look at the changes that were made to the diet of America's livestock...I think there's a pretty close correlation."

Dan believes news of findings like these "can change the world." Smaller sustainable and organic farmers, he says, are at the forefront of that change. "The multinationals want you to believe that food is food, an egg is an egg," he adds. "It's not."

He's also interested in investigating the vitamin and mineral profiles of his corn. Although he realizes it would take expensive testing to nail down every nutritional benefit, protein levels have already been found to be higher than in hybrid corn, where they've been declining for years.

"I wish you could select for that visually or through taste," he says, and hints that OP corn guru Walter Goldstein's taste buds may be trained enough to do just that.

"Walter," Dan says with a grin, "he likes the taste of my corn." ☞

## The man behind the corn Walter Goldstein



The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute began researching open pollinated corn in 1989. The goal: to discover if any open-pollinated varieties through long-term breeding could become suitable for commercial production.

In the following three years, Walter Goldstein, director of crop research, and his staff evaluated 200 different populations, or pollinated varieties, obtained from the USDA and numerous public and private breeders. While most were discarded because of problems with roots, stalks, ear rot and lodging, staff began to breed the most promising plant selections in replicated ear-to-row plantings. Gradually the program combined its best selections to make a few populations with a similar background.

The diverse populations that resulted have comparable but somewhat lower yields and standability than commercial hybrids. They tend to have a harder, shinier seed with a homier endosperm than the hybrids. They also have a rich maize taste. Tests made of seed quality indicate a general protein content of 9 to 11 percent, which is higher than expected for hybrid corn.

Goldstein most recently has focused on breeding for large-seeded flour corns and feed corns that have a high oil and lysine content.

Currently, Walter and the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute are involved in a cooperative effort with PFI, the USDA and Iowa State University to develop corn varieties high in specific nutrients. ☞

# Fire Is Key!

## Reflections on the 2003 Summer Camp and Youth Leadership Program

By Brad Meyer



Photos by Meryl Wise, Bryce Bauer and Trinity Thompson

As I sat on the freshly painted bench at the 4-H Center watching the first carload of campers drive in, I realized that after months of planning, the exciting part was just about to begin. This was my fourth year being involved with camp, but PFI's first camp put on jointly with 4-H.

It had been several years since camp was held at the 4-H Center near Madrid, but older counselors and staff were eager to return to the beautiful oak and hickory forests and prairie plantings along the scenic Des Moines River. For three days before camp started, youth counselors and staff attended the leadership training. Counselors learned and discussed how to maintain order in their cabins once the younger campers arrived and how also to be a role model. Part of the three days was also set aside for some fun.

Don Broshar of 4-H led several leadership- and team-building activities that served both as great teaching tools and fun times. On the last night before camp, counselors and staff had a campout at Ledges State Park, located just north of the 4-H Center. We taught each other games to play with campers if we needed to fill some time, but the

PFI Camp reached several important milestones this year. On the one hand, this was the first year of camp in over seven years without the leadership of Shelly Gradwell, a difficult transition as you can all well imagine.

On the other hand, it was the first year that the primary leadership for camp came from four longtime PFI campers, who are now college-age students: Brad Meyer, Frances Zacharakis-Jutz, Torey Olson, and Meryl Wise. David Rosmann, another longtime, college-age PFI member, also took on a staff role at camp.

It's hard to convey how exciting it is to see camp alumni and the children of longtime PFI members begin to take strong leadership roles in the organization. I think it says a lot about the depth of the PFI community as we approach our 20<sup>th</sup> year as an organization.

Many thanks also to the many PFI youth who stepped in as camp counselors this year—we trust some of you will also want to grow into staff roles in the future! And special thanks again to Cynthia Tallman for pulling the many details together and to the 4-H Center for co-sponsoring this year's event.

—Robert Karp



highlight of the campout was the campfire and s'mores.

When everyone just got to their cozy tents and fell asleep, we started hearing the “tap, tap, tap” coming from our rain flies. By morning some tents were a little damp, while others—or one, in particular, with four boys in it—were in rough shape. They had so much water in their tent, they looked like muskrats.

On Thursday, we were all ready for the campers—18 in all. Some were shy at first, some arrived going full speed. Each day, we had rotations where campers got to choose from a list of activities, like canoeing, climbing wall, creek walk, learning about insects, and learning about prairies and woodlands.

What about swimming, you ask? It was one of the first things we put in for the camp schedule, but the pool was cracked and they finished fixing it just as we were leaving. We did get to do some other exciting things, though. We had a breakfast in the wilderness one morning and bird-watching a couple others. The Ames Area Astronomers came out one evening to show us the Moon, Mars and a couple of other things. We also did a couple of night hikes that involved calling for barred owls and coyotes. Our barred owl calls were so loud and good we even attracted some 4-Hers.



Another highlight was learning about the joys of eating locally. We got to help chefs from Ames restaurants Aunt Maude's and The Café cook a meal of food produced by area farmers. On Saturday night, we had a bonfire where we all learned that “Fire is Key” in keeping prairies and woodlands free of invasive vegetation. By Sunday, campers were getting rundown and tired, but it only took one s'more a piece to revive their energy.

It may seem like we did a lot—but I've offered only a small sampling of what we did together. PFI camp was only for a few days, but the faces, memories and new friendships will be with us for a long time. And remember, “Fire is Key.” ☼



### Field Days 2003:

# Standing Room Only

Another season of PFI field days came to a close Oct. 4 with a standing-room-only corn-breeding workshop at Full Circle Farm near Madrid. The workshop featured

presentations by some of the country's leading experts in open-pollinated corn, including Walter Goldstein, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, and USDA scientist Linda Pollak. The workshop was just one example of PFI's new daylong field day format, piloted at five of 12 field days this summer and fall. Afternoon activities Oct. 4 included a farm tour with presentations on market gardening and organic certification of field crops.

Other daylong events included a Sept. 23 grass-fed beef production and marketing field day hosted by Steve Reinart, Glidden. That event included a standing-room-only presentation by Colorado rancher Kit Pharo and a panel discussion on marketing grass-fed beef featuring PFI farmers.

Sept. 19, Francis Thicke, Fairfield, hosted a morning workshop on farm-based milk processing followed by a controlled grazing farm tour and Conservation Security Program update.

Other daylong events included Eric Franzenburg's Sept. 5 field day on herb production, processing and marketing near Van Horne and Paul Mugge's Aug. 22 field day that included a tour of the American Natural Soy plant in Cherokee and a prairie walk and camp fire.

All field days received a significant bump in attendance as a result of increased publicity efforts—many events more than doubling their numbers.

Many thanks to Del Christensen for all his work organizing this year's field days. ☞



Eric Franzenburg talks with the crowd of 140 that turned out for his daylong field day on herbs Sept. 5.



An Amish farmer studies beneficial insects under power of a microscope at the Aug. 23 Dordt College Agriculture Stewardship Center field day.

Photo by Rick Exner

# The Practical Farmers of Perú

By Rick Exner



Traditional agriculture clings to steep mountainsides in Perú. Good soil conservation indicates an intact community.

*PFI farming systems coordinator Rick Exner and PFI member Ron Brunk traveled to Perú in March as part of a project that establishes links between Iowa State University and La Molina Agricultural University near Lima. The project encompasses teaching and research, and functions through the ISU Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture (GPSA) and a corresponding sustainable agriculture center at La Molina.*

In some ways our Perú experience was like being in Iowa in the mid-1980s, when farmers were just realizing some of the things they could accomplish together through PFI. Ron Brunk and I participated in a sort of “rolling workshop,” in which farmers from three communities got on a bus and spent a week visiting each other’s fields, corrals and shops. Two communities are on the desert Pacific coast of Perú, and one lies in the mountains. Many of the farmers from the highlands had never even been to the coast, and vice versa.

They quickly discovered that while they don’t raise the same crops, they face similar challenges. They increasingly consider marketing to be just as important as production. Many are becoming certified as Integrated Pest Management producers and even as organic, and they are looking for corresponding markets. In the U.S., many specialty markets owe their existence to an economic middle class; in Perú that middle class is much smaller. However, there is evidence the public is becoming aware of the same issues of quality, health and equity that drive those markets here.

Everywhere we saw farmers seeking value-added markets. Fruit growers were looking to turn grapes into the regionally famous *pisco* distilled beverage. A group of dairywomen started a guinea pig cooperative in order to finance their yogurt cooperative. The highland community raises dozens of unique and delicious strains of potato organically, bringing them to market on the backs of llamas—what a story for the consumer! A group of small producers on the eastern slopes of the Andes has received a prize for raising the best coffee in Perú. But their markets in the capital city of Lima are limited as a result of their status as “outsiders,” so they are seeking to export to Europe and the U.S.

How will these farmers work together? They have plans to share production skills, which is fairly straightforward and will build relationships and confidence. By the end of the workshop they were already talking about cooperating on trucking, product promotion, and even marketing. Further workshops like the one we attended will involve new communities in the growing network.

What is our role as North Americans? Our trip was part of a project linking Iowa State University and La Molina Agrarian University. Project objectives are to cultivate teaching and research relationships, and also to link farmers and their organizations. Although Perú’s small farmers won’t try to adopt our production models or most of our technology, the farmers we encountered were quite interested in PFI and our experiences with networking, market development and working with institutions. Certainly their primary agenda is learning from each other. The world is far too small now for North American farmers not to be part of the conversation.☞

# Grant Funds Des Moines Community Food Project



The USDA Community Food Project Program has awarded an \$118,000 grant to Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) and the Des Moines Community Gardening Coalition (DMCGC). Called “Digging Deeper,” the project will implement a community food project in the central city neighborhoods of Des Moines.

The three-year project will:

- ❖ Build 120 raised-bed backyard kitchen gardens in six low-income neighborhoods;
- ❖ Create nine edible landscapes (fruit tree orchards, etc.) in community spaces such as schools, food pantries and community centers;
- ❖ Provide at least 50 families with open-pollinated heirloom seed for their gardens, and
- ❖ Assist two established community gardens (or gardeners) in marketing produce and developing a business plan.

“People of all income levels should have access to fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables,” Teva Dawson, project co-leader and DMCGC community garden coordinator, said. “And what better way to accomplish that than by providing people the resources to grow the food—in a backyard garden billowing with vegetables for the family or a homeless shelter landscaped with apple trees?”

DMCGC, a program of the Des Moines Parks Department, is entering its sixth year of supporting grassroots community greening efforts in Des Moines.

Project co-leader and PFI food systems staff person Rick Hartmann said, “This is an exciting project for Iowa, positioned to capture people’s growing interest in healthy food and communities. Food is a common denominator among people. And its status as a commodity is being reevaluated, with the important social, cultural and spiritual aspects being restored to their original historical position. My hope is Digging Deeper will help catalyze this reevaluation here in central Iowa and beyond.”

Project goals include increasing food security, economic self-sufficiency, and access to nutritious food for the neighborhoods involved. Another objective is establishing and strengthening connections between community members, organizations and resources to ensure the long-term health of the urban Des Moines food system, and benefit the community in general.

The project was named Digging Deeper because it doesn’t start a whole new program, but extends and deepens current efforts of the Des Moines community.

In addition to the \$118,000 in USDA funds, the project benefits from another \$172,785 in cash and in-kind support from area businesses and non-profits. ❧

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“This is an exciting project for Iowa, positioned to capture people’s growing interest in healthy food and communities.”

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## Hartmann elected to OFRF Board

Rick Hartmann, PFI food systems staff person, was recently elected to the national board of the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF). Rick joins a 15-member board that includes fellow PFI members Jerry Dewitt and Ron Rosmann, board chairperson. He serves on OFRF's Research and Education Committee, which helps make decisions on what grants the organization funds (\$114,000 in 2003). Founded in 1990, OFRF sponsors research related to organic farming practices and disseminates that research to organic farmers and to growers interested in adopting organic production systems. Information about OFRF research, funding and more can be found at [www.ofrf.org](http://www.ofrf.org).

## Website redesign is on the way

A redesigned PFI website is in the works, with a debut expected early this winter. The redesigned site features a new, colorful look with improved organization that makes it easier to navigate and find exactly what you're looking for. The new site also features a gateway to the Buy Fresh, Buy Local site. Stay tuned.

## PFI farmers participate in D.C. Fly-in

Four PFI farmers offered their advice to USDA and congressional officials Sept. 5 in Washington, D.C. Dwight Ault, Ron Rosmann, Dan Specht and David Williams spent the day in Washington, D.C. as part of the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group's (MSAWG) Farmer Fly-in.

The group met with a senior USDA official to urge the release of draft rules for the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Williams, who chairs PFI's CSP Farmer Advisory Committee, is eager to see the rules and get them to committee members for their advice. Farmers in general have been flooding NRCS offices with requests for the CSP, which some are calling the ideal program for "master farmer conservationists."

Other points made by the producers at the Farmer Fly-in:

- ❖ USDA should devote substantial dollars to research that promotes future food production,

environmental quality, farm income, and rural economic and community development.

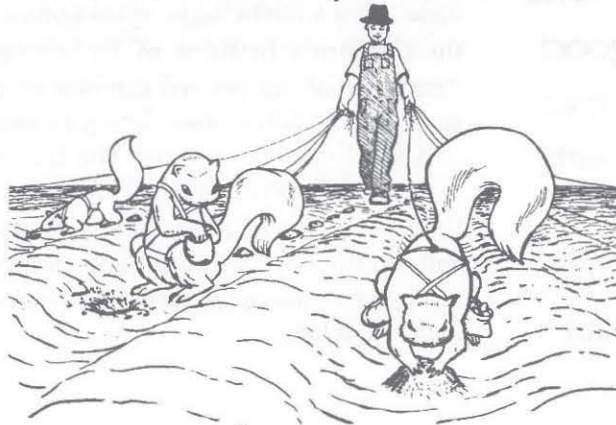
- ❖ Congress should fund a new program authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill to promote and strengthen farmers markets and direct producer-to-consumer opportunities.
- ❖ USDA should protect the money allocated in the 2002 Farm Bill for organic research and extension activities, and expand funding for those who are transitioning to organic production.
- ❖ Federal crop insurance provisions should not penalize producers for farming organically and sustainably.

MSAWG is a coalition of 40-plus groups, including PFI, that are working for a food and farm system that is profitable to small and medium-sized farmers, environmentally sound, family-farm based, and socially just.

### The Farmer Funny

Art by Kevin de Laplante

#### The 16-Row Squirrel Planter



Bill keeps finding new ways to integrate wildlife into his farming operation.

# Carol Hunt Will Say Good-bye to Iowa



Carol Hunt (right) with cookbook author Deborah Madison at last year's Field to Family culinary event in Iowa City.

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"It's going to be hard to leave Iowa and all the good people I've met and worked with,"

Carol said, "but I'm pretty jazzed about going 'home.'"

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**P**FI member and local-food activist Carol Hunt's good-bye to Iowa will be longer than most. Although her husband Ralph Adolphs has accepted a position at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Cal., the two will continue to spend summers and falls in Iowa during a transition period of up to five years. The transition period is so Ralph can maintain his research at the University of Iowa and build strong collaborative relationships between the two institutions—although Carol doesn't expect it to take that long.

"It's going to be hard to leave Iowa and all the good people I've met and worked with," she said, "but I'm pretty jazzed about going 'home.'"

Carol's family lives in the Los Angeles area and Ralph's family in British Columbia—another reason for the move.

Carol moved to Iowa City 10 years ago, and for the last five years has served as the Local Food Systems Coordinator for the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District. Her work has included her popular cooking-with-local-food workshops and connecting growers with local restaurants and other institutions.

Although funding for her position officially ended this summer, she continues work on a volunteer basis. Friends may keep in contact with Carol through email at [carol\\_hunt@yahoo.com](mailto:carol_hunt@yahoo.com).

"I hope to resume some of my work when I return to Iowa next summer," she said. "I can't predict how things will go, so it's probably best that I don't apply for funding or make commitments to upcoming local food projects at this point. I would eventually like to get into local food systems work in L.A., and hope that I can call upon my Iowa connections for inspiration and advice."

At last year's PFI Annual Conference, Carol led a workshop on eating locally during the winter months. She also kicked off our new "Focus on Food" section in the PFI summer 2003 newsletter with an in-depth article on greens. We wish her luck. ☺

## Julie Carlson inspires local food venture

Cerro Gordo County PFI member Julie Carlson is spearheading a project to bring a restaurant/store to northern Iowa that will deal almost exclusively in Iowa-made products.

The plan is to finance a business that will be a part of the town of Swaledale (population 174) and visible from Interstate 35. Other components include a bio-fuel station, a Northern Iowa history museum and a garden.

Julie said one of the project's main goals is to provide a commercial kitchen where local food artisans can prepare items for retail sale. Laws restrict the retail sale of food not prepared in state-licensed facilities.

Last February, Julie opened a store of her own in Thornton that sells locally produced food and gifts. She works with 30 local consigners and also markets Niman Ranch meats. Husband Jon is a Niman Ranch producer.

In addition to hogs, the Carlsons raise organic hay, oats, corn, and soybeans on 600 acres near Thornton.

FOR SALE \_\_\_\_\_

## Beef & lamb, calves & yearlings

Beef and lamb ready for the locker. Also have many yearlings and this year's calves available (sired by Angus bull). No junk and raised on organic grasses, hay and grains. Wise Acres Farm, 712-622-7716.

## PFI members receive SARE grants

Several PFI members have been awarded 2003 grants through the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) program.

Two Iowa State University graduate student PFI members were awarded grants to further their investigations:

- ❖ Andrew Heggenstaller for "Developing Educational Tools to Facilitate Systems Thinking in Sustainable Agriculture in the North Central Region."
- ❖ Parker Forsell for "Restoring Organic Agri-Culture: Resource Conservation, On-Farm Recycling, and Alternative Marketing Taught Through Farmers and Farm Organizations."

PFI ag producers receiving funding from the SARE Producer Grant Program were:

- ❖ Tom Wahl, Wapello, for "Value-Added Processing for Small-Sized Chestnuts."
- ❖ Michael Nash, Postville, for "Local Foods Buying Club."
- ❖ Maury and Mary Wills, Adel, "Evaluating Alternative Pest Management Strategies for Organic Apple Production."
- ❖ Jeff and Jill Burkhart, Woodward, "Picket Fence Creamery... To Sustain a Family Farm and Preserve a Way of Life."

## Fredericks named to IPIC Board

PFI farmer Wayne Fredericks will represent PFI on the Iowa Pork Industry Center's advisory board. A coordinated effort of the colleges of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State University, the IPIC offers Iowa pork producers information to aid in making their operations more efficient and profitable. Wayne and his wife Ruth raise row crops and hoop-finished pork on their Osage, Iowa, farm.

## New book features PFI

PFI is featured in the brand new book, *Renewing the Countryside—Iowa*. Edited by PFI member Shellie Orngard, the book is a collection of 38 stories and eight essays highlighting those who have found a way to make a living in the countryside while supporting their communities and protecting the environment. The piece on PFI was written by PFI member Michael Bell.

Essays by Michael Carey, Charles Carpenter, Mary Swalla Holmes, Paul Johnson, David Osterberg, John Schillinger, Mary Swander and David Williams conclude each chapter.

This is the second book in a series on rural revitalization—Minnesota was the subject of the first.

Available at bookstores or online at <http://store.rtcmarket.org>.

Have you or another PFI member won an award or done something interesting? Let us know about it! Send news items or tips to Todd Kimm at PFI, Box 349, Ames, IA 50010, email [communications@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:communications@practicalfarmers.org) or call 515-232-5661 ext. 108.

# Apples:

## The Iowa story

By Chef Kurt Michael Friese

### Apple resources

A search of the Internet will yield more than you could ever digest about apples.

For a more concise and enjoyable read, though, turn to *In Praise of Apples: A Harvest of History, Horticulture and Recipes* by Mark Rosenstein, published by Lark Books in 1996.

### "Apples to Apples: A Perspective on Local Food Systems"

This 1999 report by Rich Pirog of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture compares the contrasting fates of Iowa and Washington's apple industries and uses apples as a case study of how Iowa can increase the potential for local food systems in general. The full report is available at [www.leopold.iastate.edu/](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/) under the resources section. To get a printed copy, contact the Leopold Center, 209 Curtiss Hall, ISU, Ames, IA 50011-1050; 515-294-3711.

One cool spring morning, about 1880, Madison County farmer Jesse Hiatt was walking the rows of his young orchard when he noticed a chance seedling growing between the rows. Being an orderly man, and preferring that his trees grow in an organized fashion, he chopped the seedling down. The seedling grew back the following year, and so he chopped it down again. When the seedling sprouted back up a third time, legend has it, Mr. Hiatt said to the tree, "If thee must grow, thee may."

Hiatt nurtured the tree for 10 years. When it finally came to fruition, Hiatt was pleased with the red and yellow streaked appearance and the sweet, impressive flavor. He named it the "Hawkeye," after his adopted home state, and began to seek a nursery to propagate his discovery.

He was turned down by 10 of them before his big break came: a contest in Louisiana, Mo., that was seeking new varieties of fruit trees, especially apples. The Stark Bros. Fruit Company held the competition as part of its search for an apple tree to replace their then most popular tree, the Ben Davis. The Ben Davis had a nice appearance, was weather-hardy and durable in shipping, but lacked flavor. When Clarence Stark tasted the apple with the unusual oblong shape and the distinctive five bumps on the bottom, he pronounced it "Delicious!" Unfortunately, due to some poor record keeping, Hiatt's name and address were lost and it wasn't until he re-entered the competition the following year that his Hawkeye officially became the winner.

Sixty years later, Stark had sold more than 10 million trees world wide, all descendants of that original tree. They had renamed Hiatt's Hawkeye after Clarence Stark's original pronouncement, and the Delicious apple was on its way to complete domination of the apple industry.

Back in Winterset, the original tree continued to flourish in a state that was second only to Michigan in apple production. In 1940, on Armistice Day (Nov. 11), a ferocious ice storm leveled Iowa's orchards, a blast from which Iowa's apple industry would never recover. With orchards being expensive to replant and war on the horizon, most orchards were turned into corn and soybean fields. Hiatt's Hawkeye tree was split in two in the storm, and newspapers and radio commentators across the state lamented the demise of the historic tree. As Hiatt had noted all those years ago, though, this little tree "must grow."

The following spring it sent up a new sprout right from the middle of the split, and it thrives to this day not far from those historic covered bridges in Madison County. The tree has its own monument, a fence and a private horticulturalist to protect it, as well as a festival in its honor in nearby Donnelson.

Today, the fruit that bears the "Delicious" name has been hybridized out of all resemblance to that original Hawkeye. The yellow streaks are gone, replaced by a seemingly unnatural bright red shine. The apples are bred for shelf life, durability and crunch, but have lost their original flavor. The fruit that once deserved the name "Delicious" is now a mute re-

reminder of the hazards of industrialized standardization in food production.

Through the efforts of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, and the Seed Saver's Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, cuttings from the original tree have been propagated. At Wilson's Orchard in Iowa City, owner Chug Wilson's 9-year-old Hawkeye trees are fruiting their second year, and he says this year they look like they will develop fully, ripen and be ready to eat.

### Less than 1% of Iowa farms

Although most grocery stores carry only a few varieties of apples (usually no more than three or four), there are actually thousands of varieties being grown worldwide. Here in Iowa, even five years after the Armistice Day freeze, apples were being grown on about 40 percent of the state's farms. Today that number is less than 1 percent. Nationally, both apple varieties and apple growers are suffering from the effects of industrialization and the onslaught of huge amounts of product, especially juice, imported from China (which is now the world's #1 producer).

Add to this the fact that orchards are expensive to start and can take 10 years to yield. Soon it is understandable why the small, sustainable Iowa farmer is not enthused about planting apple orchards. Iowa now produces less than 15 percent of the apples it consumes. The other 85 percent travels an average of 1,500 miles and takes approximately eight months to go from tree to table.

The rewards can be great, though, for those with the patience to pursue the delights of fresh-picked apples. Local growers can choose from most of the thousands of varieties available. One organization, Slow Food, promotes the growing and consumption of heirloom varieties through its Ark of Taste program. Named for Noah's Ark, the mission is to support high quality, small-scale food production; to rediscover, catalogue, and describe foods and flavors in danger of disap-

pearing from our tables; to protect biodiversity; and to champion the art of taste and the right to pleasure. Recently, over 140 varieties of apples boarded the Ark. More information about the Ark can be found at [www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org).

### Iowa orchards

For a list of Iowa orchards go to: [www.applejournal.com/ia01.htm](http://www.applejournal.com/ia01.htm)

## Apple Tips

### Choosing apples

Which variety to choose depends on what you intend to do with them. Some are good to eat straight, some are better for cooking into savory dishes like chutney or sweet confections like traditional apple pie. Others are best for cider, while still others have great shelf life (that means they store well over long periods of time—months, usually).

For a really good dessert or “eating” apple, look to my favorite—the Gala—or to one of the oldest American varieties, the Swaar. For apple pie, the favorite American choice is the Granny Smith (which originated in Australia, actually), but in England they swear by the Cox's Orange Pippin. If you want to make cider (hard or not), you must find an apple with the right blend of sugar, acid and tannin. Though hard to find, one of the best is the Foxwhelp, an English apple that dates back to Shakespeare's time; Falstaff probably enjoyed this cider.

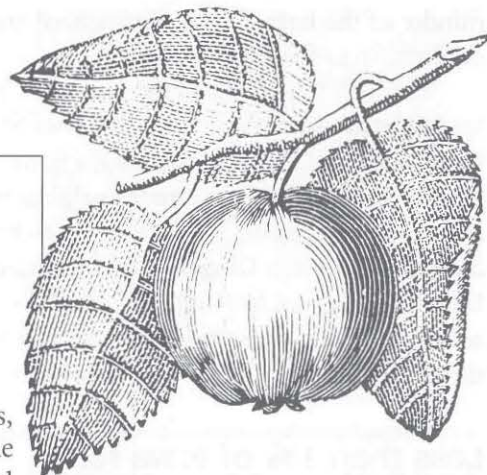
### Handling and storage

Preserving the bounty of apples that are in season right now is quite simple, and methods date back centuries. Remember three words: cool, dark and dry. The old-fashioned root cellar is a great place to store apples, because it has all these qualities. Most especially, it is not too cold, as refrigerators are. As with anything, cold retards flavor, which incidentally is why the big beer companies encourage you to serve their product ice cold.

Also be sure there is some circulation of air. Sealing them into paper or plastic bags will cause them to over-ripen, mold and rot very quickly.

Commercial Red Delicious apples are bred to be shipped. They are very tough and can withstand rough handling. Most heirloom varieties, like the Hawkeye or the Song of September, are more delicate and should be handled with care. If you do bump or bruise an apple, it will be fine if used right away. Soon though, it will begin to oxidize and lose flavor and texture.

# Apples



## Apple-pecan stuffing

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 2 Granny Smith apples—diced      | 2 tablespoon chopped fresh sage                 |
| $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pecans—toasted | 1 tablespoon salt                               |
| 1 onion—diced                    | 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ tablespoon cracked black pepper |
| 1 stalk celery—diced             | 1 quart chicken stock                           |
| 1 loaf French bread—diced        | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter                        |

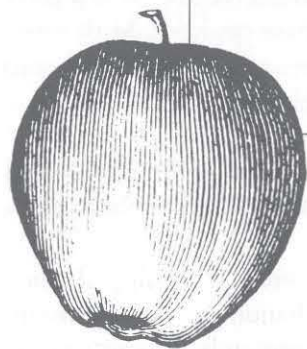
Melt the butter in a large sauté pan over medium high heat. Sauté the apples, pecans, onions and celery until just tender. Add the sage, salt and pepper. Add the bread and mix thoroughly. Add the stock, a little at a time, until it is absorbed and the stuffing reaches the desired consistency (all a matter of taste, really; you may need more or less stock). Cool to use as an actual stuffing, especially for pork chops, or put in a shallow casserole and bake about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour at  $350^\circ$  until crisp & crusty on top to serve as a side dish.

—Chef Kurt Michael Friese, Devotay, Iowa City

## Sorghum-baked apples

Scoop out the stem end and entire core of good baking apples (allow 1 apple per serving), leaving the bottom intact. Place in a baking dish. Inside each apple cavity, place a pat of butter, a tablespoon of brown sugar, and a tablespoon of sorghum molasses. Place a few additional pats of butter and tablespoons of sorghum, and a scattered pinch of salt, on the bottom of the baking dish. Bake at  $400^\circ$  until apples are soft when pierced with a toothpick. Baking time may vary depending on apples used; expect 30–45 minutes. Serve with pan juices, accompanied by vanilla ice cream if desired.

—Carol Hunt, Iowa City



## Raw apple cake

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening  | 1 teaspoon baking soda                     |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar | Pinch of salt                              |
| 1 cup white sugar             | $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder       |
| 1 cup milk                    | $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon nutmeg              |
| 2 eggs                        | 2 cups peeled, finely chopped apple        |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon           | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup black walnuts (optional) |
| 2 cups all-purpose flour      |  |

Topping:  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup brown sugar,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped black walnuts, 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon mixed together.

Cream shortening; add sugars, eggs and milk. Sift together flour, cinnamon, soda, salt, baking powder and nutmeg; add to first mixture. Fold in apples and nuts. Pour batter into a greased 9 x 13-inch pan. Sprinkle with topping. Bake at  $350^\circ$  for 30–35 minutes.

—Mary Anne Reinart, Glidden, from recipe of her late mother, Olga “Ole” Reinart.

## OCTOBER

❖ **Second Annual Celebration of Sustainable Agriculture and Local Food**, Oct. 13, 6–9pm, Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines. With Neil Hamilton, director, Agricultural Law Center, Drake University, and presentation of the International Local Food Prize. Contact: Catholic Rural Life Conference, 515-270-2634.

❖ **“Revolution from the Heart of Nature,”** 14th annual Bioneers conference, Oct. 17–19, San Rafael, Calif., and Fairfield. Live broadcast of California activities plus workshops, panel discussions, etc. in Fairfield. Contact: 641-472-7033, FairfieldBioneers@yahoo.com.

❖ **“What’s Nature Worth? A Multi-disciplinary Conversation with Scott Slovic and Peggy Barlett,”** Oct. 21, 7:30pm, Sun Room, Memorial Union, Ames. Leopold Center director Fred Kirschenmann will participate in a panel discussion. Featured speakers are Scott Slovic, director of the Center For Environmental Arts and Humanities at the University of Nevada, author, and founding president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE); and anthropologist Peggy Barlett who has written several books about agricultural change and sustainability on campus. Contact: Sheryl St. Germain, sgermain@iastate.edu, 515-294-8211.

❖ **Value Added Ag Forum**, Oct. 23, 10am–2:30pm, Tabor Vineyard/Winery, Baldwin. Contact: Mary Holz-Clause, 515-294-0588.

❖ **“Finding the Center of the World,”** Sixth Annual Harvest Lecture, Oct. 23, 7pm, Old Brick, 26 E. Market St., Iowa City. Peter Bakken on “The Grace of Place: Patriotism and the Care of the Earth”; poet Nancy Adams-Cogan with a reading titled “Iowa Roadsides”; *Places in the Center* by Iowa photographer Rod Strampe. Contact: 338-7868.

## NOVEMBER

❖ **2003 Shivers Lecture**, “The EPA’s Perspective on Agriculture and Its Relation to Water Quality in Iowa,” Nov. 3, 4:10pm, Pioneer Room, ISU Memorial Union, Ames. With Jim Gulliford, ISU grad and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency representative. Contact: Mike Duffy, 515-294-6160.

❖ **“Re-Imagining Cooperation Among Cooperatives,”** Ninth Annual Cooperative Development Forum, Nov. 5–7, Crowne Plaza Northstar, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: Leta Mach, 202-383-5450, lmach@ncba.coop, www.ncba.coop.

❖ **Fall Harvest Women’s Gathering**, Nov. 7–9, Good Earth Village, Spring Valley, Minn. Workshops and activities bring women involved in sustainable agriculture together from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa to learn new skills, network and eat great food. Contact: Stacey Brown, staceyleighbrown@yahoo.com.

❖ **“Coexisting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Balancing Nutrients & Enhancing the Environment,”** Environmental

Quality & Agricultural Conference, Nov. 10–12, Des Moines Marriott, Des Moines. Contact: Bill Hall, 863-428-7161, wlhall@IMCGLOBAL.com, www.ctic.purdue.edu/eqa.

❖ **“Place-Based Agriculture: The Economics, Ecology, and Community Ethics Behind Self-Sufficient Farms,”** National Biodynamic Conference, Nov. 14–16, Ames. With presentations by Fred Kirschenmann, Don Adams, Dewane Morgan, Sarah Flack, Janet Gamble, Walter Goldstein, John Reganold. Contact: 888-516-7797, www.biodynamics.com.

❖ **Third Annual Iowa Organic Conference**, Nov. 17, Scheman Building, Ames. Keynote speaker, Theresa Marquez, Organic Valley Cooperative, presents marketing success stories for organic grain suppliers and livestock producers. Sessions on production, marketing, new crops, farmer-chef connections, GMOs and world trade, and grant writing. Contact: Kathleen Delate, 515-294-7069, kdelate@iastate.edu.

## JANUARY

❖ **Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference**, Jan. 9–10, Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn Conference Center. Saturday keynote speaker, rural sociologist Judy Heffernan; Friday music, Chuck Suchy; workshops, All-Iowa Meal, presentation of PFI Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award. Contact: 515-232-5661.

### Background

Most corn hybrids are generally developed for yield, not grain quality. Additionally, technology fees and industry concentration lead some producers to seek corn varieties whose seed they can own and replant. This includes open-pollinated as well as other new kinds of public varieties. ISU and USDA-ARS corn breeders are working with PFI and the Michael Fields Ag Institute to develop and test these on cooperators' farms.

### Objective

The objectives of this effort are:

- To evaluate the economics of using these public varieties, whose yields are less than those of typical hybrids but which can have unique value as feeds
- To move additional grain quality characteristics into new public varieties from exotic corn germplasm.

### Cooperators

Nan Bonfils and Donald Adams, Madrid  
Francis Blake, Waukon  
Ron and LaDonna Brunk, Eldora  
Bob Burcham, Neely-Kinyon Farm Liaison  
Karl Dallefeld, Worthington  
Paul Homan, Waverly  
Paul and Karen Mugge, Sutherland

### Results

Only preliminary results are available. Gross yields of open-pollinated and "synthetic" varieties have been less than those of hybrids. Grain quality analysis will be emphasized in the study that began in 2003.

### Conclusions

It is too early to determine whether crop quality characteristics will outweigh yields. The answer may depend on whether a producer is selling commodity number 2 yellow dent corn, feeding livestock, and/or producing for a specialty market.

# Corn Varieties: Yield, Quality and Control

By Rick Exner

**P**FI cooperators are evaluating open-pollinated corn varieties and varietal hybrids in cooperation with Walter Goldstein of the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute and with USDA and ISU corn breeders. Most people know that corn yields jumped when farmers started using hybrid varieties in the 1940s. Why go to all this trouble when hybrid corn is so successful?

Because that success comes with a price, literally. So-called "technology fees" on hybrid seed continue to rise. Some producers are concerned that future consolidation in the industry might even limit their choice of seed. These farmers reason that if they had seed that they could save and replant from year to year, then they wouldn't *have* to get top yields to remain profitable. Hybrid seed, on the other hand, cannot be replanted, both because the next generation crop would not retain the vigor and uniformity of the parent plants and because most hybrids are the proprietary property of the companies that develop them.

Most hybrids, also, are bred for yield not for nutrition. *Breeding High Quality Corn for Sustainable Farmers in the Northern Corn Belt*, a project that began in 2003, seeks to produce a spectrum of different corns with higher nutritional value or greater suitability

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A project that began in 2003 seeks to develop corn varieties high in specific nutrients. This corn would benefit livestock producers, especially if they could demonstrate its benefits to consumers.

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for alternative farms; these cultivars will give farmers new options. They would particularly benefit livestock producers, especially if these producers could demonstrate the benefits to consumers. An example would be eggs with yellower yolks from increased levels of a vitamin A precursor in the corn fed to the chickens. The new project is utilizing corn from a variety of sources to create "synthetic" lines and other open-pollinated populations that farmers can replant from year to year. Figure 1 compares protein, oil, and starch contents of typical hybrids and some experimental crosses made as part of ISU's GEM Project (Genetic Enhancement of Maize).

In 2002, in a project funded by the



USDA SARE program, farmers in Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota compared several open-pollinated and “synthetic” mixtures of varieties to a “farmer’s choice” variety of their choosing. Figure 2 shows yield data from the PFI farms that participated. As might be expected, on most farms the “farmer’s choice” yielded the most; the exception was on the farm of Don Adams and Nan Bonfils, Madrid, the only farm where the farmer’s choice variety was not a hybrid. The highest yielding of the alternative varieties in 2002 was a “synthetic” mix of two inbred varieties, BS21(R)C7 and BS22(R)C7. Next was the synthetic mix of inbreds BSSS(R)C14 and BSCB1(R)C14, followed by Nokomis Gold, an open-pollinated variety developed by Walter Goldstein of the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute.

## Free lunch?

So just auger next year’s seed out of the grain bin into the planter, right? Actually, there’s more to it than that, as long-time growers of open-pollinated corn will attest. It’s important to carefully *select* the seed that you want to be the future of your corn.

So you go to the field and hand-harvest... but what? The biggest ears, the healthiest plants? It isn’t always so obvious how and what to select. Laura Krouse, Mt. Vernon, is proprietor of Abbe Hill Open-Pollinated Corn and an old hand at selecting seed. But Laura says that in the past four years, when she has been using selection methods suggested by ISU breeder Kendall Lamkey, her corn has improved as much as in the previous 11 years of her work with the variety. Laura is using a modified “ear-to-row” selection procedure on the Abbe Hills corn, a variety that in 2003 marks its 100<sup>th</sup> year on the farm. ☞

## Some corn variety types

### Open-pollinated

Plants are a mix of different genetic types, all crossing with each other randomly.

### In-bred

Plants are all the same genetically, the result of generations of in-breeding plants grown from seeds from the same ear.

Crop characteristics are stable over time.

### Hybrid

Plants are similar because they are the first generation from the cross of two (usually) inbred lines. Hybrid vigor is lost after one generation.

### Varietal hybrid

A cross between two open-pollinated varieties. Some hybrid vigor is expected in the first generation.

### Synthetic

The result of crossing a number of inbred lines with each other. Hybrid vigor should be maintained.

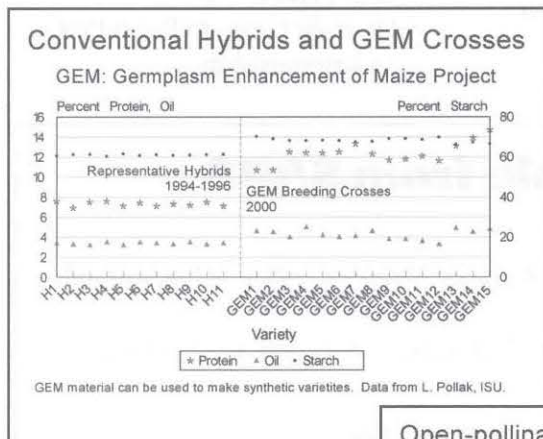


Figure 1. These varieties in the GEM project, with traits from Central and South American corn, have grain quality characteristics that could benefit sustainable and diversified farms.

## Open-pollinated & Synthetic Corn Varieties

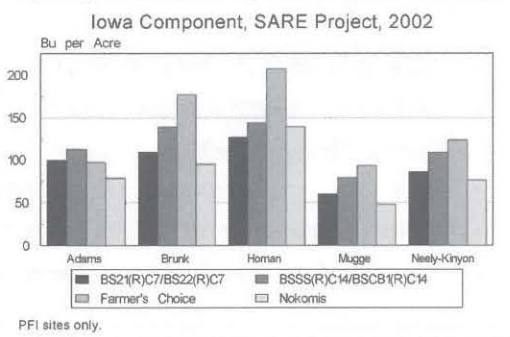


Figure 2. Yields of synthetic, open-pollinated and “farmer’s choice” varieties in 2002.

## Contact the Corn Doctors

**Walter Goldstein**

262-642-3303 ext. 112

wgoldstein@michaelfieldsagainst.org

**Kendall Lamkey**

515-294-7826

krlamkey@iastate.edu

**Linda Pollak**

515-294-7831

lpollak@iastate.edu

Welcome to our new resource pages. In each issue we'll focus on a selection of resource organizations, or a particular topic, and highlight some of the reports, books, newsletters, etc. each offers.

## SARE

[www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org)

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program offers a host of resources through its communications and outreach arm, the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN). Most can be found on the SARE website. (The North Central Region SARE office can be reached at 402-472-7081.)

Here are a few examples:

### Tip sheets

Click on the website's "Tip Sheets" shortcut under "Education" link:

- Improve Soil Quality
- Add Value Through Marketing
- Prevent Pest Problems
- Explore Organic Production
- Cut Livestock Costs
- Manage Weeds Wisely
- Plan For Profit
- Network
- Diversify Crops
- Use Trees

### Resources from SARE-funded projects

On website, click "Publications and other resources":

- The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing
- Alternatives to Insecticides for Managing Vegetable Insects
- Adding Value for Sustainability:

A Guidebook for Cooperative Extension Agents and Other Agriculture Professionals

- Alternatives to Insecticides for Managing Vegetable Insects
- Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community-Supported Agriculture
- Vegetable Farmers and Their Weed Control Machines
- Composting Resources: A Series

### Informational bulletins

- *Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers*, download at [www.sare.org/market99/](http://www.sare.org/market99/)

index.htm or order free print version, 301-504-5236, [san\\_assoc@sare.org](mailto:san_assoc@sare.org).

Other bulletins:

- Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture
- Profitable Pork: Strategies for Hog Producers
- A Whole-Farm Approach to Managing Pests
- Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers
- How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch
- Diversify Crops to Boost Profits and Stewardship

## Books available from SARE

On website, click "Publications and other resources." Order actual books or access online versions of many.

- *The New Farmer's Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers and Communities*, 2001
- *Building Soils for Better Crops*, 2nd Edition, 2000
- *The Small Dairy Resource Book*, 2000
- *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*, 2nd Edition, updated in 2001
- *Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses*
- *Steel in the Field: A Farmer's Guide to Weed Management Tools*
- *The New American Farmer: Profiles of Agricultural Innovation*
- *Sustainable Agriculture Directory of Expertise*, 3rd Edition

## ISU Extension

[www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/)

2003 marks ISU Extension's 100<sup>th</sup> year of sharing university research and expertise with the public.

A listing of Extension's ag-related publications can be found at the above URL where PDF versions are available for download. Hard copies can be ordered at any county extension office or by contacting the Extension Distribution Center on the Iowa State University campus (515-294-5247, [pubdist@iastate.edu](mailto:pubdist@iastate.edu)).

The web site's sustainable ag section lists 13 publications. Some highlights:

- "Fundamentals of Organic Agriculture" offers a good overview in 16 pages, including sections on labeling, certification,

marketing and pest management. The publication was updated with a nice redesign this spring (PDF not yet available online).

- The now classic "Community Supported Agriculture: Local Food Systems for Iowa," covers the basics on how CSAs work, lists additional resources and serves as a good primer for the uninitiated few.
- "Swine System Options for Iowa" covers alternatives to large-scale hog confinement.
- "Reducing Weed Pressure in Ridge-Till" summarizes the fruits of PFI co-founder Dick Thompson's weed research.

## University of Missouri Outreach and Extension

[www.outreach.missouri.edu/](http://www.outreach.missouri.edu/)

UM Outreach and Extension offers many excellent publications on their website. Just a few:

- "Integrated Pest and Crop Management" is a biweekly newsletter dedicated to pest management. Past issues have included articles on pest management during drought conditions and the basics on chiggers.

- "Ag Opportunities" comes out every two months and covers small-acreage and alternative crop news. The Sept.–Oct. issue includes articles on direct marketing meat and forest farming with mushrooms.
- "Small Farms, Big Ideas" is a monthly series of articles showcasing Missouri producers experimenting with innovative and sustainable practices.

## ATTRA

[www.attra.ncat.org/](http://www.attra.ncat.org/)

ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas), funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is a national sustainable agriculture information service managed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology. ATTRA-written reports number in the thousands and are all available on the ATTRA website. ATTRA welcomes questions by phone at 800-346-9140.

Here's a sampling:

### Fruits (Horticultural Crops)

- Organic and Low-Spray Apple Production
- Pawpaw Production

### Vegetables (Horticultural Crops)

- Organic Tomato Production
- Specialty Lettuce and Greens: Organic Production

### Field Crops

- Alternative Agronomic Crops
- Nutrient Cycling in Pastures
- Genetic Engineering of Crop Plants

### Organic Farming

- Overview of Organic Fruit Production
- Resource Guide to Organic & Sustainable Vegetable Production

### Livestock

- Sustainable Beef Production
- Considerations in Organic Hog Production

## PFI Staff Pick

**Missouri Alternatives Center Website:** [www.agebb.missouri.edu/mac/index.htm](http://www.agebb.missouri.edu/mac/index.htm)

A favorite of PFI staff members, the home page for the Missouri Alternatives Center offers one of the most complete and user-friendly directories of alternative ag resources. The site offers an alphabetical listing of resources from universities across the U.S. and Canada, with links that take you direct to the publications. Resources are grouped by state or under regional and national categories and include everything from links to the web sites of organizations to newsletters to a horticulture info hotline.



Sustainable agriculture... We throw those words around a lot, but are we really sure what they mean, or what we want them to mean? We wondered what the phrase means to you, our readers and members.

Send your 150-words-or-less definitions of sustainable agriculture to Practical Farmers of Iowa, Attn. Todd, PO Box 349, Ames, IA 50010, or email them to [todd@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:todd@practicalfarmers.org). Feel free to be as poetic or technical as you'd like. A free PFI hat to anyone who sends in a thoughtful response.

Our second installment is from Mt. Vernon PFI member **Laura Krouse**, Abbe Hills Farm. Laura operates a CSA for 70 families in the Mt. Vernon area and raises and sells open-pollinated corn for seed.

# What Is Sustainable Agriculture?

For me, sustainability is an ecological concept. I think that if I can get the ecosystem under my care functioning smoothly—following a few simple rules—overall, the whole farm will approach sustainability much more closely.

There are two important processes at work in all ecosystems. It doesn't matter if you consider a stream, a forest, a terrarium, or a farm. Ecosystems are always capturing and transforming sun energy to provide the energy needed by the multitude of "creatures" that live there, and nutrients are always being cycled and recycled through the creatures and through the air, soil and water of the ecosystem.

Sustainability for me means that we understand these processes, and that we work with them when we manage our farms. In

fact, we find ways to take advantage of them.

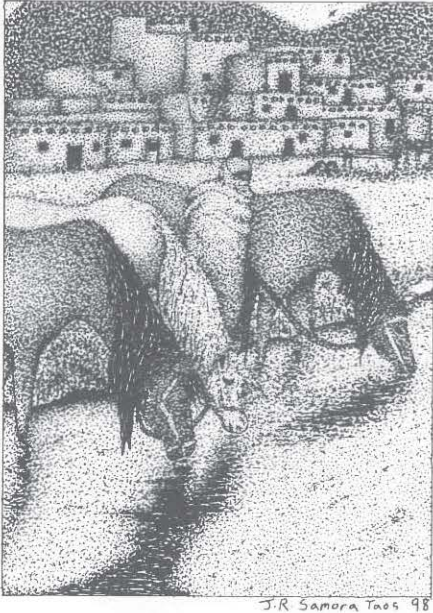
For example, I grow cover crops for lots of reasons, but one important one is to maximize sunlight capture over the whole growing season. That puts more "food" into the ecosystem, which will eventually translate into more organic matter and the nutrients it contains staying on the farm in a biologically available form.

Understanding a complex ecosystem like a farm, while trying to manage it for profitability and a little bit of fun, is no small task. I like to think that the more closely I can mimic the processes of natural, sustainable ecosystems, the more closely I can approach sustainability on my farm. ☘

—Laura Krouse

# Remembering the Sacred

by Robert Karp



A three-day vacation in the enchanted world of New Mexico this fall got me thinking about something that we don't talk about too much at PFI meetings and events—the sense for the sacred.

I spent a day at Taos Pueblo, a native American settlement that has been continuously occupied by the peaceful pueblo peoples for over 1,000 years. Nestled at 10,000 feet beneath Taos mountain, the sense of the sacred is palpable at this place.

What struck me there is how for

the native peoples everything in nature has a deep inner meaning. The eagle is not just a beautiful bird that should be protected, but a messenger of the spirit world, that can teach us specific things that will be useful in our day to day lives. Likewise the insect, the star, the stone, the corn.

Spirit was seen in every thing, and every thing had a wisdom to contribute to the human community. Reverence was the key to unlock these secrets of creation.

Another characteristic of native people is their deep connection with the seasons and with agriculture. Planting and sowing, cultivating and tending, harvesting and cooking and sharing, were not only means of survival, but a way of fulfilling a sacred responsibility to care for the things of the earth—the soil, plants and animals, as well as the people—both the living and the dead.

It seems to me that many PFI members are also deeply motivated in their way of farming and living and eating by this same sense for the sacred, by this feeling that the air and the water, the plants and the animals, the soil and the people—both the living and dead—are all part of a great circle of life.

Some might call this great circle the divine plan and some might call it simply the laws of nature—but what interests me is not so much what we call it, but the fact that so many of

us seem to feel it, seem to feel called by it to change the way we think and eat and farm.

What else can explain the deep loyalty and connection so many of us feel for the land, the great sacrifices we make to try and preserve our farms and communities, the innovation and creativity we employ trying to grow and purchase food with integrity? Certainly there are easier ways to live and make a living!

I find it helpful to remember that behind all our practical efforts to foster a new agriculture in Iowa, there is a rich tapestry of people and families. Both joy and tragedy are woven into this tapestry—births and deaths, marriages and divorces, times of plenty and times of naught. Pleasure and pain flow beneath the surface of all our lives. Remembering this can open our hearts to one another, to a sense of community and compassion.

While PFI is committed to bringing scientific rigor to bear on the creation of a more sustainable agriculture, it is important to remember that for many of us, it is the thinking of the heart as well as the thinking of the head, that call us to this way of life, that inspires us to experiment with new and innovative ways of farming and living, and that keeps us persevering—with the strength of buffalo and the help of a community—through the many joys and sorrows of our lives. ☞

# PFI Merchandise

**Be a proud PFI member!**  
**Wear a PFI shirt, cook with a PFI apron,**  
**shop with a PFI tote bag...**



**Wear your love of local foods with PFI's new Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign logo. Beautiful design, dazzling colors!**

**Casual Cap—\$12**

Khaki, Velcro closure, "Healthy Food, Diverse Farms, Vibrant Communities" tagline printed on back.

Made in the USA.

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$



**Farmer Cap—\$8**

Summer style farmer cap with light denim cotton front and mesh back.

Made in the USA.

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$



**T-shirt—\$10**

Heavyweight, 6.1 oz 100% cotton jersey in S-2XL. White with full-color Buy Fresh, Buy Local logo on front.

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ SIZE \_\_\_\_\_ \$



**Grocery Tote—\$8**

Natural color 100% cotton canvas tote with full color Buy Fresh, Buy Local logo. Perfect for grocery shopping, or taking to the farmers market.

Made in the USA.

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$



**Posters—\$5 each, \$20 for five.**  
 \$3 each for orders of 10 or more.  
 11 1/2" x 13"

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$



**Apron—\$15**

White, 8 oz. 100% cotton canvas, 26"-long, adjustable neck strap, tie straps

\_\_\_\_\_ QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$

**Coming soon:**

- T-Shirts with PFI logo & tagline
- Buy Fresh, Buy Local caps
- PFI yard signs

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- new membership
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- Individual—\$25
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- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups)—\$50

**My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:**

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- food or farm related business person
- concerned citizen/consumer/advocate
- other professional, please check one:
  - agency/extension/non-profit staff
  - educator
  - policy maker
  - researcher
  - other \_\_\_\_\_

Each membership includes one vote and one subscription to *The Practical Farmer*.

## Sustain PFI

For the sake of the long term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. Donation without membership is also welcome. Donors who give \$100 and above will receive a free PFI hat or other gift of PFI merchandise and will receive an invitation to our annual Cooperators and Partners Banquet.

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their connection to a rich past  
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where individuals and families  
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