

the **Practical Farmer**

**Annual
Conference
Jan. 13 & 14
in Des Moines!**
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A Newsletter of Practical Farmers of Iowa | Vol. 20, #3 | Fall 2005



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Cover photo by Helen Gunderson

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www.practicalfarmers.org



Dear PFI members and friends,

As you all know, PFI is not a typical organization: We are more of a community than an organization and sometimes we feel more like a family than a community. In this spirit, I wanted to let you all know of some upcoming changes in my life and work situation.

On Sept. 10, I married a wonderful woman named Lori Barian, who has two delightful children named Austin and Hannah, ages 8 and 10. Lori and I and the children are thrilled to be embarking on a new life together—that is the good news! The sad news is that this new life is not going to be in Iowa, but rather in Milwaukee, Wis., where Lori and her children reside, as well the children's father. Wisconsin is also where I was born and where I maintain many family connections.

Working for PFI
the last seven years
(five as executive director)
has been rewarding
beyond any experience
I have known.

As much as I wish that I could somehow remain executive director of PFI and live in Milwaukee, I have been informed by several people close to me that this is just not realistic! So I have accepted the fact that I must take leave of my beloved PFI. In truth, this has been a very hard decision and it is with much emotion that I make this departure.

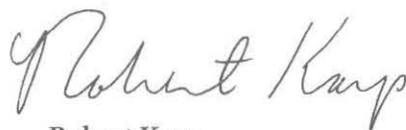
Fortunately, the PFI Board and staff have taken up this news with courage rather than anxiety and have a detailed plan in place to transition to a new director in the early spring of 2006. I will remain executive director until a new person is hired, and I will

continue to work for PFI on contract for some months after that while I finish up some program responsibilities. Post PFI, I plan to do more writing and offer my services as an independent consultant to various non-profits in the region, so it's possible you have not seen the last of me here in Iowa.

Working for PFI the last seven years (five as executive director) has been rewarding beyond any experience I have known. You are incredible people, with a powerful vision and set of values that are desperately needed in this country. The opportunity to serve this vision and support your efforts has transformed my life. I have been humbled, enlightened and inspired. And hopefully, I have made a modest contribution to the life of this beloved community, family and organization.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the support I have felt from all of you these past years.

Sincerely,



Robert Karp
Executive Director

Growing Our Future: Tools and Inspiration for Beginning and Transitioning Farmers

2006 Annual Conference set for Jan. 13 & 14

The 2006 Annual Conference is set for Jan. 13 and 14 at the Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn. This year's title and theme is "Growing our Future: Tools and Inspiration for Beginning and Transitioning Farmers." We'll be focusing on the needs of a new generation of farmers committed to sustainable agriculture—whether they are starting out fresh or transitioning to new practices and markets. A keynote panel, resource fair and full track of workshops will focus on the subject.

Our keynote will bring together three passionate and articulate mid-sized farmers who have successfully started or transitioned to farm operations rooted in sustainable agriculture. The keynoters will discuss what inspired and motivated them, major challenges they faced, the keys to their success, resources that were most helpful to them, and what their outlook is on the future of sustainable agriculture.

The keynote panel

Michelle Benrud, Goodhue, Minn., began farming with her husband Roger six years ago, with support from the Farm Beginnings

Program of the Land Stewardship Project. As young farmers, Michelle and Roger have made grass-based farming and environmental stewardship their lifestyle of choice.

Keith Bolin, Sheffield, Ill., transitioned from commodity to niche marketing his hogs in 1999. President of the American Corn Growers Association (ACGA), he started farming with his father in 1978 after graduating from high school. The family operation includes corn, oats, alfalfa, wheat, a cow/calf herd and farrow-to-finish hogs on pasture sold primarily to Niman Ranch.

Todd Stewart, Meadow Grove, Neb., and his wife Julie recently fulfilled a long-time dream and quit their "town" jobs to farm fulltime. Their 1,520-acre operation is dedicated to certified organic corn, beans, alfalfa and small grains. They also have a 170-pair cow/calf herd and raise 700 farrow-to-finish hogs.

Friday night activities

Friday night activities will include:

- ❖ Live music and dancing
- ❖ A live auction to support PFI Youth Program
- ❖ Good food

Workshops

- ❖ Tune-up for Grass-Based Production and Marketing
- ❖ Farmer Cooperation for Marketing Specialty Grains
- ❖ Successful Niche Pork Herd Health and Production Management
- ❖ Preserving Heirloom Vegetable Varieties and Heritage Livestock Breeds
- ❖ Organic Flax Production and Marketing
- ❖ Working with Distributors: Lessons from Three Iowa Food Companies
- ❖ How to Choose Among Alternative Enterprises
- ❖ Producing and Marketing Meat for Ethnic Communities
- ❖ What Do Consumers Want from Direct Marketing Farmers?
- ❖ Climate Change and Your Farm
- ❖ Managing Canada Thistle in Your System
- ❖ Hiring Employees: Legal Requirements and Worker-Management Relationships
- ❖ Gone Nuts: The Potential of Woody Agriculture
- ❖ The Economics of Pasture Poultry
- ❖ Roundtable Discussion: Linking Experienced/Retiring Farmers with Beginning Farmers
- ❖ Women and Sustainable Agriculture: Past Lessons, Future Opportunities
- ❖ Policy Issues and Opportunities for Beginning Farmers

Paul Johnson to receive PFI Sustainable Ag Achievement Award



The recipient of the 2006 PFI Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award is Paul Johnson of Decorah.

Paul's public service career includes three terms in the Iowa State Legislature (1984–1990) during which he co-authored the 1987 Groundwater Protection Act, the 1989 Resource and Enhancement Protection Act (REAP) and the 1990 Iowa Energy Act.

Paul also served as chief of the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) at the United States Department of Agriculture from 1993–1997 and as director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources 1999–2000.

Paul has been the recipient of many awards over the years, including the prestigious Hugh Hammond Bennett Conservation Award.

Since 1974, Paul and his family have owned and operated Oneota Slopes Farm near Decorah. Their operation has included dairy, corn, soybeans, hay, beef cattle, sheep and Christmas trees. Recently, the tree

farm has expanded to provide fresh-cut, sustainably grown Christmas trees to local businesses and co-ops in Iowa and Minnesota.

Paul is married to Patricia Johnson, Associate Professor Emerita of Social Work at Luther College. They have three adult children—Eric, Andy and Annika—and five granddaughters.

Since stepping down from his last public service position in 2000, upon the birth of his third granddaughter, Paul has spent his time speaking, writing, traveling, farming, fishing and caring for grandchildren.

PFI Board and Retreat Update

July 14 board meeting

The PFI Board of Directors met on July 14 for our annual summer meeting. Many things were covered including the hiring of a new office manager and membership services coordinator, Julie Carlson. Julie is a highly qualified individual for this position and should be able to fill the big shoes of Sandra. We will definitely miss Sandra and we wish her well.

Robert gave a report on our 2005 fundraising efforts to date. Things are going well and it looks like we will meet our goals for the all-important first year. To date, \$36,025 has been raised through several methods. Rick Hartmann and Stacey Bastian have

made a generous proposal to house the PFI library on their farm in Minburn. Stay tuned for more details on how to check out various books and publications. We also had a very informative discussion with our new ISU Board Representative, Jerry DeWitt, and a presentation from Mahdi Al-Kaisi about the Iowa Learning Farm demonstration program. Plans for the annual conference are underway and events appear to be shaping up nicely.

Annual Board and Staff Retreat

Another productive retreat was held at the Des Moines Y Camp near

Boone Aug. 25–26. We've ended up in a better financial situation than predicted a year ago, this due to good budgeting, prudent financial management and additional grant dollars. Our unrestricted fundraising efforts have gone well, leaving us only \$3,400 short of this year's \$47,000 goal, with still a few months left. Planning for the annual conference is going well and should be another great time to meet with old friends. The field day season has gone well and we appreciate the strong attendance we have seen throughout the summer.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Franzenburg
District 3 Board member



Tom German answers questions out in the field at his grass-fed beef field day this summer.

Health Food

Case study by Clara Muggli,
John Seymour-Anderson and Jim Ennis

Health benefits have proven the biggest selling point for Tom and Kristi German's Thankful Harvest Tenderheart Beef. A doctor even asked to put their new brochure in his waiting room.

This is the second in a series of stories on Iowa grass-based meat marketers who participated in a project sponsored by PFI, Midwest Food Alliance and the Leopold Center to examine which messages and communication strategies are effective in communicating the benefits of grass-based products. Other participants were PFI members Nan Bonfils and Don Adams, Madrid, and Scott Weinberg, Clarksville (profiled in our summer issue). Each utilizes pasture-raised production systems and markets products directly to consumers.

The first step of the project was to conduct consumer focus groups to determine which aspects of pasture-raised meat production were most compelling to consumers. Results from the focus groups indicated that the average consumer would respond most to information about taste, health and nutrition; support for local farmers;

and, to a lesser extent, environmental sustainability and humane treatment of animals.

A consultant then worked with each participating farmer to develop a brochure focusing on those marketing messages that focus groups had determined to be most effective. The consultant visited the three farms and interviewed all participants, ultimately creating a brochure tailored to each farm, and targeting each participant's desired consumer market.

Following is a description of how the project worked for Tom and Kristi German, along with a summary of the results.

A family legacy

"As tender as a woman's heart," Tom German's grandfather used to say of the beef he sold at the Chicago Stockyards. When Tom and his wife, Kristi, returned to Tom's family farm 10 years ago to begin a pasture-raised beef operation, they wanted the name of their product to reflect this family legacy. Now, Tom and Kristi's TenderHeart beef is known to their customers as "the way meat used to taste, the way it's supposed to taste."

The Germans' animals eat only grass for their entire lives (the only additional supplements are free-salt minerals). Tom and Kristi look at pasturing as a perfect scenario: Surrounded by a delicious salad bar of forage grasses, the animals feed themselves, which reduces the human energy and costly feed inputs needed to sustain them. In addition, the pasture environment—with the daily exercise, sunshine and fresh air—leads to happy, healthy animals.

Raised without antibiotics or added growth hormones, the Germans' beef cattle are certified organic. The operation was also recently certified by Food Alliance in recognition of the environmentally and socially responsible practices used on the farm. Tom said customers should know that his beef "is produced as if they would have done it themselves, with the utmost attention to eating

quality and human health benefits."

In addition to cattle, the Germans produce pastured broilers and farm-raised eggs. And last, but hardly least, they have three children: Daniel, 8; Morgan, 8; and Grace, 6.



Markets and goals

Prior to the case study project, Tom and Kristi were marketing their TenderHeart beef directly to customers in bulk (quarter or half an animal). In addition, they sold TenderHeart beef at a local natural food store. For advertising, Tom and Kristi relied primarily on word-of-mouth referrals, as well as the brand recognition from selling their product in the natural food store. Interestingly, they had also recently begun to receive referrals from an osteopath in Omaha, Neb., who recommended their pasture-raised beef for some of his patients. (This idea originally came from the same doctor, who called the Germans and asked for information he could make available to his patients. The doctor had learned of their product from a patient who had purchased some after being advised by the same doctor that she should eat more healthfully.)

The Germans had already developed names for both their company (Thankful Harvest) and their beef products (TenderHeart). In developing these names, Tom and Kristi tried to stay away from geography and direct farm ties. "We wanted something that was more universally acceptable and mobile," Tom said. "We think we can build a story that is not just tied to this farm's location."

Tom and Kristi were eager to participate in the case study project in order to develop a brochure to expand their marketing. They planned to widen their retail market as well as increase referrals from regional doctors

Member Profile



Measuring success

Eighteen months after the development of the marketing brochure, Tom and Kristi have distributed their brochures to potential customers in person and through the mail. They've also followed through with their plan to make the brochure available in doctors' offices. The Germans went a step further and had some of their existing customers give brochures to people they knew as well as placing brochures in the offices of their doctors.

Tom said the brochure has proven successful in helping him reach new customers, especially those interested in the health benefits of the product.

Of all the messages in the brochure, Tom said the health message is proving the most effective in attracting new customers. "This is all about healthy food," Tom said. "It's about doctors telling their patients they should eat better, and those people coming to us."

Of additional messages, Tom said, "We've had virtually no customers coming to us because of environmental issues. That's a nice tag-along thing for customers, but nobody came in the door because of that. We're all somewhat self-centered. We say, 'food has to be good for me, in taste and health, first.'"

Time saver

Tom said the brochure has saved time. Phone calls with people interested in the product and its story would normally average 45 minutes each, talking through the health benefits and research. The potential customer would have no choice but to memorize the information or write it down. Now the Germans can give a short

"This is all about healthy food. It's about doctors telling their patients they should eat better, and those people coming to us."

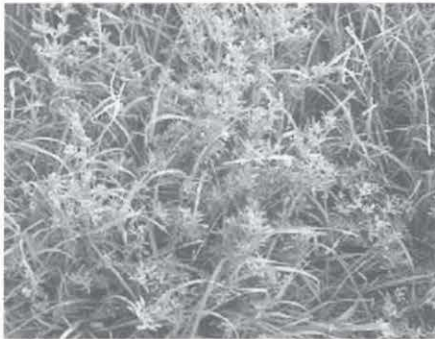
—Tom German

and alternative health practitioners by placing brochures in doctors' offices.

In order to augment their bulk sales, the Germans hoped to implement a subscription program for frozen beef cuts. With this CSA-style program, customers would purchase a quarter or half an animal to be delivered bi-monthly over a six-month or yearlong period; the Germans would primarily target this program to customers with limited freezer

space or an income too limited for one bulk purchase. Besides targeting these specific markets, the Germans wanted their brochure to highlight the difference between their pasture-raised product and conventional grain-fed beef, focusing on "both what we do, and what we don't do."

John Seymour Anderson, the consultant contracted to design marketing materials for each project participant, visited the German farm to interview Tom and Kristi. Using the messages determined by the focus groups to be most compelling, Anderson designed a brochure advertising TenderHeart beef. The brochure highlights the flavor and tenderness, as well as the health benefits, of the product. In addition, it presents three convenient buying options for customers, one of which is the subscription program that Tom and Kristi had hoped to promote.



pitch and say the rest is in the mail. Brochure to the rescue.

The reaction to the brochure has been overwhelmingly positive. “We’ve received many compliments,” Tom said. “Because there is so much information in the brochure, we haven’t had comments about specific items, but the overall reaction has been great.”

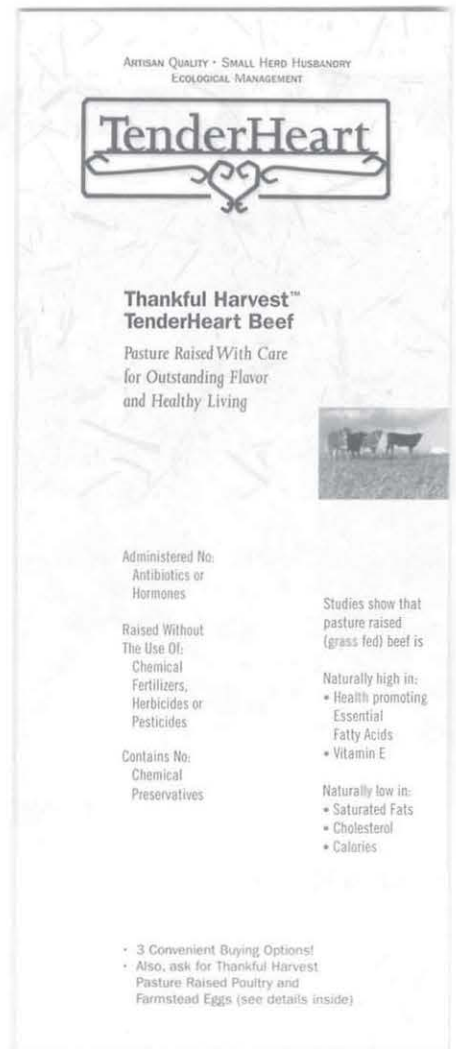
The Germans chose to include a lot of information in their brochure and didn’t worry that people might be overwhelmed. “People are looking for this information,” Tom said. “They need a place where it can all be consolidated. They made the effort to find us in the first place, so they’re willing to make the effort to read it.”

When asked if he would benefit from continued marketing support from the project, Tom answered in the affirmative. “I’d like to fine-tune the message and maybe produce some more materials,” he said. John has already helped the Germans create business cards and refrigerator magnets and they turn occasionally to him for marketing advice.

In the end, Tom said the project hasn’t really changed his ideas about marketing or how to present the story of his product. “John basically took our story and used the tools and information he had to put together the pasture-raised message,” Tom said. “He had the background and experience to help us tell our story. It was a terrific effort.” ☞

“People are looking for this information. They need a place where it can all be consolidated.

—Tom German



The front of the Germans’ brochure.

The Germans’ pasture-raised messages

Tom and Kristi’s brochure focused on these marketing messages:

- **Flavorful.** The Germans “approach our beef like making wine. We start with the best ingredients...” The perfect mix of animal type, good forage grasses and careful handling lead to the perfect flavor of beef.

- **Nutritious.** What it has. Grass-fed beef contains many beneficial nutrients: “Studies show that pas-

ture-raised (grass-fed) beef is naturally high in health-promoting essential fatty acids [and] Vitamin E.”

- **Nutritious.** What it doesn’t have. Pasture-raised beef is lower in cholesterol and saturated fats, as well as containing fewer calories than conventional beef.

- **Convenient.** Customers can purchase meat directly from the farm, either in bulk or through a bi-monthly subscription-buying

program. In addition, individual cuts are available at a local natural food store.

- **Processed locally.** By working with a small local processor, the Germans ensure humane treatment of their animals. They also minimize the stress the animals experience.

- **Environmentally friendly.** The Germans manage their farm to preserve biodiversity, as well as soil health.

PFI Camp 2005 Around the World in Four Days



By Brad Meyer

What a view! The annual PFI Camp was held June 8–11 at the beautiful Boone YMCA Camp along the Des Moines River. This year's theme was "Around the World in Four Days," which we explored through many hands-on activities and games. PFI Camp staffers Meryl Wise, Torey Olsen, Frances Zacharakis-Jutz and Kate Gilbert shared their experiences of visiting other countries like Denmark and Trinidad, including interactions they had while there.

Naturalist and long-time PFI Camp supporter Mike Havlik, better known as "Mike Marsh," contributed many programs, including an activity where we fed mice to a snake used in Y-Camp environmental programs. A big hit this year was the swimming pool. While much of the state had large amounts of rain, we had hot,

sunny weather perfect for swimming. There was even an ongoing contest to see who could go down the water slide the fastest.

One of the biggest activities this year was archery. It turned out that several siblings signed up, making for a fun rivalry between brothers and sisters. I have to say that I think the sisters edged out their brothers in the end.

Our annual service project was to revisit and work on a prairie reconstruction that PFI Campers had planted back in 2001. First everyone learned how to identify some common prairie species and some common weeds. Then as a group we weeded the prairie, and before leaving, each of us found a prairie plant and weeded around it. A couple highlight species we found were Compass Plant and

Rattlesnake Master. Once again this year, a family potluck wrapped everything up with perfect weather and excellent food to enjoy. See everyone next year!

PFI Camp silent auction at Annual Conference

Just a reminder that we are now accepting items to be auctioned off on eBay for the benefit of PFI Camp. For more information on how this works, contact Todd at todd@practicalfarmers.org or 515-232-5661 ext. 108. It's also not too early to start collecting items for the PFI Camp Silent Auction. For more information about PFI Camp, or to comment, contact Brad Meyer at pfifarmer@hotmail.com or 515-230-1439. ☺



Photos by
Meryl Wise

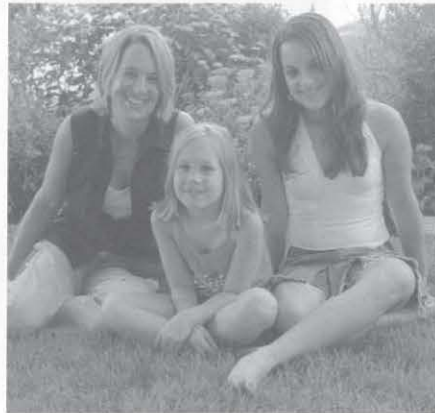


Julie Carlson new PFI membership coordinator

Julie Carlson recently replaced Sandra Trca-Black as PFI Membership Services Coordinator. Julie lives on an acreage near Meservey in Hancock County. Most recently she revived an old hardware store in downtown Thornton, selling locally produced food and gifts in addition to the usual nuts and bolts.

“My work at PFI further connects with my interest in rural communities and local agriculture,” she said. “Many, many times I referred my customers—farmers and non-farmers alike—directly to PFI staff and programs to seek additional resources for their local marketing efforts.”

Julie has two daughters, Natasha, 16, and Lea, 8. They attend Sheffield-Chapin-Meservey-Thornton Community School District.



Julie and daughters Lea and Natasha.

Julie first learned about PFI while enrolled in the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings Program. The relationship between the two organizations brought Julie and her daughters to North Iowa to farm, and even though they are not actively

farming, the experience brought forward a passion for those who are.

Julie attended Wartburg (Waverly) and Grand View (Des Moines) colleges and recently completed the FastTrac NewVenture program through North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City. In the past five years, she has started two farmers markets and spearheaded three community development projects.

Trca-Blacks have son

Former PFI office manager Sandra Trca-Black and husband Bruce Black are the proud parents of a new baby boy: Caden, born Aug. 31 at a generous 9 pounds and 12 ounces, and 22 inches long. Congratulations!

Alternative pork producers sought for project

Alternative pork producers can get help on production issues through a new USDA-funded effort titled “Niche Pork Herd Health and Production Cost Management Project.” The project has three parts:

1) Production Cost Management: Accurate recordkeeping is a tool that helps solutions happen. The project will help farmers use records to find ways to lower costs and increase profits. Each farm’s data will be confidential. Farmer-to-farmer meetings will be held to review results and discuss solutions. The goal is long-term financial success for your farm and family. Partners include ISU Extension swine field staff, the University of Nebraska Extension and the Iowa Farm Business Association. Locations

of farms can be in Iowa, Nebraska and nearby areas of states adjacent to Iowa.

2) Routine Herd Health Diagnostics: Knowing why pigs get sick is crucial to knowing whether or not to treat. This part of the project will use Iowa State’s Veterinary Diagnostic Lab to learn what causes a farm’s pigs to get sick. Farmers will cover the costs of tests, but the submission fee will be waived. Private veterinarians will need to collect samples. However, vets can often identify the cause of sick pigs without tests, which can expedite decisions on whether to treat. Farm locations can be anywhere in the United States.

3) Intensive Herd Health Diagnostics: This part of the project will work with a subset of farms to con-

duct intensive diagnostic tests to determine and address herd health issues. Private vets will collect samples for testing at the ISU Diagnostic Lab. ISU vets will then develop strategies to address herd health issues. Private vets will share the results and strategies with farmers, and they will work with farmers to implement strategies and monitor results. The project will pay for over 80 percent of the costs. Locations of farms can be in Iowa, Nebraska and nearby areas of states adjacent to Iowa.

Farmers should consider getting involved in this project. For more information, contact Gary Huber, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Box 349, Ames, IA, 50010, 515-232-5661 (x103), gary@practicalfarmers.org.

Brown Huber signing up new class

PFI member Penny Brown Huber's popular "Grow Your Small Market Farm" program is signing up participants for classes beginning Jan. 21. The program is designed to assist local, small producers in testing their innovative ideas and creating farm business plans. Twenty-five small producers will be accepted into the 2006 class that will meet once a week in Des Moines through April 15. These meetings will be supplemented with guest speakers and hands-on opportunities. Beginning in May, the group will work on finalizing personal farm business plans, developing marketing materials and testing business ideas. This one-on-one assistance continues through October followed by a final group meeting in November. Registration deadline is Jan. 6. For more info, contact Penny at 515-232-1344, BrownPennyL@aol.com.

Tjelmelands' prairie seed for sale

PFI members Mark and Connie Tjelmeland are taking orders for their native Iowa prairie seed. The seed is Central-Iowa ecotype, bulk harvested, mixed seed and includes at least 20 species, including five grasses. Mark said prairie helps control Canada thistle, holds back blowing snow, reduces lawn mowing when used in natural landscaping, attracts birds, and "is beautiful to watch all summer long." The seed costs \$10 per pound, and custom seeding is available. Contact Mark at 515-434-2440.

Rob Marqusee's organic idea flies

Woodbury County PFI member Robert Marqusee had an innovative idea to spur rural development in the county: Give farmers property tax rebates to go organic. The idea became reality June 28 when the Woodbury County Supervisors voted to grant up to \$50,000 annually in property tax rebates countywide.

Rob is Woodbury County rural economic development director, a new position created this spring to help reverse economic declines in the rural areas of the county. Rob said the plan is designed to stimulate growth of small-scale farms and encourage people, especially young farmers, to stay on the land. As far as Rob knows, it's the first plan of its type in the country and could be adopted by

other counties in the state and throughout the country.

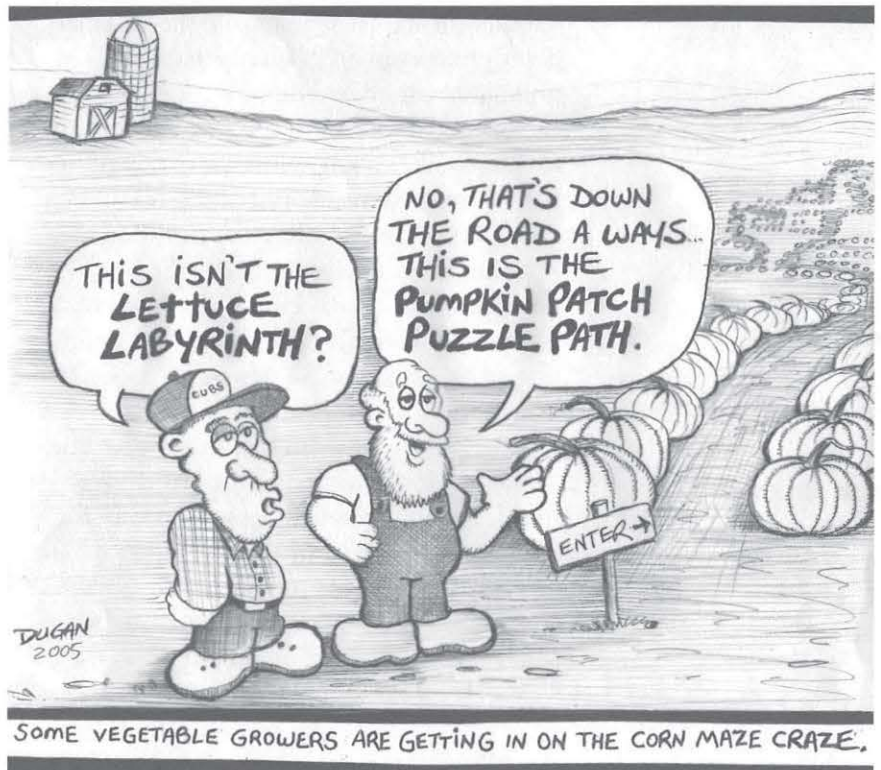
The rebate is provided for three years. To qualify, farmers would have to convert farmland to organic production, gain organic certification after three years, and use the land for organic production for the entire five years.

"The policy was the only logical way to address the production side of agriculture as an object of economic development," Rob explains, "and it had to be enacted at the local governmental level since there is no state financial assistance for agricultural production."

Rob's next goal is the adoption of a "Local Food Purchase Policy" (LFPP). It would provide that all county food facilities purchase locally grown food, when available.

The Farmer Funny

Art by Dave Dugan



One Word...Flavor

Raising and marketing heirloom vegetables has its pros and cons, but taste trumps all.

By Sondra Feldstein

The author

PFI member Sondra Feldstein operates the SalAmander Farms CSA in Bondurant.

Interested?

Lots of seed companies these days offer some heirloom varieties. Here are a few that specialize in or emphasize heirlooms, often including varieties from other countries. The list is not exhaustive.

Baker Creek Seeds

Missouri
www.rareseeds.com/
(417) 924-8917

Fedco Seeds

Maine
www.fedcoseeds.com/
(207) 873-7333

Seed Savers Exchange

Iowa
www.seedsavers.org/
(563) 382-5990

Flavor. That's the word you hear over and over whenever gardeners, farmers and eaters talk about heirloom vegetables. Other words come up, too—color, variety, nutrition. Also some less flattering ones like “challenging” and “a pain.” But it's the flavor that overrides everything, and it's the flavor that brings people back year after year to heirloom varieties.

The term “heirloom,” as applied to vegetables, is somewhat nebulous. When the Horticulture Division at the Iowa State Fair this year offered, for the first time, heirloom vegetable classes, “heirloom” was defined as any open-pollinated vegetable grown in this country for at least 50 years. But then the class description went on to specify that any open-pollinated variety would be eligible.

Some of the better-known heirloom tomatoes, like Green Zebra, are in fact rather recent introductions. But since the Green Zebra is an open-pollinated, non-patented plant, anyone can save seed from the fruit and grow more of them. Fifty years from now, Green Zebra will fit even the stricter definition of an heirloom. So maybe it's a distinction without meaning.

For people who grow vegetables for sale, the definition hinges on that critical word: flavor. American consumers accustomed to cosmetic perfection in their vegetables can be trained to tolerate tomatoes with cracked shoulders, and peppers that are small or oddly shaped, if the flavor is outstanding.

The ups and downs

Market gardeners in Iowa are growing heirloom tomatoes with great success. PFI member Angela Tedesco of Turtle Farms in Johnston likes Amish Paste, Arkansas Traveler, Green Zebra, Garden Peach, Kentucky Beefsteak and Matt's Wild Cherry. “The ones I keep have to be productive, not crack easily, be good keepers and, of course, taste good,” she said. “My CSA members like the variety and fun of trying different ones as well.”

PFI member Larry Cleverly of Cleverly Farms near Mingo has been producing heirloom tomatoes for nine years and this year grew about 60 varieties. “From a production standpoint, they're a pain,” he said. “Little or no blight resistance, splitting, green shoulders, misshaped fruit, vines that crawl up and down the trellis... But proper rotation and no watering except rain help some. But again, it's about the flavor.”

Ah yes, the flavor... But as with the definition of an heirloom, what amounts to good flavor can be subject to personal taste. For my own CSA, I gave up growing Garden Peach after several years because my members and I just didn't care for it.

On the other hand, Green Zebra and Amish Paste have been consistent winners. Other favorites include Cosmonaut Volkov, Black Krim, Kellogg's Breakfast and Cherokee Purple. And though most people like the range of color and shape, one of my retail accounts, a small grocery, says that his customers won't buy a tomato that isn't round and red.

As Angela indicated, yield can be problematic with heirlooms. Some of the variet-

What amounts to good flavor can be subject to taste.

ies I've tried, like Cosmonaut Volkov, produce high yields every year whether it's hot or cold, dry or wet. Others, like Black Krim, are outstanding one year and produce nothing the next. One of my favorite varieties, Hillbilly Potato Leaf, is always a poor producer, but I grow a few anyway because the result is the world's most beautiful tomato: huge, with yellow and pink stripes. And yes, the flavor is outstanding.

When I talked to Larry about his experiences with heirloom tomatoes, I was glad to hear him mention blight. I had thought maybe it was just me. No matter how carefully I mulch, and even if there's little rain early in the season, the heirloom tomatoes get blight.

Hoophouse solves blight?

This year, for the first time, I tried growing a few plants in a small hoop-house. Amber is a small, very early Russian variety; Legend is a very early red tomato of good size and flavor. I've been picking ripe tomatoes since late June with no signs of blight. This suggests that hoop-house production of heirloom tomatoes might be something worth trying on a larger scale.

When most people hear "heirloom," they think "tomatoes." But I've grown heirloom carrots, eggplant, potatoes, peppers, beans and okra with great success. Like tomatoes, the variety of color available in all these crops is amazing. With early planting and a little luck weather-wise, you can offer your customers red, white and blue potato salad fixings for

the Fourth of July!

Purple and white-striped eggplant, red and yellow carrots, purple striped beans, yellow hook-shaped beans...I've had CSA members arrange their weekly delivery as still-life sculptures.

In my own experience, these vegetables don't have the disease and production problems associated with

heirloom tomatoes. Yields are equal to hybrids in crops where they exist, and I've not noticed any particular disease problems in heirloom beans or potatoes. Heirloom carrots lack the candy sweetness of the modern hybrids, but for cooking purposes, I prefer their more intense flavor.

But any way you cut it, heirlooms are worth a look. ☺

Recipes

Athenian Plaka Salad

This is wonderful. Stunning to look at, divine to taste.

1 lb. snap beans, mix of colors and shapes

Dressing:

3 T white wine vinegar 1/3 c. chopped fresh basil
1 T lemon juice 1 T chopped fresh oregano
1 clove garlic, minced 1 T olive oil
4 scallions or shallots, finely chopped

1. Combine dressing ingredients and set aside.
2. Wash beans and trim stems; steam or boil briefly, just until tender but still bright green (or yellow).
3. Drain thoroughly. When cool, toss with dressing, then arrange pinwheel-fashion on platter with cheese in the middle and other toppings around the outside.

Suggested toppings:

Crumbled feta cheese
Toasted slivered almonds
Finely chopped boiled egg
Tomato wedges
Greek-type olives (not green)

Eggplant Parmigiana

Make this with orange and red tomatoes for real eye appeal.

app. 1 1/2 pounds eggplant, sliced 3/8" thick 3 c. tomatoes, coarsely chopped, w/ juice
1/2 c. flour 1 T chopped fresh parsley
1/2 tsp. pepper 1 T chopped fresh oregano
1/2 tsp. salt 1 1/2 c. shredded mozzarella
olive oil 3/4 c. grated Parmesan or Asiago

1. Heat olive oil to cover bottom of skillet very hot.
2. Put flour, salt and pepper in shallow dish. Coat eggplant slices with flour, then fry until browned, flipping to brown each side. This may take two or three skillet-fuls. Add more olive oil with each fresh batch of slices. Dump in any extra flour with the last of the eggplant as you fry it.
3. Spread half of tomatoes in 9" x 13" dish, cover with eggplant slices. Sprinkle with oregano and half the parsley. Add remaining tomatoes, then spread cheese over top. Sprinkle on remaining parsley.
4. Bake covered at 325° 20 minutes, then uncover for 10–15 minutes more. Let sit a bit before serving for the juices to set.

A Harvest Walk

By Helen D. Gunderson

*This is an abridged version of a chapter written in 1995 for Helen's book, **The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era***

There is a time during August when the scent from the maturity of plant life intertwines with the moisture in the air, and a cool shift in temperature says fall is coming. In September, the leaves of the trees on the farms along the road where I grew up are still green, as are the lawns, but the late-variety apples are finally maturing. They are firm and cold. While taking a walk at a farm a mile from where my parents live, I reach for one and take a bite. It is crisp, tart and juicy. The caw-caw-caw chorus of the crows resounds across the grove. The birds sit high in the cottonwoods, ash trees, soft maples, lindens and elms. The leaves on a few trees are beginning to fall. The wind blows them in somersaults, whispering across the green grass and down the lane.



Farmers are in their machine sheds readying their combines to harvest the corn and beans. The corn stalks are a weave of green and dirty beige; the silks at the end of the ears are burnt brown, coarse, curly and tangled. The whitish husks are beginning to loosen, revealing full, yellow,

dented kernels. The bean plants are turning rusty brown, their leaves drying, curling and shrinking. A farmer can measure the size and count the number of beans in a pod to predict the yield per acre. Even so, no one knows for sure when the first hard frost will come and the growing season will end.

As I walk down the road with my camera, the gravel crunches under my feet. The air is fresh and cool, making my cheeks red and causing my nose to drip; but there is also a glow from the sun, and I feel cozy in my wool sweater and Pheasants Forever jacket. I delight when I see a rooster dart out of the road ditch, flutter its wings as it takes off, and then glide across the field. Its piercing warble-gobble is a gift to my ears as I reminisce.

In the ditch there are milkweeds whose pods have hardened and opened, releasing a spray of white angel hair with brown, heart-shaped seeds at the end of each strand. The wind blows the seeds apart, and the strands of silk shine in the sun like soap bubbles blown by a child. In some sections of the road ditch, there are native prairie species. The big bluestem is the most noticeable, its purple-blue seedheads shaped like turkey feet swaying in the wind.

The bronze plumes of the Indian-grass are smooth. The Canada wild rye plants are nearly white, bleached by the sun. Their kernels are full and their whiskers are brittle and long. I look low and see the wild roses. Their thorny stems and small leaves are camouflaged against the ground; but the red, round rose hips are distinct.

Iowa is the only state that once was covered predominantly by tall-grass prairie. In fact, 85 percent of the state was made up of prairie. Today, less than one tenth of 1 percent (.001) of that prairie, with its rich biodiversity, continues to exist. It has been tilled to create a monoculture of row crops, mostly corn and soybeans.

The Machinery of Harvest

I like seeing the tractors headed for the fields, returning with wagons of corn and beans behind them. The pattern of farmers and their harvest machines is much like the activity of ants in their colonies. There are many varieties of tractors on the farm-to-market roads. The huge, new green ones with their double sets of rear tires are taller than I am. They are monstrous machines and able to pull two monstrous wagons at a time.

When I walk through the stubble of a harvested cornfield, looking for the right spot for a photo, I must lift my feet high so I don't trip. The stalks crackle and rustle with each step. As I establish my position at a safe distance from the path of the combine and wait for it to come into my viewfinder, I feel the ground solid under my hiking boots. There is a smell of ripeness that I find hard to describe. My agronomist friend at Iowa State University, Stan, tells me that it comes from the actinomycetes, a kind of organism in the corn stalk and the earth.

When harvest is over, there is still work to be done. The corn stalks need to be chopped and the ground plowed

with a V-ripper, an implement consisting of large tillage knives mounted behind a tractor.

Wildlife

I may see a jackrabbit bounding across the field. The wildlife is never close enough to photograph. I simply say, "Hi, Mr. Jackrabbit" and watch him dart across the field in a jerky, zigzag pattern like a cartoon character. I might hear honking and see a squadron of geese migrating south. Other times, a dark cloud will rise out of a field. It is a fluttering flock of blackbirds that are moving to another part of the field in search of grain.

As I drive along my road, I see a family of three deer. They have regular routes where bits of grain have fallen to the ground in the open fields between the water at Crooked Creek to the north and Lizard Creek to the south. If I hadn't come along, the deer would gradually have crossed the road. Now they stand frozen, eyeing my car. As I drive slowly west, they begin to run ahead of me and parallel to the road. They then take off across the field, running, springing and leaping with their white tails bobbing. They are graceful and majestic like stars of a ballet. I watch them until they are out of sight behind a rise in the field and the lone building, a corncrib, on one of the seven abandoned farmsteads along my road.

Over nine-tenths of the tillable farmland in Pocahontas County is used to grow corn and soybeans. They are the cash crops, the underpinning of the economy, but there is no adequate protection for wildlife during the winter in the farm fields.

Growing Wheat by Hand

In 1994, I planted 400 square feet of wheat by hand on an abandoned farmstead I own six miles from the road where I grew up. The

project was an experiment with poetic motivations. I hoped to at least be able to bake a loaf of bread from wheat I had grown. I used a hand sickle to harvest the wheat. I laid the plants to dry in a pile in a cardboard box in my father's machine shed. Later I took them to my apartment. I made a flail from two pieces of wood tied together with some clothesline and beat the wheat to loosen the seed. I put a pile of seed, hulls and bits of stalk into a five-gallon plastic bucket, stood outside on my deck in a strong wind, and poured the mixture into another bucket. The idea was to let the wind blow the debris away while allowing the wheat berries to fall into the second bucket. I sat at a table and picked the kernels out by hand. It was tedious. The result was three 10-ounce jelly jars of wheat. I quit and gave the rest of the plants to friends to use for decorative purposes. I packed one-ounce samplings of the grain in small plastic bags and gave them as party favors at a dinner for my 50th birthday.

Appreciating the Fields

At the tail end of the season, I see tractors pulling white anhydrous ammonia tanks or the tall, funny-looking, three-wheeled, monster-shaped trucks on large balloon tires. When these vehicles with brand names like Terragators finish their work, the land lies fallow for the winter, but much is happening in the soil during that time.

A well-managed field is like bread dough that contains yeast and is kneaded and left to rise before being shaped into the loaves. The difference is that the fallow ground rests in a suspended state of activity during the winter with conditions more like a refrigerator or freezer than the warm spot in the kitchen where the bowl of bread dough sits.

(continued on pg 25)



Background

Lengthening the crop rotation and/or transitioning to a sustainable system like organic brings both economic rewards and challenges. Can weeds be controlled? Will the crops have adequate fertility? Will yields and prices received justify the production costs? These questions can best be answered in field-scale, long-term studies.

Objectives

- 1) **LTAR** (Long-term agroecological research) at the Neely-Kinyon Farm: compare production, economics and other characteristics of a conventionally managed corn-soybean system to several longer rotations managed organically.
- 2) **Crop Rotation Study at the ISU Marsden Farm:** evaluate production, economics and other characteristics of a conventionally managed corn-soybean system (broadcast herbicide, fixed nitrogen rates) to several longer rotations managed with banded herbicides and testing-based nitrogen applications.

Results

- 1) **LTAR:** Organic systems have been more profitable than the conventional corn-soybean system. Despite increased labor requirement, the organic system profits are more sensitive to compost cost than labor cost.
- 2) **Crop Rotation Study:** Three years of economic results show the longer rotations with reduced inputs are economically competitive. Three years of production data suggest the longer rotations are gradually reducing the need for purchased N. The number of foxtail and velvetleaf seeds in the soil is declining, in part for an unexpected reason.

Cropping Systems Research at ISU

More than the sum of the parts

By Rick Exner

PFI field days in 2005 have provided opportunities for two cropping systems research projects at ISU to showcase their findings. One of these projects is completing its eighth year, while the other is only finishing year four, but both are demonstrating that the whole of a system is more than the sum of its parts. That might not surprise you, but some of the findings may.

Kathleen Delate, director of ISU's Organic Agriculture program, has a long history with the Neely-Kinyon Research Farm in Greenfield. Since 1998, Kathleen's LTAR (Long-Term Agroecological Research) project has compared a corn-soybean, conventional cropping system to several longer rotations under organic management. These systems are evaluated in plots large enough to work with standard field equipment, and each crop in the different rotations is grown each year.

One obvious question, at least at the beginning, was yields. As Table 1 shows, soybean yields in the organic system are holding their own with those in the conventional, corn-soybean system, and organic corn yields are not far behind conventional corn. In fact, there are years in which yields flip-flop and the organic corn yields more. The concerns with the organic systems would typically be fertility and weeds. Crop nutrient needs in the organic systems have been managed through composted swine

Table 1. Average yields by crop and rotation, 1999–2004, Greenfield LTAR

Rotation/Crop	– bu or T/acre –
Corn-soybean	
Corn	155
Soybean	41
Corn-soybean-oat/alfalfa (organic)	
Corn	141
Soybean	42
Oat	95
Corn-soybean-oat/alfalfa-alfalfa (organic)	
Corn	142
Soybean	43
Oat	94
Alfalfa	2.8

Data from Delate, Chase, and Turnbull.

manure and the nitrogen-fixing alfalfa crops. Weeds have been managed through timely field operations, including some hand labor—and through the rotations themselves.

As you might expect, organic premiums do not hurt the alternative rotations at all. Table 2 shows returns by rotation and by crop within rotation before figuring in the costs for land, labor and management. Of course, “individual mileage may vary,” but these results do show what organics can do for the bottom line.

In a paper covering the years 1999–2001 of the study, Delate et al.¹ observed that the organic rotations were more profitable than the conventional corn-soybean system even without the organic premiums. And although more

Table 2. Average returns to land, labor and management, 1999–2004, Greenfield LTAR
Rotation/Crop – \$ per acre –

Corn-soybean	
Corn	116
Soybean	109
Rotation	113
Corn-soybean-oat/alfalfa (organic)	
Corn	361
Soybean	435
Oat	130
Rotation	309
Corn-soybean-oat/alf-alfalfa (organic)	
Corn	400
Soybean	448
Oat	124
Alfalfa	208
Rotation	295

Data from Delate, Chase, and Turnbull.

Delate et al. observed that the organic rotations were more profitable than the conventional corn-soybean system even without the organic premiums.

Table 3. Average yields by crop and rotation, 2003–2005, ISU Marsden Farm.
Rotation/Crop – bu or T/acre –

Corn-soybean	
Corn	199
Soybean	52
Corn-soybean-triticale/red clover	
Corn	207
Soybean	56
Triticale	63
Corn-soybean-triticale/alfalfa-alfalfa	
Corn	207
Soybean	56
Triticale	64
Alfalfa †	4.6

† One full year plus seeding year cutting.
Data from Liebman and Chase.

labor was required in the organic systems, they remained more profitable than the conventional system even at high rates of wage labor. What the organic systems were most sensitive to was the cost of compost.

Closer to the middle of the state, a crop rotation experiment led by Matt Liebman has completed four years at the ISU Marsden Research Farm, west of Ames. The study included three rotations: corn-soybean; a three-year corn-soybean-triticale/red clover sequence; and corn-soybean-triticale/alfalfa-alfalfa. Crop outputs are priced the same across rotations.

The researchers were fairly cautious about reducing inputs, but by 2005, the late spring soil nitrate test was recommending less fertilizer N, and the yields of corn and soybeans in the three- and four-year rotations actually surpassed those in the corn-soybean rotation. Table 3 shows average yields over 2003–2005.

Table 4 shows that at the Marsden Farm the two-year and four-year rotations have performed best on average, trailed slightly by the three-year corn-soybean-triticale/red clover rotation. Several factors combine to make the results of this

Table 4. Average returns to land, labor and management, ISU Marsden Farm, 2003–2005.
Rotation/Crop – \$ per acre –

Corn-soybean	
Corn	176
Soybean	170
Rotation †	173
Corn-soybean-triticale/red clover	
Corn	220
Soybean	207
Triticale	54
Rotation	160
Corn-soybean-triticale/alfalfa-alfalfa	
Corn	228
Soybean	211
Triticale	42
Alfalfa	286
Rotation	192

Data from Liebman and Chase.

† Greater \$ with Roundup-Ready soybeans.

crop rotation study slightly different than those of the LTAR. Row crop yields have been excellent in central Iowa the past three years, favoring the corn-soybean rotation. A different set of grain prices were assumed (see Table 5), and of course organic premiums were not part of the picture. Moreover, when LTAR takes away the premium, the organic rotation still performs well, in part because it is truly low input. While the three- and four-year rotations at the Marsden Farm are trending toward lower inputs, they still are based on testing-based nitrogen and banded herbicides in row cropping years. Based

¹ Kathleen Delate, Michael Duffy, Craig Chase, Ann Holste, Heather Friedrich and Noreen Wantate. An economic comparison of organic and conventional grain crops in a long-term agroecological research (LTAR) site in Iowa. At <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag>

Table 5. Crop prices per bu or T

Marsden Farm		Greenfield LTAR	
2003–2005 Avg. Prices †		1999–2004 Avg. Prices	
Corn	\$2.04	\$2.00	Conventional corn
		\$3.48	Organic corn
Soybeans	\$6.03	\$5.65	Conventional soybeans
		\$13.28	Organic soybeans
Triticale	\$2.04	\$1.85	Organic oats
Triticale straw	\$35.00	\$50.00	Organic oat straw
Alfalfa	\$84.33	\$100.00	Organic alfalfa

† Based on tentative 2005 prices.

on tentative 2005 prices, for the first time both the three-year and the four-year rotations outperformed the two-year crop rotation.

If the message from the LTAR is that organics represents an attractive economic option for producers who are com-

Even conventionally oriented growers may be able to benefit from enhanced conservation with a painless transition to longer rotations.

patible with that style of farming, perhaps a “bottom line” message of the Marsden study is that even conventionally oriented growers may be able to benefit from enhanced conservation with a painless transition to longer rotations. Additionally, because herbicides were banded and were used less often than in the corn-soybean system, herbicide use has been reduced 71 percent and 78 percent, respectively in the three- and four-year rotations. If nitrogen prices continue to rise, cropping systems that need less energy input per crop output will only look better. And somewhere in the future, systems that protect soil and water may be rewarded as much as those that contribute most to agricultural exports. ☞

The Mystery of the Disappearing Weed Seeds

The Marsden Farm study is revealing new information about weed dynamics. Farmers may not realize that they have lots of little helpers out there. They do know that even a few weeds can produce enough seeds to thoroughly infest next year’s crop. But what keeps weed numbers from exploding? A number of scientists working on the Marsden Farm study are finding that the answer is “seed predation.” Who’s eating the weed seeds? To some extent, insects such as crickets are responsible. But the champion consumers of weed seeds turn out to be mice and other rodents.



in the soybean years, the overall soil seedbank for those weeds has actually declined since the study began in 2002.

In the fall and spring, these beneficial rodents spend most of their time in the forage legumes and small grains, whereas the summer finds them active in the row crops. Seed predation increased with greater distance from the edge of the plots.

In fact, in 48 hours, rodents removed up to 39 percent of velvetleaf seeds and 58 percent of giant foxtail seeds from cards left in the field, according to graduate student Andy Heggenstaller. So although the cropping systems study’s three- and four-year rotations are producing tremendous numbers of velvetleaf and giant foxtail seeds, especially

Professor Brent Danielson suspects this is because the most abundant rodent, the prairie deer mouse, happens to shun the edges of fields. Finally, the four-year rotation at Marsden appears to support more mice than the two-year or three-year rotations. The researchers do not yet know what draws these beneficial rodents to, say, corn or soybeans in the four-year rotation as opposed to the same crops in the two-year rotation. It’s another example of the system being more than the sum of its parts. ☞

Field Days 2005



Branded beef consultant Allen Williams demonstrated his ultrasound testing equipment as part of the Aug. 3 grass-fed beef field day on Tom and Kristi German's farm.



A good crowd turned out for Richard Black's Farm Vineyard Workshop July 23.

The 2005 PFI field day season has entered the history books. Highlights included the PFI 20th Anniversary Field Day June 30 at the Rosmann Family Farms. Special guest George DeVault, past editor of *New Farm Magazine* and current farm editor at Rodale, Inc., was there to help celebrate. George and Rodale were a help and inspiration to PFI co-founder Dick Thompson in the early days of the organization. George and Dick shared stories from the past and Harold Wright, Ames, was awarded PFI's first ever Legacy Award.

Several field days focused on alternative crops. Flax and lo-lin soybeans were the focus of several field days, and PFI co-presented Richard Black's annual Farm Vineyard Workshop July 23.

Tom and Kristi German hosted a grass-fed beef production and marketing field day Aug. 3. We had a big crowd turn out to hear branded beef consultant Allen Williams showcase his ultrasound testing.

On Sept. 8, Vic and Cindy Madsen showed off their many conservation practices at a field day focused on the Conservation Security Program.

Our total turnout this year was more than 1,600, one of the biggest ever. Thanks to everyone who participated! ☺



Audubon County NRCS soil conservationist Kristy York talked about the Conservation Security Program Sept. 8 at a PFI field day on the Vic and Cindy Madsen farm.

In each issue we focus on a selection of resource organizations and highlight some of the reports, books, newsletters, etc. each offers. This issue, we look at resources offering info on small grains.

Small Grains

www.smallgrains.org

Small Grains bills itself as “The Internet source for small grain growers” with an emphasis on wheat. Maintained cooperatively by the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers (MAWG), the Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council, and the University of Minnesota’s Northwest Experiment Station.

A few highlights:

- Grain Market Advisor list
- Market News
- Wheat Facts
- Research Reports
- Production Guides
- 2004 Wheat, Barley and Oat Variety Performance in Minnesota
- Harvest and Storage
- Seed Processing
- Marketing and Finance

University of Missouri

www.psu.missouri.edu/cropsys/

MU Small Grain Extension and Research

- Management of Soft Red Winter Wheat Manual (book, PDF online)
- Barley
- Barley Yellow Dwarf Management (research report)
- Utilizing Small Grains as Forage (newsletter article)

- “Weed Control in Winter Wheat” (newsletter article)

And...

- Production Guides and Basic Practices
 - Fertility Management
 - Weed Management
 - Grain Handling and Storage
- Call 800-292-0969

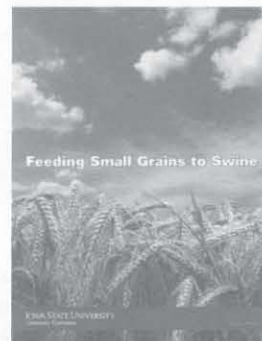
Michael Fields Institute

www.michaelfieldsagainst.org/PDF%20files/Small%20Grains%20Production%20Guidebook.pdf

Farmers Guide and Resource to Quality Small Grains Production

This booklet includes sections on selecting variety, weed control, scouting for diseases and pests, handling and storage, marketing and cutting chemical inputs with cover crops.

ISU



Feeding small grains bulletin,
[www.extension.iastate.edu/
Publications/PM1994.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1994.pdf)

Iowa State University has just released a new bulletin titled *Feeding Small Grains*. The publication has sections on nutrient composition, bedding, challenges and separate sections on barley, oats, rye, triticale and wheat. 515-294-5247.

Small grain buyers,
[http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/
organicag/grainbuyers.html](http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag/grainbuyers.html)

Iowa State’s organic ag website has a good listing of buyers that accept small grains.

Small grains expert

David Brenner is amaranth germplasm curator at ISU and a widely recognized expert on the small grain. He maintains publicly available electronic data on the Germplasm Resources Information Network. dbrenner@iastate.edu, 515-294-6786

ATTRA

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/smallgrain.html>

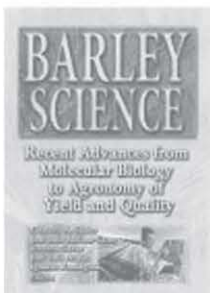
Organic Small Grain Production (Summary). This ATTRA publication discusses soil fertility, insect and disease management, weed management, and marketing for organic production of small grains. 800-346-9140.

USDA

<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/nassr/field/pcp-bbs/>

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service offers this full-text report that includes data on the area planted and harvested, yield and production of wheat, oats, barley and rye, by state and U.S.; also wheat production by class.

Books



Barley Science: Recent Advances from Molecular Biology to Agronomy of Yield and Quality

Comprehensive book covers every aspect of barley from molecular biology to agronomy of yield and quality. Explains the latest developments in the field and presents ideas and techniques for bridging the gap between physiology and breeding.

The Oats, Peas, Beans & Barley Cookbook
by Edyth Young Cottrell

Oats

www.oatlink.com

Oatlink is a consortium of farmers, grain handlers, processors and university researchers striving to connect the production, handling and processing of value-added grain. Download the "Farmers Guide and Resource to Quality Small Grain Production," www.oatlink.com/bugrep.htm.

Wheat, Barley and Triticale Abstracts

www.cabi-publishing.org/AbstractDatabases.asp?SubjectArea=&Subject=&PID=58

Wheat, Barley and Triticale Abstracts is a fully searchable abstracts database of internationally published research offering the latest information on production, from germination to storage, consumption to marketing.

This is a subscription service that delivers a weekly dose of new highly targeted, searchable summaries covering key English and non-English

www.maes.umn.edu/maespubs/vartrial/cropages/oatpage.html

The Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Association offers results of their oat trials 1997–2003. Also info on seed sources and oat variety description sheets.

language journal articles, reports, conferences and books about wheat, barley, triticale and rye. Over 5,000 records are added to the database each year.

Includes a fully searchable backfile to 1990. Over 55,000 research summaries bring a wealth of current and seminal research in these cereals to your fingertips.

Small grains grab bag

Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute, www.jeffersoninstitute.org

TJAI specializes in alternative crops. A website features detailed alternative crop overviews on everything from amaranth to flax. Also featured are crop production guides and crop budgets. Read news about upcoming conferences. Sign up for a free email newsletter or join the organization. 573-449-3518

ATTRA amaranth bulletin

ATTRA has a short but sweet bulletin on the ancient small grain amaranth that includes the basics and a list of good resources. <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/amaranth.pdf>

Rodale amaranth info, www.eap.mcgill.ca/CPAT_2.htm

A great primer by the Rodale Research Center on amaranth. With info on varieties, crop rotations, diseases, drying, marketing and more.

SARE accepting grant proposals

North Central Region-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) is accepting Farmer Rancher Grant Proposals through Dec. 1. More info: www.sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm, ncrsare@unl.edu, 1-800-529-1342.

Calendar

NOVEMBER

- ❖ Cooperative Opportunities in a Global Economy, Nov. 7–8, Hyatt Regency, Minneapolis, Minn. 8th Annual Farmer Cooperative Conference. For more info: UW Center for Cooperatives, www.wisc.edu/uwcc/fc/fc.html.
- ❖ DBIC Turning Chaos into Control: Milk to Artisanal Masterpiece Conference, Nov. 8–10, UW River-Falls, Wis. Encouraging cheesemakers to produce new artisanal cheeses and show participants how to use existing equipment to convert milk into a masterpiece. Contact: Rane May, 715-425-3702.
- ❖ Woodbury County Organic Growers Conference, Nov. 9–10, Bluff's Area Family Center, 903 Topaz Dr., Sergeant Bluff, Iowa. Keynote speakers, Ellen Huntoon, U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee, on The Future of Farm Subsidies and Farm Bill 2007; Fred Kirschenmann, Leopold Center, on The Philosophy of Family Farming & Agriculture of the Middle. Contact: 712-279-6609, rmarqusee@sioux-city.org, www.woodbury-ia.com/departments/EconomicDevelopment/conf1.asp.
- ❖ A Creative Quiescence, Sixth Annual Fall Harvest Gathering for Women in Sustainable Agriculture, Nov. 11–13, Good Earth Village, Spring Valley, Minn. Contact: Cassi Johnson, cassi@wfan.org, 319-354-3760.
- ❖ Aldo Leopold and Prairie Weather, Display of George Olson illustrations, Nov. 13–20, Arts for Living Center, Seventh and Washington, Burlington. Olson is the illustrator of a new book, *The Elemental Prairie*. Contact: Jerry or Lois Rigdon, 319-753-2661.
- ❖ Fifth Annual Iowa Organic Conference, Nov. 14, Scheman Building, Iowa State University, Ames. Contact: ISU Organic Agriculture Program, acmckern@iastate.edu, 515-294-5116.
- ❖ Forum on Energy Efficiency in Agriculture, Nov. 14–16, Embassy Suites Hotel, Des Moines. Conference will highlight energy efficiency technologies, policies and actions that can contribute to sustainability of farms, ranches and rural businesses. For utility companies, regulators, agencies, researchers, educators and farm leaders. Contact: Amy Swenson, Iowa Energy Center, 515-294-4391, swenson@energy.iastate.edu.
- ❖ Experience The Diversity of Food: Production through Consumption, Nov. 17–18, Sheraton Four Points Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio. Regional and national experts discuss issues related to production, marketing and consumption of ethnic and cultural foods. For more info: www.ces.purdue.edu/dearborn/diversityconf.htm.
- ❖ Leopold Celebration: Harvest Lecture, "Aldo Leopold and Prairie" presented by Bob Sayre, Nov. 19, 2:30pm, Arts for Living Center,

Seventh and Washington, Burlington. Contact: Jerry or Lois Rigdon, 319-753-2661.

DECEMBER

- ❖ The New Rural America: Partners and Progress, Dec. 7, 8:30am–4pm, Hilton San Francisco, 333 O'Farrell St., San Francisco. National community economic development symposium examines communities in rural America that are breaking all of the molds. Join community development practitioners, policy-makers, local officials and residents as they share stories of success and outline pitfalls to avoid. More info: <http://nw.org/network/training/upcoming/ruralSymposium05.asp>
- ❖ Marketing & Food Systems Workshop, Dec. 8, 8:30am–4pm, Gateway Hotel & Conference Center, Ames. Leopold Center Marketing & Food Systems Initiative Workshop. Contact: Rich Pirog 515-294-1854 or rspirop@iastate.edu.

JANUARY

- ❖ PFI Annual Conference, Jan. 13-14, Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn, www.practicalfarmers.org.
- ❖ Midwest Value Added Agriculture Conference, Jan. 27–28, Plaza Hotel and Suites, Eau Claire, Wis. For more info: www.rivercountryrca.org/VAC%20info.htm.

FEBRUARY

- ❖ Sixth Annual Water Monitoring Conference: Health and Economic Impacts of Water Quality, Feb. 16–17, Benton Auditorium, Scheman Building, Ames.

Swine Herd Health Workshop info available online

In July, PFI held a swine herd health workshop in conjunction with Dan and Lorna Wilson's field day near Paullina. Two presenters brought participants up to date in two critical areas in alternative swine production systems.

Dave Stender, Extension Swine Specialist from Northwest Iowa, demonstrated why the niche pork producer requires a different set of strategies and priorities than the conventional producer. This is some-

thing that many lenders and consultants—and even some producers—don't fully grasp.

Dr. Kurt Van Hulzen described a practical yet thorough approach to keeping pigs healthy in alternative systems. Kurt is a vet who gets to know clients and their systems well enough that he can work effectively with them in eliminating disease outbreaks and restructuring their systems for herd health. Kurt has agreed to take over development of the Herd Health

Guide for Alternative Swine Systems.

The slides and audio for these two sessions can be found on the PFI home page, www.practicalfarmers.org. Just click on Programs, Farming Systems Program, Farming Systems Related Resources. Then choose the Herd Health and Production Strategies link. After you select a talk, you can choose a connection speed appropriate for your situation. Faster speed settings have better quality sound, but may sound choppy if your connection can't keep up.

Harvest Walk

(continued from pg 17)

There are billions of minute creatures in a couple of scoops of soil. The molds and fungi begin to eat the crop residue, but the debris has little nitrogen in it. So the bacteria begin to digest the inorganic nitrite of the anhydrous ammonia and convert it to organic nitrates. After devouring all the nitrogen sources that are available, the first round of organisms dies and is consumed by larger creatures. This cycle of devouring and being devoured builds the level of organic nitrogen in the earth so that the new spring plants can assimilate them with average yields of 51 bushels of beans or 163 bushels of corn per acre for Pocahontas County. Creatures that are large enough to move between the layers of the soil—such as insects, earthworms, centipedes and millipedes—move to the surface to obtain organic material, and then take it down deep, leaving vertical holes that allow air and moisture to sink into the earth.

When the temperatures drop below freezing, the frost creates a beautiful, crystalline look, a white dream dust that sparkles on the landscape. The landscape is a simple monochromatic juxtaposition: fallow fields, brown trees and a somber sky. As the wind picks up, the sky becomes a stratified mixture of light and dark clouds interspersed with bands of blue. The temperature drops again, and the first winter storm starts moving in from the west.

Since I own land inherited from my grandparents and given me by my parents, I profit financially from status-quo agriculture. But I wonder about the cost. What is the long-term effect of a system that jeopardizes the ecosystem of the rural landscape to such an extreme degree? I also wonder about the effect of modern agriculture on rural neighborhoods. For instance, it is hard to ignore the inverse correlation between the trend toward larger farms and the declining population of Pocahontas County.

I have mixed feelings of nostalgia and disenchantment, love and disdain as I walk along the road where I grew up. The feelings are strong, and the inner wrestling match seems overwhelming at times. Being in the country is part of my salvation, but it also disturbs me. I like being there with my camera and observing the machinery of harvest. I enjoy breathing the cool air and stopping to visit my parents' retired neighbors. Often they serve me a cup of coffee and a dish of apple crisp. However, how much should I accept the status-quo agri-business and how much should I try to change it? Then the big question—the one I would just as soon avoid—stares me in the face: "Is it possible to alter the system of Iowa row-crop agriculture and its lack of ecological diversity, or must it roll on—even if it has reckless consequences for the natural community and the people community—before future generations of farmers and the public at large come to their senses and insist on change?" That is the kind of winter that scares me. ☼

PFI Merchandise

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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.

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Farmer Cap—\$8

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

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100% cotton jersey in S, L-2XL.
White with full-color Buy Fresh,
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Buy Local logo. Perfect for grocery
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