the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 10, #1
Spring 1995

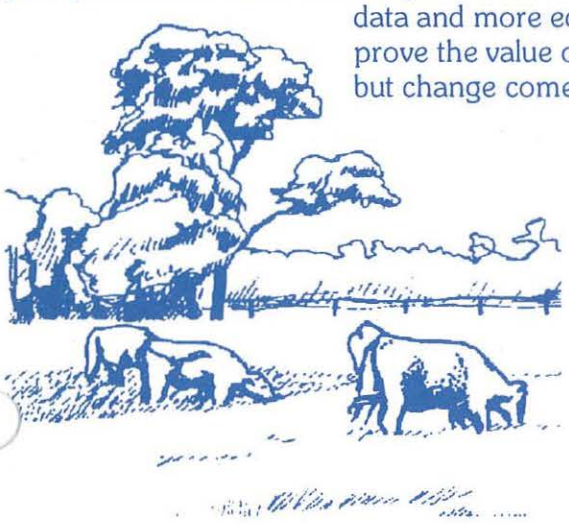
FENCES AREN'T FASHIONABLE

Vic Madsen, Audubon

A neighbor and I were visiting in mid-April about the fence we see being torn out this spring. My friend said he had a couple broken posts to fix in his stock cow pasture. Then he said, in a half-joking manner, "I feel like setting the posts at night when the neighbors can't see me fencing." We both laughed, but since then I have pondered that visit.

What is happening here is peer pressure. Nothing is said. But there is a definite message sent by our community that fences are not fashionable. While we don't like to admit it, most of us like to fit in and are nervous if we do something that doesn't fit our community's norms.

I have a hunch that sustainable agriculture's biggest hurdle is local peer pressure to farm like everyone else. We get more production data and more economic data every year to prove the value of sustainable agriculture, but change comes slowly.



Practical Farmers of Iowa helps people who are trying to shift their management style and mental process. The summer field days held on cooperators' farms are excellent opportunities to meet people who are trying different practices

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and who frequently look at things from a different angle. So often, too, the person sitting next to you on the hayrack or at lunch turns out to be a fascinating source of ideas.

PFI's *Shared Visions* program can also help people develop the confidence to try different farming practices. A local group of people can explore a different management style or a different crop, or they can do a value-added project. The key thing is they are not doing it alone. The group has other people for support and for sharing experiences. There is also less financial risk for everyone.

For those of you feeling torn between wanting to try something and doing what is accepted, don't feel alone. If you think about history, the only way improvements are made is by someone doing something different.

1995 FIELD DAYS AND PASTURE WALKS PLANNED

Despite the rainy spring, farmers are thinking about "show-and-tell" get-togethers for later in the summer. These occasions generally fall into three overlapping categories – scheduled PFI field days, pasture walks, and *Shared Visions* community groups' field events. (Descriptions and schedules for *Shared Visions* groups' events are on page 12.)

PFI On-farm Trials and Field Days

This year sees field days by some new cooperators as well as experienced veterans. Through a new project on integrated pest management funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, three new cooperators have joined the on-farm trials program (see article opposite). They are Mark and Julie Roose, of Pella, Phil and Sharon Specht, of McGregor, and Joe and Ane Fitzgerald, of Peosta. Ron and Maria Rosmann, of Harlan, are also involved in this IPM project.

The 1995 cropping year will mark the completion of a USDA SARE project to study ridge tillage. The grant has supported a wide range of tillage comparisons, fertility trials, and weed management evaluations.

Before the "official" photo, cooperators line up by height.

ISU soil scientist Antonio Mallarino has also provided a boost to PFI ridge tillage research by setting out fertilizer placement trials on several farms, including: Ted and Donna Bauer, Audubon; Don and Sharon Davidson, Grundy Center; Doug Alert and Margaret Smith, Hampton; and Dick and Sharon Thompson, Boone. To augment Antonio's work on fertilizer placement, PFI invited ridge tillers Dean and Deborah Ekstrand, Pocahontas, to carry out a placement trial in 1995.

Steve Hopkins and Sara Andreasen last held a field day outside of Decorah, where they were grazing the Jersey herd of PFI member (and NRCS head) Paul Johnson. Now the couple is settling in on their own farm near Newton. Their field day August 14 will look at the building process and growing pains of the first year on the new site. Also on the tour will be the grazing system of Russ Hughes, *Shared Visions* AG 2020 member.

Speaking of building, John and Pam Cowles, of Pulaski, saved and renovated a 100-year-old barn on the farm they bought two years ago. Having practiced intensive rotational grazing for a decade with beef cows, John and Pam are taking up the dairy challenge this summer. The two-story, 45-by-

The two-story, 45-by-70-foot barn, featuring "peg and pocket" construction, now houses a double-four herring-bone-style milking facility.

(Continued on page 4.)

DAUBENDIEK PRAIRIE WALK TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 10:00 AM

Laura Jackson, Cedar Falls

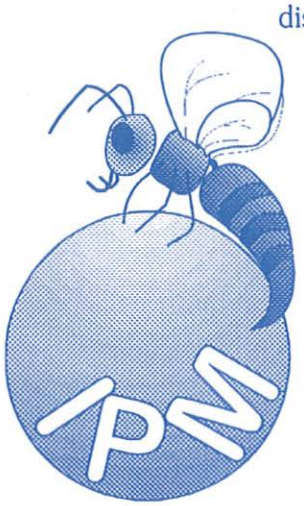
Daubendiek Prairie is an excellent example of the kind of pasture which used to occupy much of Chickasaw and Howard Counties. Over 80 species of plants, including valuable forage species like big bluestem, switchgrass, indiangrass, a native brome, and numerous prairie legumes, can be seen growing in somewhat natural conditions. Graziers may learn more about what kinds of wild plants could be used to augment their pasture systems.

Diversity of flowers and grasses should be ideal in late June. The grasses will be high, and some of the area is a slough, so boots and long pants are suggested. If time permits and there is interest, we will demonstrate prairie management techniques by clearing some white poplar that is encroaching on the site. If you wish to help, bring loppers.

The prairie is $^3/_4$ mile east of Highway 63, on Chickasaw County road B-22. (B-22 is the road you turn west from 63 to reach Frantzens' and Reicherts'.) The prairie is on the north side of the road. For more information, contact me at the Dept. of Biology, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, 50614. (319) 273-2705.

IPM PROJECT DRAWS IN NEIGHBORS

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) looks at bug problems holistically. That is, IPM looks at the whole farming system for causes and solutions to problem insects. IPM has traditionally searched for economic "threshold" levels of pests in order to set rational trigger points for treatment. The treatments themselves have usually been inherited from the pre-IPM era. That is beginning to change, as shown by an on-farm IPM project supported by the Leopold Center. The research will try out *biological* controls for some common pests of Iowa crops.



ISU entomologist John Obrycki and graduate student Kris Giles have been meeting with PFI members and their neighbors, setting up research plots in four areas around the state. Two of these sites will concentrate primarily on the corn borer, and two will emphasize the alfalfa weevil and potato leafhopper.

Joe and Ane Fitzgerald, Peosta, and Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan, are cooperators in the corn borer project. Joe and Ane are new PFI cooperators, and Joe manages the farm at New Melleray Abbey. When scouting detects the second flight of the corn borer, these cooperators will release a kind of tiny wasp that lays its eggs in the corn borer eggs. Obrycki and Giles will measure the effectiveness of the wasps in reducing corn borer damage. The technique is used routinely in European corn fields.

The alfalfa-IPM cooperators are Phil and Sharon Specht, McGregor, and Mark and Julie Roose, Pella. They will be making use of insect diseases to manage the alfalfa weevil and the potato leaf hopper. These diseases occur naturally in the field and can be encouraged by the timing and method of alfalfa harvest. For instance, a strip along the upwind edge of the field that misses the first cutting creates good conditions for the weevil fungus. In rainy weather, the disease proliferates naturally. This may be a year in which most of the weevils caught in the sweep net are already infected. If so, the cooperators will detect the disease using methods they learn in the project.

Increasing the "multiplier effect" of this work, cooperators at all four locations are inviting in the neighbors to meet John and Kris, learn about the research, and ask questions. Some of these farmers are also trying out the same IPM methods in their own fields. All four cooperators will show the research at PFI field days this summer.

It's tough to evaluate water quality, but Ray Stonecypher did his best at the Pine Creek Project field day held jointly with Don and Sharon Davidson's farm tour in 1994.

(Field Days, continued from page 2.)

70-foot barn, featuring "peg and pocket" construction, now houses a double-four herringbone-style milking facility. There should be plenty new to see at their field day July 19, including the grazing system of neighbor Gary Cossel.

Ray and Marj Stonecypher are now farming the home place where Ray grew up. They say it's a beautiful spot overlooking the Cedar River Valley. Ray and his son Tony have been making fence this winter, and Tony is starting a dairy herd. The field day August 17 should provide a mix of grazing and row cropping, with some nice scenery, too.

With researchers in the ISU Department of Forestry, the Frantzens will be examining six combinations of establishment methods for hazelnut seedlings.

Tom and Irene Frantzen, Alta Vista, were recipients of a PFI Sustainable Projects grant for 1995 (see article opposite). With researchers in the ISU Department of Forestry, the Frantzens will be examining six combinations of establishment methods for hazelnut seedlings. These methods involve mulching, bare-ground, and no grass removal, all with and without use of plastic Tubex seedling protectors. Tom also took the initiative, along with PFI cooperator Mike Natvig, Cresco, of obtaining additional funding from the Organic Farming Research Foundation, in Santa Cruz, California. The Natvig field day July 27 and the Frantzen field day Aug. 16 will show the hazelnut establishment methods being tried.

Mike Natvig is also part of the study by Laura Jackson (see article opposite) that will examine the potential of native prairie plants in both grazed and ungrazed areas around Natvig's new farm pond. The study, supported by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, also involves PFI member Dan Specht, who last year started an evaluation of native plants with the help of a *PFI Sustainable Projects* grant.

As the newsletter went to press, the rainy weather was delaying planting and making it hard to say just what on-farm trials will be seen this year. In June, PFI members will receive the field day guide with the full listing of field events and trials. Here is the calendar of PFI field days.

June 22
Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan

June 24
Phil and Sharon Specht, McGregor

July 11
Dave and Lisa Lubben, Monticello

July 12
Joe and Ane Fitzgerald, Peosta

July 18
Mark and Julie Roose, Pella

July 19
John and Pam Cowles,
Gary Cossel, Bloomfield

July 25
Matt and Diane Stewart, Oelwein

July 27
Mike Natvig, Cresco

August 14
Steve Hopkins and Sara Andreasen, Newton
Russ Hughes, Searsboro

(Continued on page 14.)

FIVE *SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS* PROPOSALS FUNDED

Five good ideas received a little help from *PFI Sustainable Projects* this spring. They range from pasture hogs to soil fertility to woody agriculture.

Joe Fitzgerald, farm manager at the New Melleray Abbey, in Peosta, is seeking to control weeds without herbicides. He proposed an experiment comparing different seeding rates of rye as a weed-suppressing cover crop ahead of corn. The plots will be shown at the field day July 12.

John and Beverly Gilbert, Iowa Falls, will compare the economics and production of a group of hogs raised in confinement and one raised in a pasture system. Part of the pasture includes different high-lysine corn of three different maturities that the hogs will harvest.

John and Rosie Wurpts, Ogden, will complete a five-year comparison of a biologicals-based soil fertility program and one using conventional fertilizers and ISU recommendations. This is one of the few long-term studies of this kind.

Tom and Irene Frantzen, Alta Vista, are cooperating with ISU foresters and Minnesota hazelnut breeder Phil Rutter in an experiment to determine the best method for establishing hazelnuts. (See article on PFI field days.)

Mt. Pleasant Explorer Post 1846 will videotape interviews with retired farmers to document their skills, indigenous knowledge, and cultural heritage. The post, whose scouts study and demonstrate life in the 1846 era, will make tapes available to Practical Farmers of Iowa.

PRAIRIE PASTURE PROJECT BEGINS

PFI member Laura Jackson has secured support from the Leopold Center for a project that may unite two worlds and two separate groups of people. The separate worlds of farming and prairie studies will be brought together, and innovative farmers looking for productive, warm-season forage plants will be brought together with botanists and prairie restoration enthusiasts. The farms of PFI members Mike Natvig and Dan Specht will play a part in the project.

"Native prairie species, particularly grasses and legumes, may have an important role to play in intensively-managed rotational grazing systems," writes Jackson. "They are most productive in the mid-summer months, when traditional forage species grow slowly and are less nutritious. Only a handful of the most common native grasses and legumes have been tested for their utility in rotational grazing systems in Iowa. Currently it is difficult to test the wide variety of prairie species, because seed is scarce and expensive, little native prairie exists in private hands, and most remnants are too small to divide into rotational units. Furthermore, awareness of the native flora and its potentially useful components is often limited to specialists in botany and conservation."

"We will address this problem by testing methods of establishing native pasture plants into three existing cool-season rotational pastures in northeast Iowa. Two levels of grazing intensity will be tested in the second and third year of establishment, and the quality and quantity of forage production measured. . . In a separate area adjacent to one pasture, we will establish a diverse mixture of prairie grass and forb species in order to introduce farmers to the enormous variety of native prairie plants."

Mike Natvig's PFI field day July 27 will provide an opportunity to view this project in its establishment year. Laura Jackson is also leading a prairie walk on a newly "discovered" site near Alta Vista on June 27 (see page 3 article).

Mike Natvig and the new pond at the 1994 field day.

SHARED VISIONS

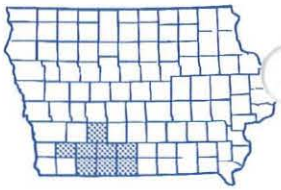
farming for better communities

Six community groups involved in *Shared Visions* submitted project applications for approval in early March. These applications were reviewed by the *Shared Visions* Advisory Council, which sent its comments on to the PFI Board.

The Board then reviewed the applications and Advisory Council comments and approved the projects for funding. The amounts requested ranged from $675 to $3,184, with the total for all projects being $10,885.

Descriptions follow of the goals, projects, and activities of these six groups. Shorter descriptions are provided of the two groups that had projects approved last summer.

Ag Connect



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* December 1994

Goal: To stop the out-migration of farm families and create a more sustainable agricultural system in southwest Iowa.

Project: Develop a database of retiring farmers that will include:

1. the willingness of landowners to use various arrangements to assist young farmers into farm ownership
2. information on practices owners would be willing to have used on their farms to promote the long-term sustainability of the operations

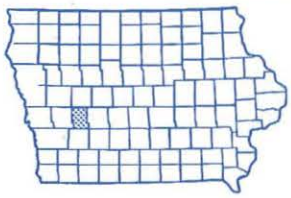
Project Budget: $2,400

Activities to Date: Ag Connect has been in existence for about two years. During this time the group developed the details of how this regional beginning farmer program will operate. They also secured funding for a coordinator who recently began work to implement the program.

The database of retiring farmers to be developed with support from *Shared Visions* will be used by the coordinator to facilitate matches with beginning farmers. A questionnaire has been developed and sent to all owners of land in the eight county area.

Contact: Lana Pals
500 E. Taylor Street
Creston, IA 50801
515-782-7058

Audubon Graziers



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* December 1994

Goal: To demonstrate that alternative farming methods such as management intensive grazing (MIG) can be profitable, sustainable, and improve the quality of life for our community and ourselves.

Project: Components are:

1. host monthly pasture walks from April through September on local farms, with each featuring a different topic or speaker
2. collect data on MIG from the farms of two group members for cow/calf, stocker cattle, ewe/lambs, and feeder lambs animal groups
3. charter a bus to the Adams County CRP Research and Demonstration Project's field day
4. develop a local resource library on grazing management to be located at the County Extension office

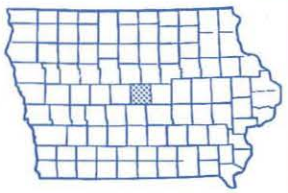
Project Budget: $2,116

Activities to Date: This group existed as an informal grazing group prior to involvement in *Shared Visions*. Since then they have broadened membership and identified a goal and activities to achieve this goal.

Data collection to assess MIG on member farms has begun. The first pasture walk took place in April, and the remainder have been scheduled. A charter bus has been reserved to take people to the Adams County CRP Project's annual field day on August 3. They have also begun collecting publications for the grazing resource library.

Contact: Donna Bauer
1667 Hwy. 71
Audubon, IA 50025
712-563-4084

Central Iowa Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* December 1994

Goal: Create a local food system, build community ties, and expand awareness of the relationships between food, land, and people.

Project: Components are:

1. document these elements of establishing a CSA:
   - organization, marketing, and distribution
   - economic viability
   - feasibility of a multiple-producer CSA
   - educational requirements
2. produce newsletters and a brochure and hold field days, education programs, and other community events
3. use member surveys and an end-of-season meeting for producers and shareholders to refine and improve the CSA
4. develop a publication on starting a CSA

Project Budget: $3,184

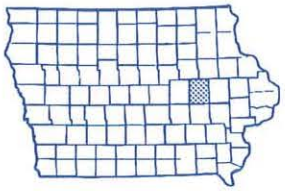
Activities to Date: This group met several times before involvement in *Shared Visions* to discuss starting a CSA. Their first *Shared Visions* meeting was a two-day visioning retreat. They have been meeting once every two weeks to continue to develop the group and the project.

Producers of vegetables, honey, meats, eggs, and bakery and fiber products have been identified. A person has been hired as the group's coordinator/historian. A brochure was developed and 19 shares sold. A meeting of shareholders and producers was held in mid-May.

Contacts: Jeff Hall
RR 6, Box 26
Ames, IA 50014
515-292-0322

Shelly Gradwell
1126 Agron. Hall
Iowa State Univ.
Ames, IA 50011
515-294-2235

Farm Fresh CSA - Benton County



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* December 1994

Goal: To benefit local farmers, consumers, and communities by enabling a group of local growers to market their fresh produce to members of their communities, thus helping people take pride in what they grow, harvest, deliver and consume.

Project: Components include:

1. document information needed to determine profit margins, positive achievements, and problems experienced
2. group members will grow 58 varieties of vegetables that 16 shareholders will receive over an 18-week period
3. a local orchard will provide apples as a part of what shareholders receive
4. marketing that will include a promotional brochure and outreach to local media
5. educational activities during the growing season on topics such as the nutritional value of produce and methods of preparing and preserving
6. a late-season picnic for shareholders, which will include a discussion to evaluate the project
7. a final report/manual

Project Budget: $1,110

Activities to Date: This group did not exist prior to its involvement in *Shared Visions*. Since then they have been meeting weekly to develop the group and work out the details of the CSA. A marketing brochure was developed and used to secure 16 shareholders. A distribution plan is in place. Members determined how much of what vegetables each will grow, and they have started production of these vegetables.

Contact: Katherine Ollendieck
116 East 4th Street
Vinton, IA 52349
319-472-5545

Louisa County *Shared Visions* Group

Became involved in *Shared Visions:* December 1994

Goal: To enhance communication between urban and rural citizens of Louisa County.

Project: The project will involve a series of "evening entrees" – tours of operations of local families involved in alternative crops and farming practices. Each tour will include refreshments and information pertaining to the topics of the evening. Local press will be invited, and follow-up articles will be written for local media. Attendees will also be asked about their interests.

These "evening entrees" will include:

1. a farm producing berries, melons, and crawdads
2. two farms that have incorporated agroforestry into their production mixes
3. a farm that has been utilizing management intensive grazing, with crafts and farm recreation opportunities to also be topics of this evening entree

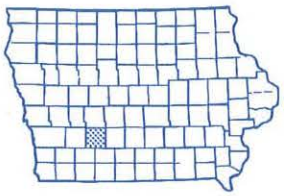
Project Budget: $675

Activities to Date: This group did not exist prior to its involvement in *Shared Visions*. Since then they have been meeting on a monthly basis to develop the group and plan projects.

Their first project (described above) is, in part, an attempt to involve more people from their communities in the group. They have also been discussing ideas for a more ambitious project, possibly on the topic of direct marketing.

Contact: Kathy Dice
13882 I Avenue
Wapello, IA 52653
319-729-5905

Neely-Kinyon Farm Project Committee - Adair County



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* April 1994

Goal: To develop the Neely-Kinyon Farm into a futuristic and innovative working farm that researches and demonstrates alternative approaches that will result in significant economic returns, that are environmentally sound, and that have a positive impact on the community.

Project: To involve community members in a process that will explore value-added concepts as they relate to the Neely-Kinyon farm.

Project Budget: $1,400

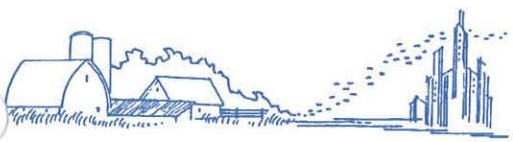
Activities to Date: This group has been in existence since January of 1994. They have helped plan research and demonstration projects for the Neely-Kinyon farm, which is a 160-acre farm located just south of Greenfield. The farm was given to the Wallace Foundation for Rural Research and Development, which gave planning responsibilities to the Neely-Kinyon Farm Project Committee.

The group is interested in farming systems and technologies that are not only profitable and environmentally sound, but that also support the quality of life of people from the area. The group's first *Shared Visions* project (noted above) came through as a strong interest during the group's planning process.

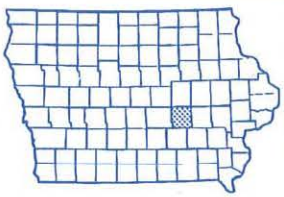
Contacts:

Deb Hall
ISU Extension
Rt. 2, Box 26D
Greenfield, IA 50849
515-743-8412

Clark BreDahl
Rt. 1, Box 54
Greenfield, IA 50849
515-745-2323



Poweshiek Area AG2020



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* January 1994

Goal: To help Poweshiek County CRP landowners use their CRP land in ways that are both environmentally sound and economically profitable.

Project: Survey owners of CRP land in Poweshiek County.

Project Budget: $1,197

Contacts:

Robert Bahrenfuse
15365 S. 12th Ave. E
Grinnell, IA 50112
515-236-4566

Eric Pederson
3638 Hwy. 146
Grinnell, IA 50112
515-236-5060

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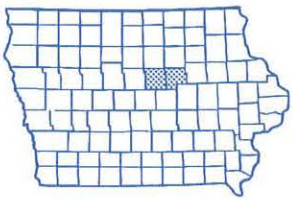
Promised Land Beginning Farmer Program - Grundy and Hardin Counties



Became involved in *Shared Visions:* January 1994

Goal: Determine the steps a community should and can take to help people start farming.

Project: Develop the Promised Land Beginning Farmer Program.

Project Budget: $3,380

Contacts:

John Gilbert
RR 1, Box 252
Iowa Falls, IA
50126
515-855-4260

Don Davidson
RR 1, Box 133
Grundy Center, IA
50638
319-824-6347

ENHANCING GROUP PERFORMANCE

During January's networking meeting for community groups, Mary Foley of ISU Extension used an overhead about six phases of a project (at right). Chuckles from participants likely came in part from the recognition of an element of truth in the overhead's message.

The following ideas may be useful if groups want to avoid the last five of these phases. The first list is from a presentation by Rick Foster of the Kellogg Foundation at a networking conference of groups involved in the Foundation's Integrated Farming Systems Initiative. The others are from the book, *Working with Groups, Committees, & Communities* by Harleigh and Audrey Trecker.

SIX PHASES OF A PROJECT

1. **Enthusiasm**
2. **Disillusionment**
3. **Panic**
4. **Search for the Guilty**
5. **Punishment of the Innocent**
6. **Praise and Honors for the Non-Participants**

Ingredients for a successful team:

- a "bone deep" respect for each individual on the team
- a mutually accepted vision and mission
- clear, open communication
- established ground rules
- awareness of group process
- balanced participation
- constructive feedback to improve team behavior
- well-defined decision procedures
- a sense of humor

Poor participation occurs when:

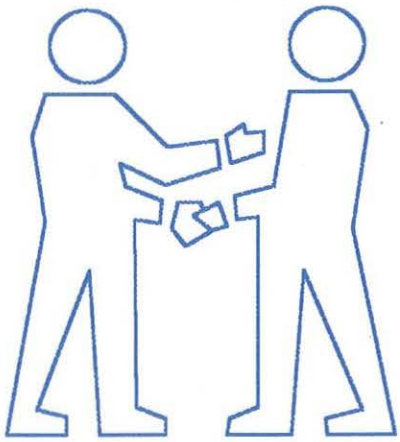
- not enough time and thought have been given to the group's formation and composition
- the group's purpose or goal is not clear or is not supported by some group members
- members may not be sure about their tasks
- members may be overloaded and overworked
- some members may lack knowledge and experience in the problem area being considered
- the group may have gotten stuck in its deliberations
- the group may have become dependent on one or two people to do most of the work

Responsible participants:

- are clear about the purpose of the group
- make every effort to attend meetings, and if unable to do so they make an effort to catch up on what went on
- openly share ideas, experiences, and opinions about matters of interest to the group
- cooperate by staying on the subject
- are fair, considerate, and reasonable in the amount of time they use in group meetings
- are willing to blend their ideas with others in the group
- learn how to use factual materials and ask for clarification if needed
- accept the process in a positive way and see the continuity between meetings

Some groups are non-productive because:

- not all the right people in terms of skills and talents are involved
- its goals are unrealistic in terms of its resources and the length of time it will take to achieve these goals
- its goals duplicate the goals of other groups, and they don't work together
- the group has ignored the planning process, and it lurches from crisis to crisis without long-term goals and reasonable, realistic plans
- the work is not spread among members



Some groups become productive from:

- agreement on procedures and methods – members know the rules of the game and how things are done
- clear goals and purposes systematically defined in relation to resources
- a plan to achieve goals that is tied to a time frame, and members work steadily to complete the plan
- an inventory of talents of members and the appropriate use of talents with a variety of individual activities
- members understand their job and stick to the assignment
- a schedule of regular meetings that the group sticks to
- materials are available for review and discussion prior to meetings, and members do their homework between and before meetings
- good records of meetings to help to keep from backtracking
- members devote time to checking up on each other, looking for better ways to do the job
- others in the community understand the group, which is a result of devoting time to encouraging this understanding

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Ways to encourage attendance at meetings:

- choose the best time and place after soliciting preferences from members
- stick to the time schedule – change only for serious reasons
- prepare notices with care and send to members well in advance
- send the agenda in advance and word it clearly so that members will look forward to a planned and interesting meeting
- make advance informational materials clear, concise, and appealing to members
- call to remind members about the meeting
- welcome and introduce all members
- create opportunities for new members to offer their ideas
- invite members to take on responsibilities
- organize a systematic follow-up with absentee members

Shared Visions Groups Hold Field Events

Many PFI field days this summer will take place with support from *Shared Visions*. Besides those field days, *Shared Visions* community groups will also be in the field with a variety of activities. The scheduled events are listed and described below. In addition to these, the Central Iowa CSA group will be holding two public field days – one in late July and other in September. The exact dates for these field days have yet to be determined.

The Louisa County group is hosting a series of "evening entrees," featuring a smorgasbord of community-supporting agricultural enterprises. All will run from 7:00-9:00 pm, and children are welcome. The series began May 25th with a trip to Turkey Run Berry Farm. Contact Kathy Dice, 319-729-5905, for directions to these evening entrees.

July 6 – a forestry-oriented evening entree at Chestnut Acres near Grandview. Topics will include agroforestry, nut and tree products, timber stand improvement, woodlot management, and a demonstration of grafting multiflora rose to spread disease.

Aug. 21 – an evening entree on rotational grazing on the farm of Roger Hunt near Columbus Junction. Also featured at this entree will be crafts and recreation opportunities on farms. (This entree will be preceded by a grazing-oriented field day by PFI cooperators Jeff and Gayle Olson, Mt. Pleasant.)

The Audubon Graziers group began their field walks April 19 with a visit to Dirk and Julie Rasmussen's farm. The sheep were already in the pasture, and ISU specialists Daryl Strobehn and Dan Morrical stopped by to discuss the new SPA enterprise analysis and the "sward stick" used for measuring forage quantity in the field.

Also, the group will be sending representatives to the Corning CRP project grazing clinic June 15-16, and they've set dates through the summer for the following pasture walks. They will all begin at 7:00 pm and include supper. For directions and more information contact Donna Bauer, 712-563-4084.

Dirk and Julie Rasmussen, of the Audubon grazing group, picked a rare sunny afternoon for their pasture walk this spring.

June 1 – John and Deb Kramer will show the watering system for their cow-calf herd. Rick Sprague will also be there to discuss water systems. Sprague is involved with the CRP grazing farm at Corning.

June 30 – Ted and Donna Bauer will show how they are working intensive rotational grazing into the "whole-farm plan" they are developing with the NRCS. Dave Brand will be there from the Audubon County NRCS.

Aug. 4 – Dennis and Cheryl Hansen are grazing sheep. Don Faidley, who grazes sheep near Colfax, is invited to speak.

Aug. 24 – Virgil and Charlotte Sorensen graze sheep. ISU Extension Forages Specialist Steve Barnhart will speak on grass identification.

Sept. 7 – Roger and Jo Ann Barten will show the fencing setup for their cow-calf operation. Also discussing fencing will be Don Hostetler, a farmer from Grand River who spoke at the Extension grazing conference last winter.

Kellogg Project Meets in California

Rick Exner

In February, some of us working in the *Shared Visions* program traveled to Santa Cruz, California for the semiannual Hub Networking meeting of the Kellogg Foundations's Integrated Farming Systems Initiative. When this meeting took place in Iowa, in 1994, we made sure that participants from around the country had the chance to visit Iowa farms and communities. Our California hosts did the same.

Not only was it a shock to experience shirtsleeve weather in February, it was startling to go from Midwest agriculture to that of the West Coast. In parts of California, the specialization and concentration of wealth in agriculture have proceeded well beyond what we know here. With $20,000-per-acre land and profit potential to match, it may not be surprising that a high-input, industrial approach has become the norm. But despite the specialization within many operations, there is incredible diversity of crops in the state overall. And even though the industrial model predominates, we met family farmers who survive by savvy marketing and creative management.

The day before the conference, our farm tour stopped at several sustainable and organic nut farms. These almond and walnut growers, some from families that have farmed for generations, are finding ways to bring biological diversity back onto their farms. This gets easier as they cut back on the pesticides that have been used to control the wide range of pests that call California home.

The key for many of these tree farmers is cover crops. They grow mixes of grasses, legumes, and other plants between the trees, and they manage the cover crops to optimize biological pest control and minimize problems with harvest. These cover crops are the "reservoir" for an army of beneficial insects above ground and below. For example, tiny wasps and flies drawn to the flowers of cover crop plants will lay their eggs in pest insects.

Quite a different kind of experience awaited us later in the week, when we visited an organization called the Rural Development Center (RDC). The RDC is one of the members of the Kellogg project in California, which they call CASA, the California Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture. CASA represents consumer groups, producers, and environmental interests as well as collaborators at the University of California. The RDC works with the community that does much of the manual labor in California agriculture. This includes Mexican-Americans and Mexican migrant laborers as well as other ethnic groups. These people have special needs because they follow the work from place to place under conditions that can strain both their health and their families.

The walnut trees were still bare, but the cover crop blooms were already feeding beneficial insects.

At the Rural Development Center, this young couple described their experiences beginning farming.

Paul Buxman (center) and a young future farmer at a breakfast meeting in California.

The Rural Development Center is bringing people back into agriculture as independent vegetable farmers. The RDC teaches organic production techniques, marketing, and financial management. One or two acres is sufficient for a farmer to grow high-value, organic vegetables, and little capital investment in equipment is required. We heard from a number of graduates and students of this program, and it was impressive to see how they were improving their lives through the project.

At the end of the Hub Networking conference, Tom Frantzen and I attended the annual meeting of a very interesting bunch of producers. *California Clean Growers Association* is the name of the parent organization, and several of their members mentioned Practical Farmers of Iowa as influential in their formation. Their founder, Paul Buxman, talked with then-President Dick Thompson about PFI's on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer information sharing. California Clean's big communication vehicle is – *breakfast*! Members have taken it on themselves to host regular local breakfasts to tell their neighbors about sustainable methods of farming.

The group has been so successful that the California Legislature made $500,000 available to expand the program statewide. Through a network of "Lighthouse Farms" that exemplify sustainable practices, scientists and producers are cooperating in a variety of on-farm research projects. It's making a difference. Driving through the countryside now, you see cover crops in perhaps a quarter of the vineyards and orchards; a decade ago bare ground was the rule.

We returned to winter in Iowa with a little bit of suntan and a broader picture of U.S. agriculture. Now we are looking forward to visiting rural communities in Arkansas, the site of the next Hub Networking meeting.

(Field days, continued from page 4.)

August 16
Mike and Jamie Reicherts
Tom and Irene Frantzen, Alta Vista

August 17
Ray and Marj Stonecypher, Floyd

Dan Wilson explains the water line reel he and brother Colin built for their pasture-based hog operation.

August 21
Jeff and Gayle Olson, Mt. Pleasant
(with Louisa County *Shared Visions* pasture walk)

August 25
Paul and Karen Mugge, Sutherland
Colin and Carla Wilson
& Dan and Lorna Wilson, Paullina
Dordt College Ag Stewardship Center, Sioux Center

August 28
Doug Alert and Margaret Smith, Hampton

August 31
Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan

September 1
Neely-Kinyon Research Farm, Greenfield

September 7
Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone

Pasture Walks All Over

One of the nicest ways to learn about intensive rotational grazing is by taking an occasional stroll through a neighbor's pasture. That's what twilight tours are all about, and this summer will see more of them than ever. Previously, PFI, NRCS, Extension, and other projects all held pasture walks, but each group was unaware of the others' dates. Now, thanks to Brian Lang, Jack Dillon and Tony Harvey in Extension, and Jim Ranum in NRCS, these schedules are finally consolidated in one place. In northeast Iowa, you shouldn't have to drive more than a few miles this summer to take a pasture walk.

Pasture walks began in April. The listing of upcoming dates follows. For details, call the Northeast Iowa Demonstration Project, in Postville (319-864-3999), your county Extension office, or the PFI staff. Note also the Audubon and Louisa County pasture walks listed in the *Shared Visions* section of this newsletter.

May 31, 1:00–3:00 pm, Sumner
John Kleppe

June 7, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Farley
Don Klosterman

June 7, 3:00 pm, Plainfield (tentative)
Scott Weinberg

June 14, 1:00–3:00 pm, Giard
Greg and Kathy Koether

June 14, 1:00–3:00 pm, Sumner
Stephanie Mitcham

June 20, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Seneca, WI
Ron Clift

June 20, 1:00–3:00 pm, Calmar
Jim Hageman

One of the nicest ways to learn about intensive rotational grazing is by taking an occasional stroll through a neighbor's pasture.

June 21, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, New Vienna
Doug and Janet Hoefler

June 21, 1:00–3:00 pm, Tripoli
Jim Wolf

June 24, McGregor
Phil and Sharon Specht

July 5, 1:00–3:00 pm, Waverly
Wayne Carolus

July 11, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Monticello
Dave and Lisa Lubben

July 18, 1:00–3:00 pm, Strawberry Point
Chris Riniker

July 20, 10:00 am–3:00 pm, Elgin (tentative)
Gilbertson Conservation Park
forage plant identification, growth and mgt.

July 25, 1:00–3:00 pm, Oelwein
Matt and Diane Stewart

July 26, 1:00–3:00 pm, McGregor
Dan Specht

July 27, Cresco
Mike Natvig

August 1, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Delhi
Pat Freiburger

August 9, 12:30 pm–3:00 pm, West Union
Tom Schissel, parlor walk followed by . . .
Don Baker, pasture walk

August 15, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Seneca, WI
Don Boland

August 16, Alta Vista
Mike and Jamie Reicherts
Tom and Irene Frantzen

(Continued on next page.)

August 17, Floyd
Ray and Marj Stonecypher

August 23, 1:00–3:00 pm, Decorah
Dan and Bonnie Beard

August 31, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Andrew
Andrew Jackson Demonstration Farm

September 6, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Sherrill
Bob and Paul Mueller

September 7, 10:00 am–3:00 pm, Elgin (tentative)
Gilbertson Conservation Park
forage plant identification, growth and mgt.

September 19, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Rising Sun, WI
Joe Liebert

September 20, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Farley
Larry Thier

October 4, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Dubuque (tentative)
Our Lady of the Mississippi

October 4, 1:00–3:00 pm, Waukon
James Weignner

October 17, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Eastmen, WI
Maurice Henkes

November 15, Prosper, MN (tentative)
Vance Haugen

November 21, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Steuben, WI
Doug Spany

PFI FIELD DAY EVALUATIONS

Gary Huber

Since 1992 PFI field day attendees have been asked to help improve these events by completing evaluation forms. A brief review of some findings from these evaluations are given here.

Table 1 gives attendance at PFI field days from 1992 through 1994. Attendance in 1993 dropped from 1992, probably because of the floods, and then increased in 1994. Average attendance at scheduled field days has increased slightly each year.

Table 2 gives information on who attended field days from 1992 through 1994. Most were farmers. About half were attending their first PFI field day, and from about a fourth to a third were members of PFI. Thus, the field days were consistently drawing new people, most of which were farmers. Also, most were not PFI members, though the percentage who were increased from one-fourth to one-third between 1992 and 1994.

Table 2. Profile of PFI field day attendees

	1992	1993	1994
Percent Who are Farmers	66%	61%	71%
Percent Attending TheirFirst PFI Field Day	52%	48%	49%
Percent Who are PFI Members	24%	31%	33%
Average Age	47	43	47
Average Years School	14.9	15.5	15.2

Figure 1 shows how attendees rated the field days in relation to their expectations. Responses were consistent between years. Slightly over 20% said the field days exceeded their expectations. Slightly over 70% said they met their expectations, and around 5% said they fell short of their expectations. To meet or exceed expectations is a worthy goal, and it appears PFI field days are doing quite well in this regard.

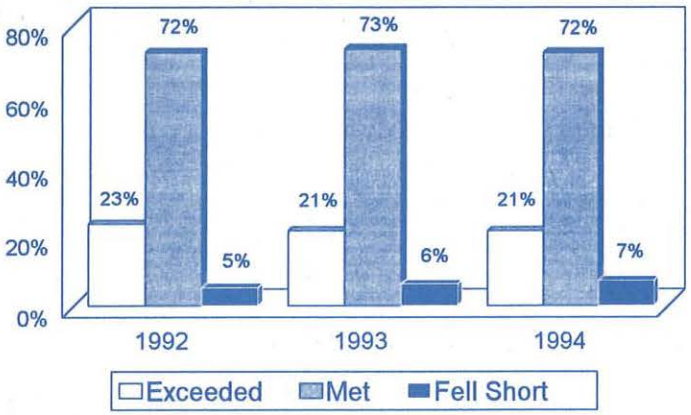
Answers to open-ended questions revealed a variety of reasons attendees were please with the field days. A response that was repeated in a variety of ways was, *"Farmers all do a nice job of explaining what they're doing, and are honest if it doesn't work."* Another response that typified a recurring theme was, *"The look, feel, and talk approach is as effective as a learning experience can get, short of doing it yourself."*

Figure 2 shows that of farmers who attended PFI field days, between 57% and 63% considered changing practices in some way as a result of attending. While knowing whether considering

Table 1. Attendance at PFI field days

Year	Number of Scheduled Field Days	Number of All Events	Attendance for Scheduled Field Days	Attendance for All Events	Average Attendance for Scheduled Field Days
1992	30	75	979	1925	33
1993	24	41	824	1163	34
1994	23	48	855	1456	37

Figure 1. Responses regarding whether PFI field days met, exceeded, or fell short of expectations



changes in practices led to actual changes is not easy, these percentages are evidence that the field days appear to have had an impact. A comment to an open-ended question that relates to the data in Figure 2 was, *"The demonstrated successful results from PFI farms is hard to beat and often used."*

Figure 2. Percent of farmers attending who are considering changes in practices as a result of PFI field days

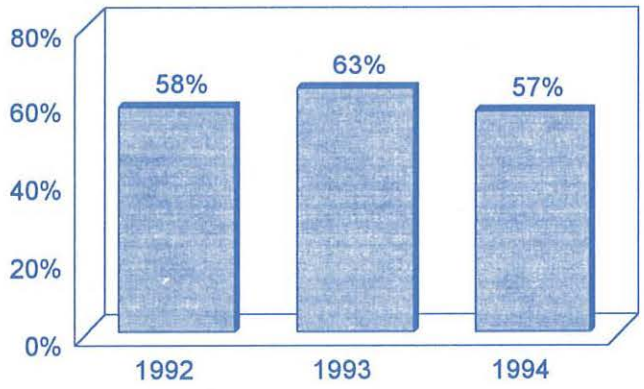


Table 3 shows which practices farmers considered changing. Grazing management was the most frequently mentioned practice in each year, maybe because changes are easier with this practice than some of the others. Grazing management was also mentioned more and more often from one year to the next, which may be because PFI field days focused more on grazing management from year to year.

Table 3 also provides interesting information on trends over time for some of the practices. For example, farmers attending were less likely to consider changes in tillage and nutrient management as the field days progressed over time.

This decline is likely due in part to less emphasis on these practices by PFI cooperators, which is a result of these cooperators having investigated these topics to their satisfaction. In other words, they know what they want to know about these topics for the time being, and they are moving on to practices for their research and demonstration efforts that hold more personal interest.

Table 3. Practices farmers are considering changing as a result of attending PFI field days[1]

	1992	1993	1994
Grazing Mgt.	25%	36%	50%
Tillage	20%	9%	8%
Weed Mgt.	12%	18%	0%
Nutrient Mgt.	20%	9%	4%
Narrow Strip Intercropping	9%	12%	4%
Cover Crops	7%	3%	4%
Miscellaneous[2]	7%	11%	29%

[1]Percentages are of the total of all responses in a particular year.

[2]Includes manure management, agroforestry, specialty crops, composting, pasture farrowing, crop rotations, hydroponic vegetable production, building ponds, etc.

Table 3 also shows that the percentage of farmers considering changes in what has been labeled miscellaneous practices went from 7% in 1992 to 29% in 1994. What the table isn't able to show is that most of this increase came from interest in practices like agroforestry, growing organic or food grade soybeans, and pasture farrowing.

This increase is likely a reflection of the increased diversity in the practices that are a part of PFI field days. It may also be due to the farmers feeling like they need to consider a wider range of alternatives if they are to be able to sustain their operations for the long term.

The information of Table 3 is relevant to a discussion that has concerned the PFI board regarding what should be the focus of PFI field days. There is truth to the idea that the organization needs to continue to emphasize the topics of weed and nutrient management because these are areas where improvements could be made among the

(Continued on next page.)

many Iowa farmers. On the other hand, the board also has the sense that focusing on these practices alone will not be enough to realize the changes they feel are needed to create a truly sustainable farming system in Iowa.

A balance in the practices undertaken by the cooperators involved in the on-farm research network is likely to be part of the answer. Anticipating needs as farming changes will also be important. Data collected from these evaluation forms is an important resource for PFI and PFI cooperators in making decisions regarding on-farm research and field days as the organization evolves to meet the needs of a changing rural scene.

Gary Huber with FFA Sustainable Agriculture award winners Josh Miller (center) and Jeremiah Finn (right).

1995 FFA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The PFI Board initiated an award in 1991 to help advance sustainable agriculture among Iowa's youth. Each spring two FFA Awards in Sustainable Agriculture are presented at the FFA Leadership Convention in Des Moines.

This year's first-place award was received by Josh Miller of Marengo and the second-place award was received by Jeremiah Finn of Cascade. While these young men were quite different in the activities they were involved in, both are excellent examples of how Iowa youth are helping create farming systems that can be sustained for the long term.

Josh Miller is the first recipient who is not from a farm. His father, Ned Miller, operated a feed and fertilizer business for 15 years before becoming an instructor in the agri-marketing program at Kirkwood Community College. His mother, Diane, also works at Kirkwood in the admissions department.

Josh's link to farming came partly from his desire to apply an interest he had in science to agriculture. This led him to contact Brad Buchanan, owner of Crop Tech Services, while Josh was still a freshman in high school. Josh was interested in learning about crop scouting, and Mr. Buchanan agreed to allow Josh to scout 200 acres in 1991. Since then Josh has steadily increased the acres he scouts so that the total for 1994 was 1,500.

Josh's scouting involves a variety of measurements. Soil is sampled and analyzed to make optimum use of available nutrients and limit overuse of fertilizers that can pollute water supplies. Stand counts help farmers decide if replanting is needed, and when these counts are placed on maps, farmers can locate areas where special attention may be prudent.

Stages of plant growth are monitored so that management decisions can be timely. Insect and weed pressures are determined, which gives farmers data to decide whether treatment is economically advisable. Also, the effectiveness of herbicide and insecticide applications are evaluated, which can help farmers develop management plans for subsequent years.

Josh summed up his view of this work by saying, "I give farmers recommendations based on accurate

"I give farmers recommendations based on accurate facts and research. They can then make the wisest decision - both environmentally and economically."

facts and research. They can then make the wisest decision - both environmentally and economically."

Jeremiah Finn is the son of Ray and Mary Finn, who farm 430 acres near Cascade. Jeremiah's activities to help his family's farm be sustainable are diverse, ranging from planting walnut seedlings in their timber to helping cultivate their corn. Rather than describe these activities, Jeremiah has given us permission to use an excerpt from his application.

"When I was only a baby, my parents made some very important decisions about our operation. Our farm seemed pretty average; my parents used the usual pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers.

However, there were some problems. There were very large losses in our cattle herd during calving – close to a 50% loss. Experts from ISU were puzzled at the problems, and someone tried a water nitrate test. It showed that our water was very high in nitrates, and seemed to be the cause of our cattle problems. From that day my parents worked towards completely eliminating chemical use on our crops and cattle."

"Farming without chemicals is more labor intensive than chemical farming, so I help out a great deal on our farm. I help lay out and maintain strip crops and grassed waterways to conserve the rich topsoil. I have spent time during the summer clipping our pastures to eliminate thistles and other weeds without any herbicides. I reshingled a shed to make it more useful and to extend its life. I have spread loads of manure to enrich our soil.

My own special project is mowing the grass in our orchard. Insects hide from birds in the grass, so I keep the grass mowed short in order to keep the insect populations down. Our orchard has 25 fruit trees, so keeping the insect population down makes a large difference in the quality of fruit. Practices like these take more work, but are less expensive and far safer on the environment."

"I have learned many things from my experiences on a sustainable, organic farm. I've learned that reusing and recycling materials is more efficient and less expensive than buying new equipment. I have come to understand that soil is our most important resource, and we must conserve it and take care of it. I also learned that it is possible to control pests with biological and mechanical means, rather than using herbicides and insecticides. However, I realize that farming is a constant learning experience, and in the future I hope to learn more about farming sustainably. I believe that sustainable farming will be the only kind of farming in the future, and I want to be prepared to be a sustainable farmer myself."

"Practices like these take more work, but are less expensive and far safer on the environment."

Josh is a freshman at Wartburg College in Waverly, and Jeremiah is a sophomore at Cascade High School. Josh's FFA advisor is Andrew Rowe, and Jeremiah's is Milt Luckstead.

PFI PROFILES: SHELLY GRADWELL

Gary Huber

Volunteers lend much to the work of non-profit organizations, and PFI is no exception. A number of PFI members volunteer their time for things such as helping with mailings, organizing meetings, and transcribing recordings from cooperator meetings.

One member whose volunteer help was recognized at last January's annual meeting is Shelly Gradwell. This recognition was for Shelly's role in the "Ponds, Prairies, and PFI" camp last summer at the Iowa 4-H Education and Natural Resources Center, which was attended by nearly thirty parents and children. During last January's annual PFI meeting she helped organize youth activities, which had over sixty youth ranging in age from infant to sixteen.

Both were wonderful events, mostly because of Shelly's abilities and enthusiasm. Shelly credits who she is in part to her grandparents, who she said

(Continued on page 21.)

Communities of Life
People, Plants, and Animals

1995 PFI Camp for Youth and Families

FOR WHO? PFI youth, friends, and others, ages 8 and up
- parents & families welcome!!!
- children under 8 are welcome with parents
- teen counselors and parent helpers would be appreciated (Teen counselors 14 years and up attend free. Counselors should plan to come the morning of July 29 for orientation.)

WHAT? A chance for youth and families to have fun, and learn about the "communities" of people, plants, and animals that we live with.

- *Visit local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farms*
- *Community overnight campout with cooking and crafts*
- *Community building through team courses, rapelling, and climbing*
- *Ecological studies of stream and forest communities*
- *Crafts and games*
- *Swimming and canoeing*

WHERE? The Iowa 4-H Education and Natural Resources Center near Madrid, Iowa.

WHEN? July 29 - August 1 (Saturday-Tuesday)

COST? $50 per participant

PLEASE REGISTER BY JULY 1, 1995. COMPLETE, CLIP, AND MAIL THIS REGISTRATION FORM AND A CHECK MADE OUT TO *IOWA 4-H CENTER* TO:

Gary Huber, 2104 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa 50011
If you have questions, please call Gary Huber at 515-294-8512.
More information will follow receipt of the registration.

COMMUNITIES OF LIFE CAMP REGISTRATION FORM

Names and ages of campers: _____

_____

Names of Parents _____

Address and Phone Number _____

Check if interested in helping as a teen counselor ____; as a parent helper ____. In what area? ____ meals ____ crafts

Write suggestions for activities below. This camp is for you! ____ other activities (specify below)

_____ _____

helped foster her interest in nature. "They were always taking me to learn about the outdoors, how things work together," Shelly noted. She also credits teachers along the way, such as Linda Zaletal, who was a naturalist in Story County. Shelly, at age 14, began helping Ms. Zaletal with education programs for nearby students.

From high school in Colo, Iowa, Shelly moved to Colorado where she received a degree in environmental education. While there she worked at the Rocky Mountain National Park. This work helped her realize that the park experience of nature as something set aside, protected, and without people made it difficult for people to see nature as an integral part of their lives.

Later, while working in Costa Rica, Shelly found rural families that lived and worked together, and who were bound to each other by a strong sense of community. Her thoughts turned to the 1980s when she was encouraged to leave rural Iowa to find jobs. Yet she saw many similarities between the farming communities of Iowa and Costa Rica. She decided to return home to State Center to try to help preserve this same sense of community while helping others appreciate their place in nature.

Shelly credits who she is in part to her grandparents, who she said helped foster her interest in nature. "They were always taking me to learn about the outdoors, how things work together."

On returning Shelly first worked at the Iowa 4-H Center near Madrid. She chose this location and work because it was near to her family's home in State Center and she could live in an outdoor setting and teach youth about nature. While everyone at the 4-H Center had strong personal interests in the environment, Shelly stood out in her interest in agriculture and the gentle way she help youth learn.

Her interest in agriculture came in part from a realization that food was a means to help connect

Shelly Gradwell (center) shows participants in the Ponds, Prairies, and PFI camp some items from the garden she and other volunteers created for the camp.

people to the land and nature. This realization led her to want to learn more about agriculture, especially sustainable agriculture. She began by becoming involved in PFI activities. She also worked as an intern for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and she began a graduate degree program at Iowa State University.

Shelly's graduate program has focused on course work in agronomy, rural sociology, and technology and social change. Her areas of interest beyond the classroom include community supported agriculture (CSA), improving agricultural programming at the 4-H Center, and linking sustainable farmers in Costa Rica and Iowa.

Shelly's ultimate goal is to establish a small, diversified, working farm in central Iowa that would be used to educate others, whether they are farmers, youth, or non-farm adults, about the integration of nature and agriculture. Ideally, this would be a place people came to get their food and be involved in its production.

In the meantime Shelly will continue to help PFI. One of her current tasks is helping plan another camp at the 4-H Center this summer. (For those of you who are interested, the registration form for the camp is on the opposite page.) She is also helping plan a trip to Costa Rica in March of 1996, and she would very much like to include PFI farmers. Future issues of this newsletter will describe the trip in more detail.

SUSTAINABLE AG TRAINING SURVEY

Jerry DeWitt, ISU Extension

In mid-April, Rick Exner and I sent to PFI members farming in the state of Iowa a simple survey on possible sustainable ag training needs for Extension and NRCS staff. The 1990 Farm Bill provides for certain USDA staff to be trained in sustainable ag. Your ideas are important in shaping how this training will look. We thought that you should have a "say" in it, and did you ever! Within days we received more than 100 replies, and more continue to come in each day. Your quick response is really appreciated. Many of you also provided a number of good comments, and these have been read and will be saved.

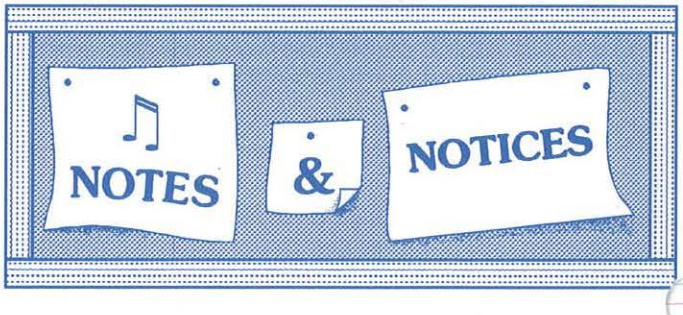
What will we do with your responses? First, we carefully calculated the numbers and studied all the comments. These numbers and ideas, then, will be combined with responses from other farmers and groups across the state. We expect to see some distinct patterns and preferences of sustainable ag training needs for Extension and others. Your ideas will guide us on what topics should be covered, and which are high priorities for training in sustainable ag. So you in a way are helping to develop the "curriculum" for sustainable ag training for the next several years. We also think that this survey may help point towards topics which need to be researched in sustainable ag in Iowa. We know that one survey cannot do everything, but this is a good first step.

What were some of the preliminary results? First, keep in mind that these are early results. We gave you about 91 choices across 11 categories such as crops, livestock, nutrient management, soils, systems, etc. We added up the check marks, and here is our interpretation of your recommendations.

Most Important Topics:

1. Reduced herbicide programs
2. Soil tilth
3. Alternative N sources
4. PFI information
5. Economics of sustainable ag
6. Rotational grazing
7. Earthworms
8. Alternative field crops
9. Niche marketing/contracts
10. Biological control

Remember, this is simply the first look at which topics are viewed as more important today. Not only will more of the surveys come back, but your ideas and ours will surely change as we move ahead with sustainable agriculture in Iowa. Again, send in your response; it is still important and will be counted. Thanks for all your help.



♫ *The New Farm Magazine* Ends

The Rodale Institute ceased publication of *New Farm Magazine* with the May/June, 1995 issue. Editorial Director Craig Cramer wrote he is "mourning the end of the *New Farm's* role," and that he is "unsure exactly what lies ahead." Institute President John Haberern referred in an editorial to the rising cost of paper and postage, but acknowledged that hundreds of phone calls and letters told him the message of the magazine is "too important to stop."

As the rumor of the magazine's demise spread in Iowa this spring, the comment was often heard that there was nothing quite like *New Farm*. Certainly they showed that there really are "winners" – farmers who are both successful and sustainable. The writing and the attractiveness of the publication added to its impact. What, if anything will arise from the ashes of *New Farm*? Perhaps those holding unexpired subscriptions will find out.

♫ PFI Here and There

People of PFI sometimes travel to give presentations at meetings of other groups. This past winter was no exception. Here are some of the presentations done over the last few months.

Dick and Sharon Thompson...

...were keynote presenters at three annual meetings. Their presentation in February to the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society was titled *"Farmer Solutions to Farmer' Problems: What Works and What Doesn't Work."* Their presentation in March to the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota was titled *"Farming Systems Economics: The Effect on Community."* They were also keynote presenters at the January annual meeting of the Innovative Farmers of Ohio.

Tom Frantzen...

...gave the keynote address titled *"People, Farms, Communities, and Decision-Making"* at the annual conference of the Pennsylvania Sustainable Agriculture Society in February. Tom also spoke at the annual meeting of the Michigan Agricultural Stewardship Association in January and conducted two workshops titled *"40-lb Pigs Produced for $14... Pasture Does It!"* at the 1995 Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference.

Ron Rosmann...

...traveled to Maine at the invitation of Dr. Stewart Smith in January, where he gave several presentations about on-farm research. One was to University of Maine researchers, one to a potato growers organization, and a third to the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

Mike Natvig...

...was a presenter at a Low Cost Hog Production workshop at the Second National Conference for Beginning Farmers in Columbia, Missouri, in February. Mike is a cooperator from near Protivin.

Doug Alert and Margaret Smith...

...were presenters at a Crop Production workshop at the Second National Conference for Beginning Farmers in Columbia, Missouri. Doug and Margaret are cooperators from near Hampton, and Doug is associate board member from the North Central District

Vic Madsen...

...spoke on *Shared Visions* and on-farm research at the annual rural-urban dinner sponsored by the Lions Club in his hometown of Audubon.

Dan Wilson...

...spoke on alternative hog production practices to the Kiwanis Club in Sheldon. Dan is associate board member from the Northwest District.

(Of these speaking engagements, Vic Madsen's and Dan Wilson's may not seem as important. However, when PFI people speak to groups their communities, opportunities for change where it counts most are possible.)

♫ Thompson and Rosmann Attend National Rural Conference

Dick Thompson and Ron Rosmann were invited to the National Rural Conference at Iowa State University on April 25. President Clinton, Vice-President Gore, and Secretary of Agriculture Glickman were present to solicit ideas on making federal policies work better for rural Americans.

Dick said it was an interesting event, and he was able to forward a summary of data on three farming systems that he and Sharon have collected over the last six years. This summary also included some conclusions regarding the impacts of these farming systems on rural communities.

Ron said he was able to speak for a couple of minutes on the floor. He addressed the President and spoke about PFI and how the organization has helped farmers be equal partners with university researchers.

♫ Bean Bar Safety Tips Bulletin

A new fact sheet, NCR 345, gives the low-down on bean bar safety. It includes an attention-grabbing color photo of the bare legs of a bar rider under UV light that shows up contamination. According to the bulletin "virtually all riders are contaminated with herbicide after two hours of

spraying." The point, then, is to minimize that inevitable contact with appropriate protection, safety procedures, and first aid. The bulletin provides safety precautions for a half-dozen common commonly used herbicides.

A second publication, *How to Comply* (PAT-12), describes new Worker Protection Standard guidelines by which employed non-family members on bean bars are classed as "handlers" and subject to additional precautions.

Single copies of bulletins NCR 345 and PAT-12 are available without charge from Extension Publications Distribution, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011, (515) 294-5247.

♫ Farm Bill News on the "Net"

Readers who use their computers to connect to the Internet may be interested in a Worldwide Web site dedicated to news about the 1995 Farm Bill and the related budget process. Begun by Charles Benbrook, a PFI member and former director of the Board on Agriculture of the National Academy of Sciences, this Web "home page" covers legislative issues from a sustainable agriculture perspective. It can be reached at

http://www.hillnet.com/farmbill/

News travels quickly on the Internet, and nothing travels faster than a good quote. Tom Frantzen is quoted (see text shown below) from the discussion on soil quality that appeared in the last *Leopold Letter*.

- Events and activities in Congress
  - Farm Bill Process at a Glance
  - Bills Introduced
  - Hearings
- Quotes of the Week
  - **4/22/95:** Former President of Practical Farmers of Iowa, Tom Frantzen, was quoted in the Spring 1995 Issue of the Leopold Letter as saying:

"If you'd ask me what I think is the healthiest soil on our farm, I would tell you that I think I could find it and I would not need my eyes nor any of my senses other than my ears. You might laugh at this, but my daughter and I have been out in a chunk of pasture that's been seeded down for seven years under intensive management. If conditions are right, I can hear the earthworms."

♫ FEEL Clinics Set

ISU's Field Extension Education Laboratory (FEEL) is offering two sessions of its Crop Diagnostic Clinic and one session of its Alfalfa Clinic. According to the literature, "these clinics are designed for seed-chemical-fertilizer reps, crop consultants, agronomists, farm managers, and others interested in crop production." Listed costs include registration and on-site lunches, but not lodging or other expenses. For more information call (515) 294-6429.

Crop Diagnostic Clinics

July 6-7, July 13-14. $225

soil fertility, insect pest management, disease management, weed identification and management, corn and soybeans development, forage management, tillage.

Alfalfa Clinic

June 6. $125

alfalfa growth and development, alfalfa insects, fertility, alfalfa management, alfalfa diseases.

♫ Wetlands and Landowners Conference

People (and especially farmers) interested in wetlands and floodplains are invited to a conference in Omaha, June 28-30. The meeting, entitled *Meeting Landowner and Resource Conservation Needs through Partnership Approaches*, is sponsored by EPA, NRCS, and the National Parks Service. The conference will:

1) Help resolve conflicts between private property rights and the conservation of wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas, identifying 'win/win' watershed management opportunities and case studies;

2) Provide 'how-to' information concerning selected implementation techniques;

3) Suggest future directions for better meeting landowner needs and protecting and restoring wetland, floodplain, and riparian resources.

Basic conference registration is $45. For more information, call Teresa Opheim, Environmental Law Institute, (515) 288-4343.

PFI MEMBERSHIP TOPS 500

Thanks to all members who responded to renewal reminders from PFI President Vic Madsen and the district directors. As the winter newsletter described, many new people came into the organization as a result of the PFI 10th Anniversary winter meeting – so many that PFI membership is now over 500. Of course, counting spouses, kids, grandparents, and the family you know in the next township, PFI reaches many more than 500 people in one way or another. Still, this is a milestone. Figure 3 shows where PFI members live in Iowa.

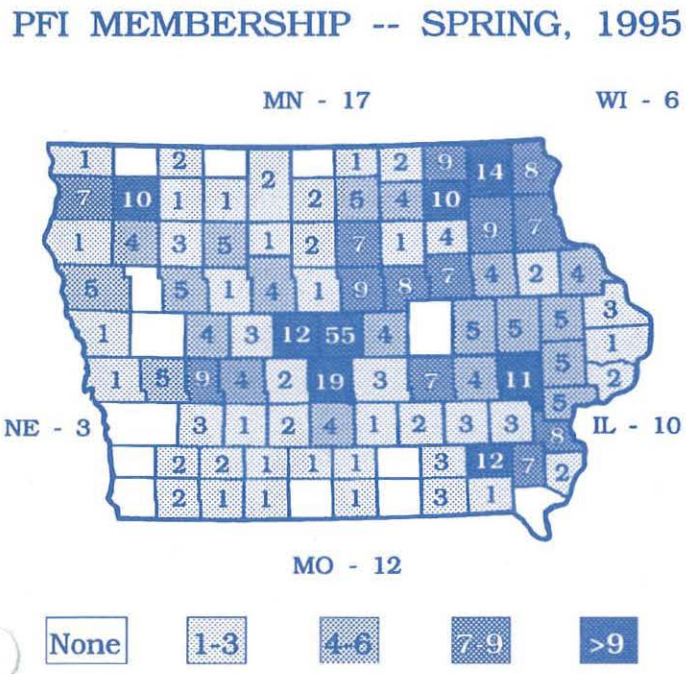


Figure 3. Current PFI membership by county.

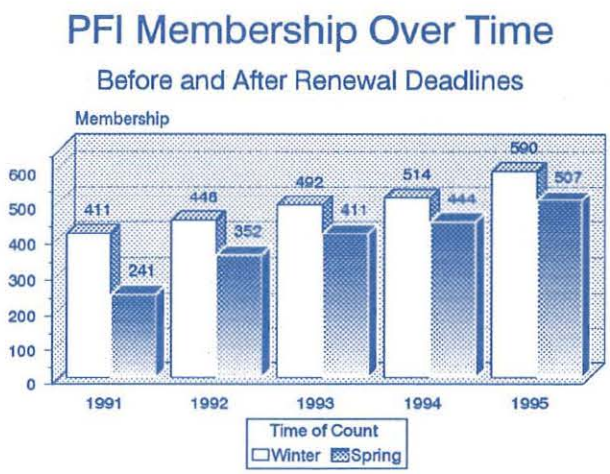


Figure 4. PFI membership over time.

PFI members who want to do a little recruiting on their own are welcome to extra copies.

It would be nice if everyone automatically renewed their membership. As Figure 4 illustrates, a number of people drop from the rolls every spring because they didn't respond to the fall renewal campaign.

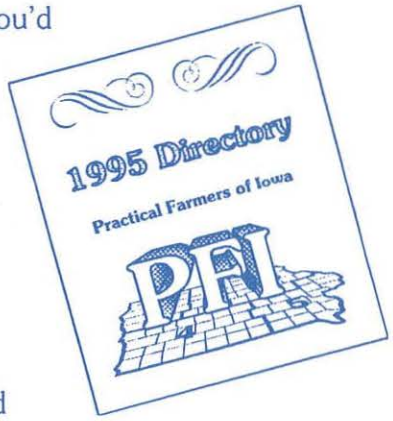
PFI members who want to do a little recruiting on their own are welcome to extra copies of the newsletter, the field day guide, and other information. Just contact the PFI coordinators, Gary or Rick, at 515-294-1923.

PFI 1995 DIRECTORY – DON'T BE LEFT OUT!

The second PFI Directory will be at least double the size of last year's, because at least twice as many members have let us know they want to take part. If you AREN'T one of the 243 current members who will be in the 1995 Directory, here's what to do. Send in the form on page 27. Then, when we send you a copy of your Membership Agreement and Information Form, check it for accuracy, write

(Continued on next page.)

down new information you'd like to share about your farm and skills, and remember to check the "Member Directory" box. Return the form pronto, and you will be added to the 1995 Directory.



The PFI Directory is organized so you can find people with answers and experience in your own part of the state. It includes listings by last name, by PFI district, by interests and skills, by crops grown, by tillage, by livestock raised, and more. To discourage commercial exploitation of personal information, the directory includes members' phone numbers, but not their full mailing addresses.

NOVEMBER FARMING SYSTEMS CONFERENCE INVITES PRODUCERS

Rick Exner

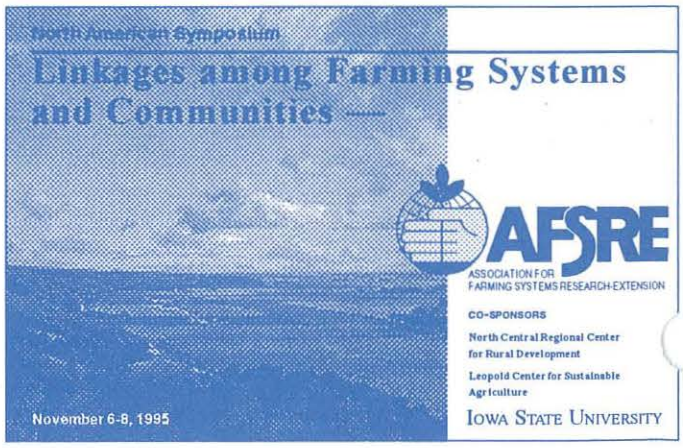
"Farming systems" is a term familiar to most PFI members. But were you aware there is an international society focusing on just that? The Association for Farming Systems Research and Extension (AFSRE) will hold its North American meeting in Ames, November 6-8. Cornelia Flora, Director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, is organizing the event, *Linkages among Farming Systems and Communities*. Flora is being assisted by other ISU scientists and a dozen producers from around the country. The conference will be preceded by a "farm and community" bus tour to look at several farming systems and ways agriculture can support rural towns.

"On-farm research," "farmer-first," "indigenous knowledge," and "participatory rural development" were terms I first encountered at farming systems conferences fifteen years ago. Many of these ideas have reappeared in sustainable agriculture. But not only are most Iowans unaware of AFSRE, most of the people in that association are just beginning to open their eyes to farming in the United States. You see, the "farming systems approach" evolved out of development work in the Third World. PFI cooperator Jeff Olson and I presented a description of Practical Farmers of Iowa at the last AFSRE meeting, and the reception was enthusiastic. Now the conference is coming to our "home turf." We hope to bring producers from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and it will be interesting to see how they relate to Iowa farming systems and farmers.

A group of 14 producers and other people we know through the Kellogg Foundation and other connections has been working to make this meeting interesting and useful to farmers and to everyone else at the conference. Farmers will be sharing the presentation in many of the sessions. Farmer-scientist teams from around North America will be featured. Using systems approaches, those attending will operate in problem solving teams made up of producers, Extension, and research scientists to address real-world situations. Through "story telling" and other sessions, participants will get to know each other as individuals. Also on the conference schedule is time for socializing and a dance.

Go out this summer and take some pictures of your farm, especially showing how things "fit together" to make the farming system.

Producer "photo albums" will be part of the conference poster sessions. Producer posters were a popular part of the last PFI winter meeting, and you are invited to take part in these sessions as well.



Go out this summer and take some pictures of your farm, especially showing how things "fit together" to make the farming system. Show how a problem or a solution is part of the whole system of your farm, or show how your farm is part of your community or ecosystem. These producer posters will provide the basis for farmer-to-farmer sharing, and some will be used in the problem-solving sessions too.

To submit a "photo album" entry (due by August 1) and for more information about the farming systems conference, return the form below.

MUTANT MESSAGE DOWN UNDER, A REVIEW

Dwight Ault, Austin, MN

If you enjoyed *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn, you will find equally interesting and revealing – or even more so – the book *Mutant Message Down Under.*

Marlo Morgan, the author, was invited on a lengthy, two-to-three-month "walkabout" with an Australian aborigine tribe. This was one of the few tribes to still carry on their 60,000-year-old customs and beliefs. They, like our American Indians, have been labeled everything from "barbaric" to "worthless" by their Australian invaders. (I realize what track record European colonizers had on original people, calling them savages and heathens. We are gradually learning now that, if anything, we were the savages.)

It was very enlightening to learn what common sense approaches the aborigines had on birth, life and death along with the eternal being of one's self, with the body only being the earth carrier, so to speak. This book, like *Ishmael*, brings out concepts that are totally compatible with sustainable farming and holistic agriculture philosophy.

I repeat my comment made on the *Ishmael* review – "If you know me, I say read it. If you don't know me, I still say bead it." It is a book which will surely help change one's image of people we have been led to believe were not "civilized." It is presently in hardcover and three months on the New York Times best seller list.

A GENTLER WAY – SOWS ON PASTURE: REPORTS FROM SUSTAINABLE FARMERS FROM MINNESOTA AND IOWA

This little collection of farm profiles is the project of Dwight Ault, who farms near Austin, Minnesota. A long-time PFI member and active in the Sustainable Farming Association, in Minnesota,

(Continued on next page.)

Request Form

Name _____

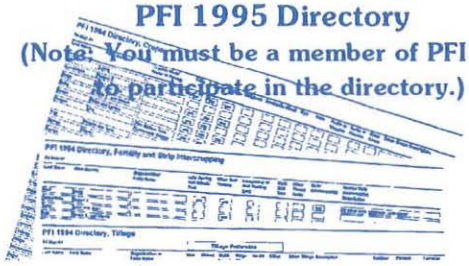
Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Return to:
Practical Farmers of Iowa
2035 190th St.
Boone, IA 50036-9632

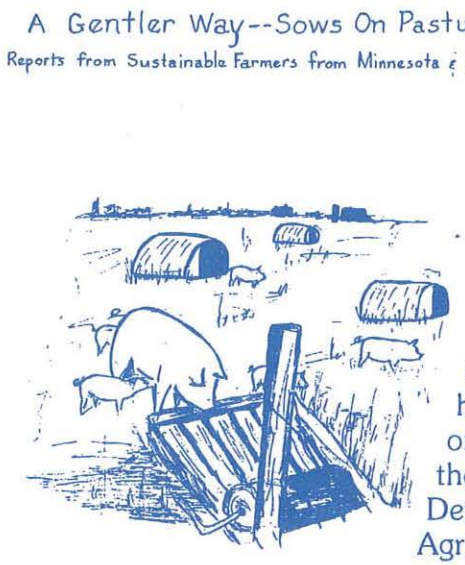
❑ **A Gentler Way: Hogs on Pasture**

❑ **PFI 1995 Directory**
(Note: You must be a member of PFI to participate in the directory.)



❑ **Farming Systems Conference & producer posters information**

AFSRE



Dwight felt there was a need for a booklet that presented tips and perspectives from a variety of pasture hog operations. So he assembled one himself, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture helped with production.

Eight producers are featured: Dwight and Becky Ault, Austin, MN; Robert and Blaine Bancks, Bluegrass, IA; Tom and Irene Frantzen, New Hampton, IA; Larry Maher, Twin Lakes, MN; Warren Robson, Scranton, IA; Dave Serfling, Preston, MN; Dan and Colin Wilson, Paullina, IA; and Tom and Sharon van Milligan, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. The Milligans are using a version of the Swedish method of confinement hog production. Some of the pieces are written by Dwight, some are by the farmers themselves, and some are taken from farm magazines. In addition to these descriptions, the booklet contains pointers from Mark Honeyman, Director of Outlying Experiment Farms at Iowa State University.

In the introduction, Dwight gives three answers to the question, "Why pasture farrow?" Ault writes that pasture hogs as a system is 1) economically sound, 2) most healthy for the pigs, and 3) "a real treat for me and the sows." The booklet illustrates that there is craft, art, and science in successful pasture hog systems and that no two systems are the same. It should provide some good ideas to experienced producers, and it may encourage new people to try pigs outside.

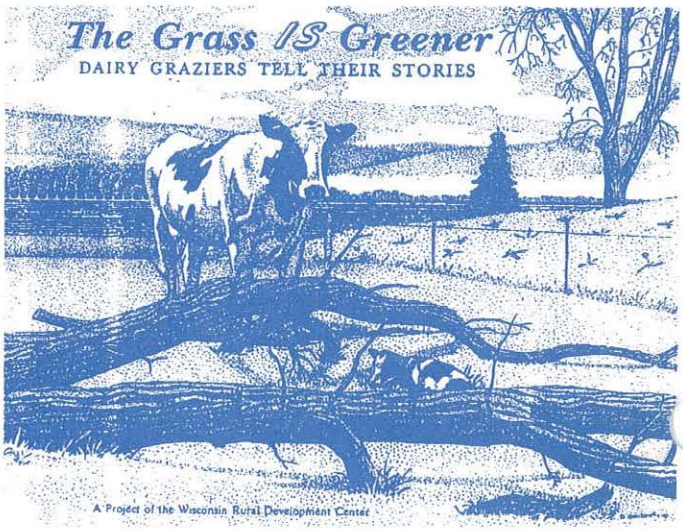
Single copies of *A Gentler Way* are available from Dwight for $4.00, but he has made the booklet available for free to Practical Farmers of Iowa. For a copy, return the form on page 27.

The Grass IS Greener: Dairy Graziers Tell Their Stories

As the preface to this 46-page booklet make clear, "The stories in this book speak to more than just the technical and management aspects of intensive rotational grazing. . . The farmers make it clear that 'grass farming' is ten percent hardware and ninety percent thinking, planning, imagining, experimenting, exploring." This is an easy-reading visit with 16 farm families from Wisconsin and Minnesota, brought together through a USDA SARE grant by the Wisconsin Rural Development Center, the Land Stewardship Project, and the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems of the University of Wisconsin.

These producers share some of their history with grazing, how it fits into their farming and quality-of-life goals, and what works for them. Many Iowans will recognize the names of several of their neighbors to the northeast who turned to rotational grazing earlier and more seriously than most farmers in the Tall Corn State. Consequently, some of these producers are further along the learning curve, and their observations can be especially useful to others. The booklet actually includes both experienced graziers and those still in early stages of transition. The survey also takes in both large and small milking operations.

A sampling of titles of the farmer profiles tells the story: *Grazing Inspires New Milking Parlor and Transition to Seasonal Dairying; Going from Confinement to Grazing Makes Dairying Easier; Farmers are the 'Experts'; Grazing Benefits Cows*



and Kids; Cows on Pasture Allow for Low-Debt Beginning; Low-Cost New Zealand Parlor Cuts Milking Time for Pulvermachers. This isn't a sugar-coated advertisement, but it does convey the enthusiasm that this group of producers feels about intensive rotational grazing.

The Grass IS Greener is available for $7.50 from the Wisconsin Rural Development Center, 125 Brookwood Dr., Mt. Horeb, WI 53572.

RURAL COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCE

Laura Krouse, Mt. Vernon

The Graduate Program in Public Policy at UNI sponsored a "Conference on Rural Communities and Public Policy, " March 29. The conference was the idea of Laura Jackson and Kamyar Enshayan. Several PFI members attended, along with economic development people from several eastern Iowa towns. Tom Frantzen and Laura Jackson were both program participants, and both stressed the role of agriculture in rural development issues.

The keynote speaker was Marty Strange, from the Center for Rural Affairs. His speech was about economic development and the role of community in rural areas. He said that the assets of rural areas are their land, capital, entrepreneurial skills, and educated people. "Good" economic development in rural areas will keep the land, and profits from the land, under community ownership, management, and control. Good enterprises will empower, rather than exploit the rich resources of rural communities. Rural people should expect investors in their communities to be committed, long-time participants in the life of the community.

Marty talked extensively about the rights and responsibilities of community membership. Social obligations cannot be avoided, but they are often easily transferred to reach short-term economic goals (like job creation). Strange believes that all members of a community should willingly accept the responsibility for their own actions in exchange for the right to be a member of the community. He believes that there is a valuable "economy of community" that is possible because of the face-to-face, daily interaction between the people who live and work in that place.

PROFITS OF STRIP INTERCROPPING: 1992-1994

Don Davidson and Rick Exner

(Editors' note: Don and Sharon Davidson farm near Grundy Center, Rick Exner is the Farming Systems Coordinator for PFI.)

Readers of this newsletter are by now familiar with narrow strip intercropping (NSI), a practice that PFI cooperators have been evaluating for as much as five years. Strip intercropping attempts to take advantage of "systems efficiencies," complementary use of resources like sunlight, moisture, the farmer's time, and the different elements of a diversified farm. What does that mean, and does strip intercropping accomplish those things?

In narrow strip intercropping, two or more crops are grown in side-by-side strips, rather than in completely separate fields. Some would say the more crops the better. The idea is to take advantage of the interactions that can occur in a complex system. Examples:

- The tall corn intercepts more sunlight, which it uses more efficiently than most other crops.
- Soybeans break up the rootworm beetle cycle for the corn while they benefit from the windbreak effect of the corn.
- Green manures like berseem clover can suppress annual weeds while they fix nitrogen for the succeeding corn crop. With portable electric fencing, livestock can graze these strips.
- Labor is spread over several crops, and peak workloads are leveled off.

Of course, it doesn't always work that way. The more complex a system is, the more chances there are of negative interactions. While we run around "putting out fires," our conventionally-farming neighbors are out on the porch with a cool one. At

least there are days it seems like that. In the past three years PFI has intensively evaluated NSI using the Crop Enterprise Record system (Table 4). We have seen that it is more than an eccentric way to grow corn and soybeans. It is more than diversified farming with a different enterprise in each field. Strip intercropping represents a higher level of integration. What have we learned?

What has attracted many people to strip intercropping is the possibility of higher yields and lower costs. In a three-crop system, for example, you may be able to generate most of the crop nitrogen internally. And there are examples of 30-40-bushel corn yield advantages in strips. As Figure 5 illustrates, eighteen PFI trials from 1992-1994 have shown instances of "overyielding" like this. In 15 of these trials, corn in strips outyielded corn in single-crop blocks, although only seven of these differences were greater than 10 bushels per acre.

On the other hand, we have seen some yield *reductions* in strips: notably Thompson corn and soybean yields in 1992, Olson soybean and oats yields in 1994, and Thompson soybean yields in 1994. When disaster has struck, it has been because of complications associated with the cropping

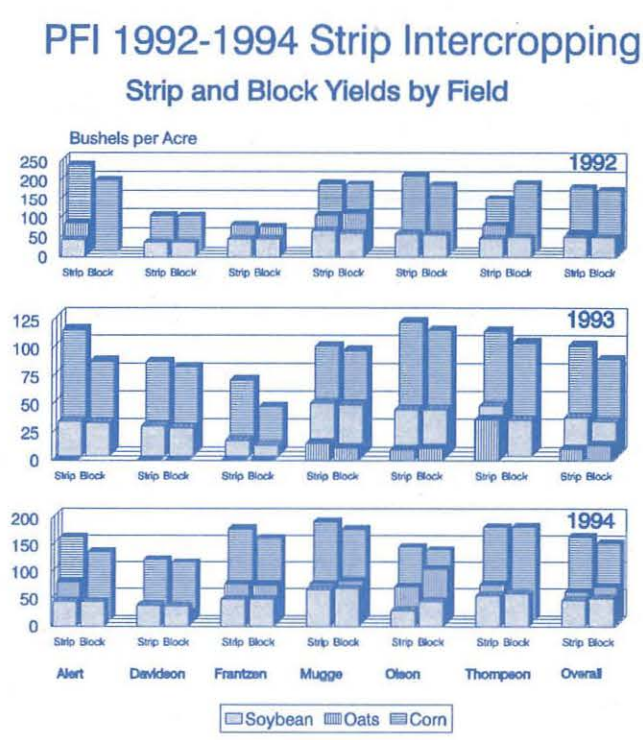


Figure 5. Crop yields in strips and blocks, 1992-94.

Table 4. Narrow Strip Intercropping Costs and Profit, 1994 *

Planting Pattern Comparisons

	Strips (Three Crops)				Blocks (Three Crops)			
	Corn	Beans	Oats	Average	Corn	Beans	Oats	Average.
Profits	149.2	46.7	58.1	84.6	138.2	51.0	66.8	85.3
Total Cost	$273.40	$283.99	153.3	$236.89	$253.55	$318.41	$164.39	$245.45
Gross Income	$217.50	$198.55	174.4	$196.83	$215.19	$196.90	$174.04	$195.38
Yield	$55.90	$85.44	($21.17)	$40.06	$38.36	$121.51	($9.66)	$50.07

Systems Comparisons

	Strips (Three Crops)				Blocks (Two Crops)			
	Corn	Beans	Oats	Average	Corn	Beans		Average
Profits	162.5	51.7	73.1	95.8	149.6	53.6		101.6
Total Cost	$304.43	$280.94	$162.56	$249.31	$279.88	$290.31		$285.10
Gross Income	$278.22	$213.24	$176.40	$222.62	$281.04	$236.78		$258.91
Yield	$26.21	$67.69	($13.84)	$26.69	($1.15)	$53.53		$26.19

	Ungrazed Strips				Grazed Strips			
	Corn	Beans	Oats	Average	Corn	Beans		Average
Profits	143.6	37.8	71.2	84.2	143.6	37.8	71.2	84.2
Total Cost	$272.79	$261.54	$183.37	$239.23	$272.79	$261.54	$278.87	$271.07
Gross Income	$262.63	$218.81	$197.40	$226.28	$262.63	$218.81	$209.13	$230.19
Yield	$10.16	$42.73	($14.03)	12.95	$10.16	$42.73	$69.74	$40.87

* Figures derived using ISU Extension Crop Enterprise records.

The question isn't whether high yields are possible, but whether strips can be integrated into a practical cropping system.

system. For example, Dick Thompson's winter cover crop got out of hand in 1992.

In 1994, a number of us struggled with weeds. The close proximity of the different crops in stripping makes weed management a challenge. In strips, more sunlight may penetrate the corn canopy, encouraging weed growth. Strip placement must be precise, or "dead" border areas between strips will harbor weed escapes. Some of us have tried to control weeds without herbicides. Ridge tillage makes this possible, but it requires high management. Those of us using herbicides have gone to use of a hooded sprayer (Tom Frantzen) or tried to adjust timing, materials, nozzles, and rates to minimize drift problems. In our caution, we have sometimes sacrificed protection.

Last winter, PFI cooperators heard from an Ontario, Canada farmer who saw corn yields up to 300 bushels per acre in two-row strips last year. The question isn't whether high yields are possible, but whether strips can be integrated into a practical cropping system. Those PFI producers who stick with strips will be those who find ways to accomplish the crop production basics – like weed control and crop rotation – within the system. This year I will tear up my own strips and re-establish them on a field with less weed pressure.

The six cooperators who have investigated strips over the past three years have fallen into two categories. Four of them have used a three-crop rotation to compare strips and whole-field blocks of the same three crops. Two other cooperators (Thompson and Alert) have compared the three-crop strips to two-crop field blocks. They have also adjusted tillage, fertility, and population in the strips. The trials of those first four cooperators are shown in Table 4 as "planting pattern comparisons," while the trials of the last two cooperators are shown as "systems comparisons." Average net profit was greater in strips than blocks for the planting pattern comparisons in 1992 and 1993, but not 1994. In the whole-systems comparisons, net profit averaged greater in strips in 1993 and 1994, but not 1992.

In 1994, Doug Alert and Jeff Olson grazed their forage strips by using portable electric fencing. Based on pounds of beef gained, the overall profitability of strips was considerably increased by grazing – $41 per ace for grazed strips versus $13 per acre for ungrazed blocks. Grazing turned the oat/forage legume strips from money losers to money makers. This shows again that strip intercropping can be more than the sum of its parts.

Why would someone choose to graze strips rather than a separate field? Because they were going to be strip cropping anyway. And why would they strip crop in the first place? Because (conservation aside) they stood a reasonable chance of greater yields for the same or less inputs. The nitrogen saving with three-crop strips is real, but it too must be seen as "icing on the cake" in a well-managed strip intercrop – not in itself sufficient reason to use the system. Strip intercropping isn't for everyone. Continued PFI research will tell us whether the system is stable enough to find a home on Iowa farms.

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

"How Are Your Plans Going?"

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

Time sure flies by! As you read this column, the grazing season is well underway, and the halfway point in the calendar year is nearby. The early summer is a very busy time of the year. The days are long, and most people have more than enough to do. Most farmers are tired after the long days. Attention to recorded grazing and financial plans tends to slip.

If you don't have a plan, then where are you headed? Remember the adage, "nobody plans to fail yet many fail to plan." A fundamental aspect of any sustainable farm is to have a written road map and to monitor your progress.

In November, as the days become shorter and the evenings longer, we begin the process that

Develop a grazing plan, keep it simple, and monitor your progress through the season.

guides our farm during the coming year. Planning is done in short episodes, off and on, through the winter months. Each enterprise on the farm gets a thorough gross margin analysis. Results of this analysis then become a component of the overall financial plan. The farm has a plan for profit. We track this plan each month, even during the busiest times of the year.

As spring nears, after we have a good idea of our farming strategies, we lay out a detailed grazing plan. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this planning. It is just as important as the financial plan. In fact, on a farm that is becoming more grass based, the financial component *cannot* operate without a grazing plan!

After several years of practice and lots of reading, we are using the *Simplified Guide to Planned Grazing*, available from Center for Holistic Resource Management [1]. This strategy calls for major planning twice each year. The first plan is open-ended. At this time of the year we don't know when the growing season will end or how much forage will be produced. The second plan is called close-ended. This one is done near the end of the growing season, when the amount of forage is known, and that amount is allotted for the dormant season. My next column will detail our dormant season forage strategy.

1) avg. minimum grazing duration = days quickest pasture recovery / (# paddocks – 1)

2) avg. maximum grazing duration = days longest pasture recovery / (# paddocks – 1)

Then the minimum & maximum grazing periods are determined for each paddock:

3) minimum paddock grazing duration = (paddock rating / avg. paddock rating) × avg. minimum grazing duration

4) maximum paddock grazing duration = (paddock rating / avg. paddock rating) × avg. maximum grazing duration

Our open-ended grazing plan begins with an estimate of the recovery periods that our pastures will need. Fast growing conditions will allow for about a 20-day recovery. When growing conditions slow, approximately 40 days will be needed for rest. These are coarse guidelines that can be adjusted if conditions deteriorate. But they allow you to estimate the range in *duration* (grazing time per rotation) for the average paddock ("avg. min. and max. grazing duration" in formulas 1 and 2 below).

With recovery periods and average paddock duration estimated, the next step is assessing the volume and quality of each individual paddock. I use a scale of 1 to 10. A paddock with a score of 10 should feed my stock twice as long as one with a 5 rating. If all of the paddocks have similar quality, then their area can be the rating. Then use this information in formulas 3 and 4 to estimate the longest and shortest grazing duration to expect for each particular paddock.

These results are recorded in my farm operations notebook. I keep this notebook on the end table next to "my chair." This way I remember to update the grazing progress even during the long busy season.

As the season progresses, attention is paid to the growing conditions. When the forage growth is fast, I use the minimum grazing period. As the growth rate slows, the maximum grazing period is allowed. A detailed explanation of this grazing planning is available from the Center for Holistic Resource Management.

Planning provides us with a road map, a guide to where we want to go. Any plan requires day-to-day monitoring to keep on track. Develop a grazing plan, keep it simple, and monitor your progress through the season. It is all a part of sustainable farming!

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FROM THE KITCHEN (and GARDEN)

Marj Stonecypher, Floyd

As I type this, it is the middle of May, and no corn in the ground. Well, maybe a start. The guys pulled into the field about a half hour ago. I'm sure you are all in the same "boat" of planting as we are? Some of the farmers around here do have some planted. Ray has been sick for a couple of weeks, so that really put us behind. That, on top of new calves coming in, and not wanting to nurse because they are wet and cold. That's where I spend my time, playing nursemaid, getting them to nurse mama so I don't have to bottle feed. Good thing Ray fixed up a nursery last year in the old hog house.

How about a quick dish, so we wives can help the guys?

AMERICA CHOW MEIN

Brown 1 pound of ground beef or pork with onion.

Add:

1 large can chop suey vegetable or 2 14-oz. cans, drained (save the juice)

1 Tbsp. soy sauce

1 can cream of celery soup

1 cup water or vegetable juice

1 cup uncooked rice

1 can cream of chicken soup

1 cup broken chow mein noodles (place on top)

Bake 350 degrees for ½ hour uncovered. Serve on top of Chow Mein Noodles.

RHUBARB PUDDING

5-6 cup chopped rhubarb

2 5/8 cup sugar

4 ½ Tbsp. margarine

1 ½ cup flour

1 ½ tsp. baking powder

3/8 tsp. salt

¾ cup milk

½ Tbsp. cornstarch

1 ½ cup hot water

Place chopped rhubarb in a 9 x 13 glass dish. Cream 1 1/8 cup sugar and margarine. In a separate bowl, stir together flour, baking powder and salt. Alternate additions of the flour mix and milk to the creamed mixture. Spread over rhubarb. Sprinkle 1 ½ cup sugar over batter. Mix cornstarch with hot water. Pour over all. Bake for 1 hour at 375 degrees. Top with fresh strawberries!

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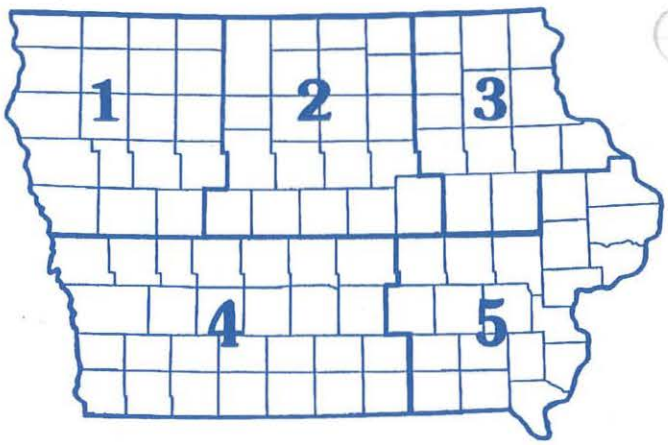

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