the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 14, #1
Spring 1999

SEXY AND GLAMOROUS, FIELD DAYS ARE HERE

Vic Madsen, Audubon

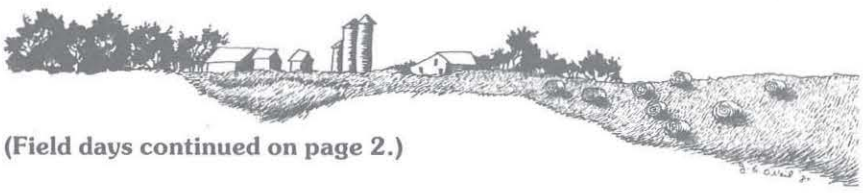
Now that I have your attention we can talk about farming and field days.

One of the challenges faced by the sustainable ag movement is the public perception that we are rather boring. Part of the reason for this is that advertising uses flash, sex and glamour to sell everything from toothpaste to cars. We are taught that shiny is better than dull, bigger is better than small, gadgetry is better than simplicity and disposable is better than durable. So when we talk about things like water quality, long term soil management and good citizenship we lose some people.

Does that mean we put some of us in tiny tights and swimming trunks? I sure hope not as the mental image is not a pretty sight.

What we can do is keep on demonstrating practices that do change our farms and lives. Somehow we will get the message across that sustainablilty is a journey and not a destination. The trip is what we live.

There have been some unique experiences on field days. We've seen sleek stock cows with big fleshy calves on rotated pastures at the Rosmann farm. There had been no commercial nitrogen applied, just the power of nature. A couple years ago the corn and soybeans on the Mugge farm were so lush and beautiful. Paul farms like an artist paints



(Field days continued on page 2.)

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and the scene has an aura that is sensed, not seen. There is nothing that warms a crusty old hog farmer's heart like a contented sow on the Wilson farm lying there on straw and nursing a bellyful of pigs.

So I urge you to attend a field day or two. You'll learn something and while there may not be glitz and glitter, there will be caring, big-hearted, generous and friendly people. It doesn't get any better than that. Go.

FIELD DAYS FILL THE CALENDAR!

Rick Exner

There almost aren't enough days in the summer to pack in everything PFI cooperators are doing this year. Even with some field day "veterans" taking a vacation this summer, there are more than enough newcomers to keep things busy. Field days start with the New Melleray Abbey June 22 and run through Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf's CSA tour September 18. In addition to the PFI field days, northeast Iowa is full of pasture walks thanks to Northeast Iowa Graziers and the Northeast Iowa Demonstration Project. (See Table 1.)

There really is no better way to know PFI than through these gatherings, so scratch down a few dates on your own calendar. Members will soon receive the full guide to summer field days. In the mean time, here's a quick look at the season.

June 22 New Melleray Abbey farm (Peosta) – compost, flaming, fertility

June 24 Bryan and Lisa Sievers (New Liberty), Les and Lisa Schnekloth (Eldridge) – N mgt.

June 30 Steve and Wendi Williams (Villisca) – manure on soybeans

July 10 Angela Tedesco, Turtle Farm CSA (Granger) – efficiency in CSA veggie production

July 19 John and Joan Lubke (Ridgeway), Mike Natvig (Protivin) – oats and fertility mgt., stream pasture ecosystem

July 22 Wayne and Ruth Fredericks (Osage), Steve and June Weis (Osage) – hoophouse hogs, no-till oats, records, composting

July 24 Magic Beanstalk CSA – ISU Student Organic Farm (Ames)

July 26 Don Hennings (Moville), Gary and Venita Wilcox (Correctionville) – fertility, organic certification, crossing hybrids

Aug. 10 Dennis and Eve Abbas (Hampton) – population and N mgt., hoophouse hogs, oats

Aug. 12 John Sellers and Ralph Alshouse (Corydon) – lysine by-product for pasture fertility, switchgrass biomass project

Aug. 18 Dennis and Cheryl Hansen, Dean and Deanna Hansen (Audubon), Audubon Family Farms – farrowing in hoops, direct marketing

Aug. 20 Daryl Dorsheimer & ISU Armstrong Farm (Lewis) – composting, weed emergence, fertility, organic marketing

Aug. 22 Gary and Nancy Guthrie CSA garden (Nevada) – CSA veggie production, organic earworm mgt.

Aug. 23 Dave and Becky Struthers (Collins) (with ISU Rhodes Farm), hoophouse hogs, N mgt. in corn

Aug. 24 Neely-Kinyon Research Farm (Greenfield)

Aug. 27 Brad and Chris Harvey (Akron) Dordt College Ag Stewardship Center (Sioux Center) – manure mgt., grazing, Bt corn, seeding warm-season pasture

Aug. 28 Colin and Carla Wilson, Dan and Lorna Wilson (Paullina), Paul and Karen Mugge (Sutherland) – Swedish-style bedded farrowing, composting, tracking cropping system, small grains

Aug. 30 Arlyn and Annette Valvick (Swea City) – N on soybeans, reduced inputs

Sept. 4 Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell (Farmersburg), Dan Specht (McGregor) – open-pollinated corn, alfalfa pest biocontrol, tracking cropping system

Sept. 12 Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice (Wapello) – agroforestry

Sept. 15 Larry and Judy Jedlicka, Susan and Jeff Zacharakis-Jutz (Solon) – hoophouse hogs, organic cropping, alternative parasite control

Sept. 16 Virginia and Marion Moser (Garrison) – efficiency in CSA veggie production, coffee bean mulch

Sept. 18 Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf, One Step at a Time CSA (Kanawha) – efficiency in CSA veggie production, compost for broccoli

Table 1. 1999 Combined Northeast Iowa Pasture Walk Schedule [1]

Date	Host	Location	Topics
June 15	Chris Riniker 33198 Evergreen, Strawberry Point (319-933-6804) Alan Kirby (319-933-6560)	2.5 miles S. of Mederville, R. on Evergreen Rd., name is on sign next to road.	Compare established and beginning grazing systems. Start at Rinikers, grazing Holsteins since 1994. Effective use of ryegrass and possible strip grazing. Kirby began grazing in 1998, new seeding.
June 23	Brian and Heidi Lantzky 24359 X Ave., Waucoma (319-429-2000)	One mile N. of Hwy 18 on Hwy 193, 1 mile W. on 240th St., then N. on X Ave.	Grazing strategies for newcomers when dealing with a mid-summer slump.
June 23	Pat Meehan 2857 Hwy 38, Delhi (319-926-2573)	4 miles S. of Delhi on Hwy 38, W. side of road	Grazing sheep and beef. Working dog demonstration.
June 30	Farm Progress Hay Expo	Allamakee County	
July 14	Dan Byrnes 1044 Hwy 76, Waukon (319-568-3381)	From the JD store S. of Waukon, go 2.5 miiles SE on Hwy 76. S. side of rd.	Performance of registered Angus cattle on pasture, Kura clover cover crop demonstration.
July 21	Jerome Gaul 13126 Fishpond Rd., Epworth (319-876-3813)	Take Old Hwy. Rd. W. fr. Epworth to Fishpond Rd., then N. about 3 miles.	Swing parlor, mid-summer grazing stategies.
Aug. 10	Andrew Jackson Demonstration Farm. Contact Jackson Co. Extension (319-652-4923)	N. of Andrew on Hwy 461, in Jackson County.	Stocker steers, cow-calf grazing, kura clover, native grasses, satin orchardgrass.
Aug. 11	Dan Specht 12082 Iris Ave., McGregor (319-873-3873)	8 miles E. of Monona on County Rd. B45, 1 mile S. on Iris Ave.	Organic beef stockers on warm season grasses. Providing gravity-fed water in hilly pastures.
Aug. 18	Brian and Heidi Lantzky 24359 X Ave., Waucoma (319-429-2000)	One mile N. of Hwy 18 on Hwy 193, 1 mile W. on 240th St., then N. on X Ave.	Summer slump. Providing water to all paddocks. Potentially, supplementing pasture with stored feed.
Sept. 1	Pat and Marion Freiburger RR 2, Delhi (319-932-2933)	S. of Delhi on X31, W. on D42 about 3 miles, S. 1 mile.	Open grazing discussion. Late-season strategies, stockpiling.
Sept. 15	Don Baker 30999 Kale Rd., West Union (319-532-9530)	4 miles S. of Festina on Hwy 150, 1 mile E. on King Rd, N. on Kale Rd to last farmstead.	Warm season grasses. Turnips for fall grazing. Late season grazing strategies. Organizing the winter feed supply.
Oct. 6	Brad Larkin 1443 Hartong Dr., Lansing (319-535-7487)	N. of Waukon 6-7 miles on Hwy 9, 1.5 miles on Village Creek Rd., 1 mile on Schweinfurth Rd. to Hartong Dr.	Mixed seedings in 1998. 80 Holsteins in hilly paddocks. Late season grazing strategies and planning winter feed storage.
Oct. 13	Dave Kraphl 32555 Klosterman Rd., New Vienna (319-921-4255)	N. of New Vienna on Hwy 136 to first gravel rd. west, ½ mile across bridge. Right side of rd.	New dairy start-up. Low-cost, step-up parlor. High quality baleage for winter feed.

[1] All pasture walks begin at 10:00 am.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

As we go to press, the roster of PFI active members stands at 508, down from our peak at the January winter meeting. Thanks to the board members and PFI volunteers who have licked the envelopes and dialed the numbers in our attempt to hold on to those members who let their renewal lapse. Since our vitality as an organization depends not only on leadership, but also on the rank and file, the trend toward lower numbers is not something PFI can long bear. Let's take advantage of summer field days to recapture some energy. If you need extra brochures or newsletters for folks in your community, call Nan at the PFI office, 515-294-8512.

IT'S OFFICIAL– PFI ENDOWED FUND READY FOR GIFTS OF ALL KINDS

PFI and the ISU Achievement Foundation have finalized their agreement to establish the Practical Farmers of Iowa Endowed Fund. Created to assure long term financial stability for PFI, the fund began with an initial investment of $25,000 from Jean Wallace Douglas through the Wallace Genetic Foundation. Additional donations have come from PFI Board members and individual members.

Why did PFI go with ISU Achievement Foundation? Because the foundation staff knows so much about so many different giving options. For example, you could make a life estate gift. This is a contribution of real estate where donors retain the right to live on and maintain property during their life times. Charitable remainder trusts are another gift format through which donors can continue to receive income from the assets.

Are we getting ahead of you? With so many ways to help support the work of PFI, including good old tax deductible donations, it's easy to get confused. But if you're inclined to make a gift, giving to the PFI Endowed Fund is probably the best way to help the organization. Your gift will support profitable farming practices that are safe for people and protect the environment. Please join the PFI Board in getting the Endowed Fund off to a strong start by completing and sending in this form. We're all in this together.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town /City & State _____

Zip code _____

Donation Enclosed $ _____
(Make check payable to PFI Endowed Fund)

___ Please send me information on other giving options

___ I'd like to talk with someone about other giving options
My phone number is _____

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

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
FOUNDATION
Campaign Destiny

THE EDITOR MUSES

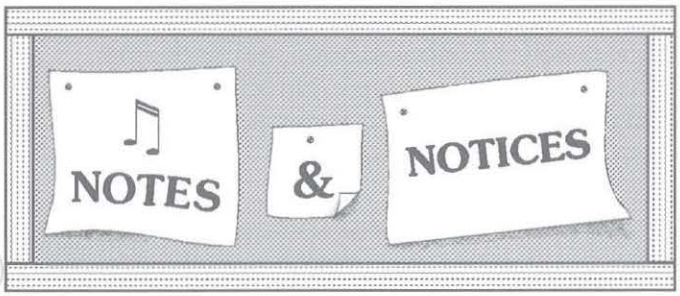
Up and at 'em! A sure sign of spring has been the increasing difficulty PFI staff experiences trying to stay in touch with PFI members. Must be that everybody's out in the field, ourselves included. Rick's been on the road a fair bit, spreading limestone and good will. Gary and Robert are on the go trying to ride herd on their crew of veggie producers and multiple projects (see Field to Family update p.7). When I'm not in Agronomy Hall, I'm at Full Circle Farm, experiencing new challenges, like harrow riding ("Is this OSHA approved?"), installing chicken condos, yanking fan weeds, and marketing firewood to campers, our latest value added venture. What are you up to?

We predict you'll have a least one more day of weather inclement enough to drive you indoors to indulge in this newsletter. There's a few chuckles in

the board member profiles. (Those folks are so industrious, they make me feel like I'm standing still!) And if Vic Madsen's field day pep talk didn't already grab your attention, hop back to page one right now. Keep your eye on the mail box for the full guide to PFI summer field days and make it a point to attend as many as you can. On-farm research is the backbone of PFI's credibility and reputation; our cooperating farmers deserve our enthusiastic support. Besides, you'll have a great time and you're bound to learn something. So take along a neighbor and recruit a new member. See you out there.

Cheers!
Nan Bonfils

P.S. Next newsletter deadline is July 23.



Editor's Note of Apology to the Spud Growers

In the winter newsletter, vol. 13 #4, we printed summaries of the January workshops. Matt Liebman advised me of an error in the section on soil quality and weed management (see p. 23-24) regarding herbicides and potatoes. Here's the straight scoop from the presenter. "Typically herbicides are applied three times during potato production in Maine: once at the start of the season to kill weeds, and two more times at the end of the season to kill the crop to prepare it for harvest. Insecticides are usually applied 2 to 4 times per season. Fungicides are applied 7 to 12 or more times per season."

Farm Bureau Contest Open to All Producers

Farm Bureau has kicked off its Farmer Idea Exchange 2000 Contest. If you have an innovative idea or invention that has saved you time and increased profits, you may be eligible for a cash prize and possibly a year's free use of a New Holland tractor. Judges are looking for great ideas in the areas of soil quality, input efficiency, marketing or rotational grazing, among others. Official entry forms are available in all Farm Bureau offices and we have few on hand in the PFI office as well. Entries are due to the Des Moines office by September 1, 1999.

Work Efficiency Tip Sheets for Small Scale Growers

Since 1966, researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits Project have been seeking and developing tools and systems which reduce the risk of injury and fatigue while increasing profits. Their findings are now available in a series of UW Extension Publications entitled "Work Efficiency Tip Sheets." Topics include: standard plastic containers; mesh produce bags; packing shed designs; narrow pallet systems. Tip sheets are available from UW Extension Publications, phone 608-262-3346 or via the web site http:/www.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/. Ask for series A3704. For more information about the Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits Project, contact Marcia Miquelon, Outreach Specialist, at 608-795-0014. You can also meet Marcia at Virginia and Marion Moser's field day in Garrison, Iowa, on September 16. Staff from the Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits Project will also be presenting at PFI's annual meeting in January 2000.

Date Set for PFI Annual Meeting 2000

Y2K worries aside, you can go ahead and mark your calendar for PFI's Annual Winter Workshops. The meeting will take place in Ames on January 14 & 15, 2000. This date is a little later than some of our more recent meetings to give everyone a little more breathing room after the holidays. We also hope that more university students will attend. How about you? The roster of speakers is already growing. If you have ideas about the program, speakers, child care, or meals, you should contact Nan Bonfils, PFI program assistant, at 515-294-8512.

Web Site Calendar for Conservation Events

A new calendar on the World Wide Web now lists meetings, conferences, and other activities in Iowa that relate to conservation and the environment. The web site is a project of the Environmental Leadership Institute with support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, John Deere, Iowa Conservation Education Council and Iowa Natural Heritage

Foundation. To list an event or check the calendar, go to <http://www.ecoinfo.net>.

Educational Materials Available

Two kits, one on neotropical migratory birds and another on Iowa wetlands, are now available. The migration unit is designed for middle schoolers to investigate the midwestern connections between declining habitats and populations. The wetlands unit includes field activities for grades K-12. Ideal for teachers, home schoolers, scout leaders, and life long learners. For more information contact Kay Neumann at 712-683-5555 or by email dfarms@pionet.net.

Working Trees Brochures Available from National Agroforestry Center

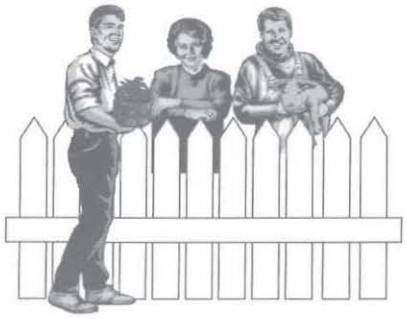
National Agroforestry Center (NAC) offers a series of brochures on Working Trees. There are currently five titles in the series including the two latest ones, Working Trees for Livestock, and Working Trees for Wildlife. Both are designed to be "awareness level publications" and are available by contacting: Nancy Hammond at NAC, East Campus-UNL, Lincoln, NE 68583-0822. You can also order publications from the web site www.unl.edu/nac.

Wanted – Organic Farmer

Organic farmer for 320 acres for year 2000, live in buildings and care for cattle. Provide resume and references to Lee B. Blum, PO Box 313, Hampton, IA. 50441. Phone 515-456-4791 or 2761.

October Composting Workshop

All-day on-farm composting workshop on October 27, 1999 in Cedar Rapids. The workshop will help you get from fresh manure, animal mortalities, and crop residues to the finished product and show you how to use it effectively on vegetables and crops. $15 registration fee includes materials. Co-sponsored by the Leopold Center For Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Recycling Association, BioCycle, and Iowa State University. For more information contact Garth Frable of the Iowa Recycling Association at (515) 265-1596, Frable3r@aol.com.



OVER THE BACK FENCE

Diane Mayerfeld, Ames

Hi. I work on informing Extension specialists and other agricultural professionals about sustainable agriculture. I've organized classroom training, tours, workshops, and field days on topics ranging from the philosophy of sustainable agriculture to grazing and water quality, hoophouse hogs, and marketing. Whatever the event or topic, participants always say that hearing from farmers about their experience is the most valuable part of the training.

So... I am often looking for farmers to help with educational events. Are you doing anything innovative on your farm that you would be willing to explain to Extension agents, NRCS staff, and others? It does not have to be replicated research (though that is great), just a practice or idea that is working on your farm. Also, you would not necessarily have to travel to Ames – some of our events are tours with farm visits and others are held in various parts of the state. I would love to put together a list of producers in different areas of the state whom I could call when I am looking for a speaker. My program reimburses speakers for any travel expenses and provides a modest honorarium.

If this sounds interesting to you, please give me a call at (515) 294-0887 or drop me an email at <dmayerfe@iastate.edu>. You won't be making a commitment, but I can add a note to my file that you are doing some interesting nutrient management or whatever, and you just may get a call from me sometime when I am looking for a speaker on that topic.

Diane Mayerfeld, 2104 Agronomy Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011

FIELD TO FAMILY PROJECT UPDATE

Robert Karp

There are two main areas of our work with the PFI Field to Family Project that we want to report on for this issue of the newsletter: Institutional Buying, and Hunger and Nutrition.

Institutional Buying

Lots is happening with our Institutional Buying Project:

Finishing touches are being put on the "Iowa's Choice Menu" which we have been working on diligently for the last five months. This menu will be made available as an option to groups using the Scheman Center at ISU for an event. The products for this menu will be secured by Field to Family, whenever possible, from farmers and growers throughout the state committed to sustainable agriculture. We've included a preliminary draft of this menu on the next page. Table tents will also be used to further educate people about the significance of the choice they have made and about the specific growers for their meal.

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the ISU Ag Foundation recently awarded PFI two one-year grants to work on institutional buying. We will be working closely with the folks at Audubon County Family Farms on these efforts. The main goals of our Leopold grant, include:

1. To estimate the potential market for Iowa grown and raised foods with Iowa Hotels, Restaurants and Institutions (HRI's);

2. To identify some of the opportunities, challenges and benefits perceived by HRI buyers in purchasing food products from Iowa farmers practicing sustainable agriculture;

3. To determine under what conditions serving local HRI markets can be a profitable venture for Iowa farmers practicing sustainable agriculture;

...growers have already begun to cooperate on supplying fresh produce for Iowa Grown meals in central Iowa.

4. To analyze various means for linking Iowa producers to HRI markets, (i.e.. direct marketing, brokering entity, producer coop, etc.) and to conduct feasibility studies for one or two of the most promising models;

5. To help build the capacity of producers to serve HRI markets more effectively.

A group of eight vegetable growers has been meeting with us for the last six months about supplying food for events at the Scheman Center. The group is considering forming some type of alliance in order to cooperate more effectively in growing for local markets. With the help of Field to Family these growers have already begun to cooperate on supplying fresh produce for Iowa Grown meals in central Iowa.

A very special meal took place on May 22nd at the Hotel Fort Des Moines to celebrate the beauty, bounty and potential of Iowa-grown foods. The meal was organized by the Niman Ranch Company of Iowa and the Field to Family Project, with financial support from ISU Extension and in-kind contributions from four Des Moines restaurants. The meal featured Iowa grown foods that were prepared by Cal Peternell, a chef from the world renowned Chez Pannise Restaurant in Berkeley, California. Four local chefs from the Hotel Fort Des Moines, the Embassy Club, Bistro 43 and Brix Restaurant helped with this meal.

Gary Huber, PFI staff person and Field to Family co-director was appointed to the Local Food Systems Task Force recently formed by Patty Judge, the new Secretary of Agriculture. The purpose of this task force is to develop specific recommendations for increasing purchases of Iowa grown and raised foods by local institutions and consumers.

(Field to Family continued on p. 9)

Scheman Center - Iowa's Choice Buffet

Meals include: choice of one or two entrees, potato, two seasonal vegetables, soup or salad, rolls and beverage. Desserts upon request.

Please Note: All menu items subject to replacement based on availability

Entrees (meats available year round): Sliced Roast Beef, Sliced Ham, Pork Chops, Baked Chicken, Lean Ground Beef Patties, Extra Lean Ground Pork Steaks, Turkey (November only), Iowa Tilapia fish filets, Vegetable Stir Fry with Iowa Tofu, Pasta Primavera

Season I
June through Mid-July

Potatoes
Baby Red Potatoes
Barley Pilaf

Seasonal Vegetables
Asparagus, Sugar Snap Peas, Snow Peas, Broccoli

Soup or Salad
Tossed Salad
Marinated Vegetable Salad
Beet Salad
Black Bean Soup

Season II
Mid-July through September

Potatoes
Seasoned Potato Wedges
Au Gratin Potatoes
Scheman Potatoes

Seasonal Vegetables
Corn on the cob, Broccoli, Zucchini, Green Beans, Carrots

Soup or Salad
Tossed Salad
Cucumber Tomato Onion Salad
Marinated Vegetable Salad
Melon Wedges

Season III
October through February

Potatoes
Smashed Potatoes
Scheman Potatoes

Seasonal Vegetables
Carrots Au Gratin
Fall Squash
Eggplant-Pepper Medley

Soup or Salad
Tossed Salad
Beet Salad
Potato Salad
Apple Sauce
Black Bean Soup

(Field to Family continued from p. 7)

Hunger and Nutrition Efforts

There are also several positive developments to report on our efforts in this area:

A new nutrition education effort was piloted in Story County this spring which was a resounding success. The program, called "Family Basics", came in to being through a partnership between Field to Family and ISU Extension's Family Nutrition Program. The program is targeted to low income families and involves six in depth sessions, three of which involve hands on cooking classes and three of which are focused on issues like money management, nutrition education and menu planning. In general, ISU Extension nutrition specialists around the state are beginning to show more and more interest in the some of the approaches to food and nutrition education that have been pioneered by Field to Family in the last several years.

Another new effort in Story County has arisen through a partnership between Field to Family and a local coalition of churches called the Good Neighbor Emergency Assistance Cooperative. This effort is called the "Healthy Food Voucher Program." The Healthy Food Voucher Program will provide low income families with "vouchers" good toward vegetable shares from local Community Supported Agriculture Projects (CSA's); fresh produce and other perishables form local farmers' markets and grocery stores, as well as toward participation in local cooking classes.

Field to Family has also recently published a "Guide to Food and Nutrition Resources in Story County." The guide brings together in one place detailed information on all the emergency and non-emergency food resources in Story County, including food pantries, farmers' markets, CSA's, food services for senior citizens, Extension nutrition programs and more. Many local agencies, churches and consumers had identified the lack of such a guide as a major obstacle to addressing the food needs of poor families.

Other Updates

Field to Family has been awarded a $3000 "Share the Learning" grant from Vision 2020. The purpose of this grant is to help several other communities around Iowa develop projects along the lines of the Field to Family. The funds will cover expenses for a Field to Family co-director to go to several urban and rural communities in Iowa to give presentations on Field to Family, and the concept of community food security. The grant money also helps in working with local groups of stakeholders who are interested in starting food security type projects. If you know of a community you think would be interested, please contact me at the Field to Family office.

As of June, the Field to Family Project will be housed in a new office at 301½ Main Street, Ames, IA 50010.

Field to Family has received a $5000 grant from the Iowa Agricultural Foundation to work with ISU Value Added Extension and Wheatsfield Grocery—a local health foods cooperative in Ames—on a feasibility study for cafe/catering/food processing venture that would add-value to locally grown foods.

We're Moving

As of June 1st, the Field to Family Project will be housed in a new office at 301½ Main Street, Ames, IA 50010. We're trying to keep our phone number the same, (515) 232-7162, but if you have any trouble reaching us, try calling the main PFI office, (515) 294-8512 for an update. You can also get in touch with us by email at ftf@isunet.net ❦

HM SESSIONS HELD IN MARCH

Rick Exner

Practical Farmers of Iowa and ISU Extension sponsored two training sessions in Holistic Management in March. The events were supported through a grant from the SARE PDP program (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, Professional Development Program). Holistic Management (which used to be known as Holistic Resource Management or HRM) originated as a grazing approach, but it has evolved into a generalized decision making and planning tool.

SARE PDP is designed for "training the trainers," so these two sessions concentrated on staff of agencies working with agriculture. The one-day workshop March 12, in Carroll, drew 30 participants, mostly from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the

Farm Service Agency, and ISU. Trainer Bill Casey introduced the core concepts of holistic management, and Extension Farm Management Field Specialist Tim Eggers described Strategic Advantage, a comparable planning tool used by Extension.

The training in Mason City, March 29-31, involved only 11 participants and trainer Ed Martsolf, so a more intimate level of communication was possible. The second day, participants traveled to the farm of Steve and June Weis, who are part of an HM-based self-help group (see photo p. 15). Participants offered their "weak link" analyses of the operation and brainstormed FFA projects for the Weis' son, David. Steve, June, and Steve's father Paul all participated in the full three days of the workshop.

Sister Miriam Brown guides district 2 listeners to the heart of sustainability.

PFI DISTRICT MEETINGS SPARK LIVELY CONVERSATIONS AND STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS

North Central District 2 Meeting Held

Steve Weis, Osage

"Sustaining your Heart and your Business" was the theme of the District 2 meeting held on March 27th in Iowa Falls. Miriam Brown, the executive director of Churches' Center for Land and People from Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, started off the meeting with a workshop entitled The Heart of Sustainability. Members were guided into a soul searching look at why the "heart of farming" is so important in our farm operations. We also discussed how we could bring the spirit and language of heart to our personal and farming choices, as well as bringing them into the public food and agricultural system.

A delicious potluck dinner was then served which was a testament to all the good cooks we have in our district. Good fellowship and conversation during the meal brightened our day even more than the sunny, warm day we had outside.

Dan Looker, the Business editor from Successful Farming magazine, then closed our meeting with a discussion on the business side of farming. He talked about the importance of strategic planning for your farm, as well as many other topics that members brought up for discussion.

Fourth District Hosts Meeting

Donna Bauer, Audubon

Twenty-six people participated in PFI's fourth district meeting held in Earlham on March 11. Following a potluck supper, the group listened intently to two speakers actively involved in sustainable agriculture.

Mary Swalla Holmes, project coordinator with ISU Extension's Value-Added Ag group, began her presentation with a quote from John Naisbitt's Global Paradox; "the bigger the global economy becomes, the more powerful its smallest players." Swalla Holmes observed evidence of this in a recent trip to Switzerland, where she saw first-hand how Europe is developing a local food system in response to a globalized economy. Organic and sustainable farmers are processing products from their farms in shared facilities and selling through local restaurants and stores. Could this happen in Iowa?

With the development of LEAF NET, Swalla Holmes believes it can. The Local Enterprise Agriculture and Food Network is being established to support the development of food processing micro-enterprises in Iowa's communities. Strategies include assisting

communities that would like to establish a licensed kitchen by offering technical and financial support as well as providing communication links between regional kitchens.

Swalla Holmes defined incubator kitchens as places where people rent facilities and create products (such as salsa) to test on the market. Eventually, successful entrepreneurs leave the facility and go out on their own. Shared kitchens, on the other hand, are facilities that a community develops and continues to use to make and sell products. The vision of LEAF NET is to have many such kitchens throughout Iowa where local producers or others can add value to Iowa's raw products. She emphasized that potential users should help design the kitchens to meet their needs.

The second speaker, Denise O'Brien, relayed the enthusiasm she experienced when visiting members of the Michigan Integrated Food Systems Project earlier this year. MIFFS was a part of the Kellogg project from which Shared Visions emerged. Three years ago, Farmer's Egg Coop was established with a grant from MIFFS. Today, the coop includes 12 farm families who raise an average flock of 600 birds that contribute to a production of 2,400 dozen eggs per week. Once a week the members get together to put the eggs through a washer-grader and pack them in cases. Although the coop has several outlets within a 100 mile radius, Whole Foods in Ann Arbor is their largest buyer. Most of the Michigan farm families involved have grain and livestock operations and have added the laying hens for additional income.

Both Swalla Holmes and O'Brien underscored the importance of sustainable micro enterprises committed to food production for Iowa farmers and their rural communities. For additional information regarding these projects contact Mary Swalla Holmes at 515-294-6946 and Denise O'Brien at 712-243-5752.

Northwest District 1 Meeting

Ken Wise and Colin Wilson, board representatives for District 1, organized a meeting for about twenty-five PFI members on March 6 in Storm Lake. Joy Johnson spoke about a resource management guide called IFARM available from the Center for Rural Affairs. Joy presented sections on goal setting, marketing plans, and resource inventories. The planning guide is designed for farm families to use at their own pace at home without extensive outside help.

Plenty of time for good conversation at the District 1 meeting.

Following a Dutch Treat Supper, John Crabtree, also from the Center for Rural Affairs, presented a Three Point Response to the Pork Crisis, covering marketing reforms, revenue insurance, and creating alternative markets. The discussion was lively, stretching well into the evening.

Northeast District 3 Meeting

Niche marketing was the central topic at the Northeast District Meeting on March 20 at Fayette. A panel discussion covered marketing home-grown beef, organic pork, vegetables, and setting up a farmers market. There was also a presentation on sustainable forestry.

Southeast District 5 Meeting

District 5 members will receive a separate flyer with details regarding their meeting which will take place this autumn.

KEEPING THE ROWS STRAIGHT: YOUR PFI BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In this issue of the newsletter we begin a series of profiles of PFI board members. These are the folks who represent you, the members, in making decisions for the organization. Board members are elected for two-year terms and meet quarterly in Ames. (The next meeting is June 29.) In between they get together via the phone, email, fax, and general jawboning. Communication lines are open year 'round. You'll find board member phone numbers and emails, when available, on the back of this and every newsletter.

Five of the ten district representatives wrote their own profiles here; five more will be featured in the summer newsletter. Even if you think you know them, here's a chance to get better acquainted. And if you're not familiar with the players, this should make it easier to match a name with a face. They're a diverse and sometimes surprising lot!

Dave Lubben, PFI President and District 5, Southeast, Director

Lubben White Oak Farms is a family owned diversified crop and livestock operation near Monticello, Iowa. We have about 400 acres in corn, 350 acres in soybeans, 150 acres in hay production and 250 acres in management intensive grazing. We currently have about 140 commercial beef cows and a 300 head cattle feedlot.

My wife Lisa and I have three children. Lydia is nine years old, Lael is three years old, and Clayton is eighteen months. Lydia is in third grade at a Catholic school and likes to play basketball and loves to ride her horse in the summer. Lael is just starting preschool and teaching her parents the difficulties of a middle child. Clayton is our little bruiser, all boy. Lisa is a full time homemaker and a part time nurse at our local school.

I have one full time employee, Brian Himes, who is better with the beef cows than I am and does a very good job for us. It always seems I have enough work around the farm for three people but I can only afford two. My father, Robert, is semiretired. He comes over every morning to see if I've got the chores done and to visit with the grandkids. He likes to go home for an early lunch and a nap. He comes back in the afternoon to see what I'm doing and then likes to leave early to go home and read the paper.

The thing that has intrigued me the most about PFI is doing on-farm research. I've been doing test plots and trials since 1989. Over the years I've tested products and tillage practices and learned a few lessons along the way:

1. I can do my own research using my management style and soil types to generate reliable and valid data quickly.
2. Test plots show me the wide variation within a field.
3. It is very difficult to get a significant increase in yield.
4. Do economic and agronomic analysis for three years before making major decisions.

A couple of things that I enjoy doing in the winter are compiling a business plan and developing marketing strategies. In 1982, I started a Marketing Club in our area with ten farmers. We meet about six times a year to develop marketing plans and strategies. Over the years we have learned from each other's mistakes and look forward to the interactions. Each meeting we try to invite an outside guest to add new opinions to our discussions.

In 1984, I wrote my first business plan in long hand and would look at it a couple of times a year. Today, I compile a very extensive notebook of goals and objectives, financial balance sheets, enterprise analysis, cash flow statements, written marketing plans, crop and livestock production plans, financial ratios and performance evaluations. I use this notebook almost on a daily basis to help make decisions on crop and livestock production, marketing sales and financial stability. Each year we seem to add more record keeping to our agenda. We continually need to measure and monitor each enterprise and integral part

As President, my goal is to keep that enthusiasm and creativity alive for the next generation.

of our operation. Which cow isn't carrying her weight in the cowherd, which hayfield yielded the best? What is our true cost of production with family living and depreciation included? How did my grain sales compare to the national average price received?

In 1993, I was elected to the Board of Directors for PFI, one of the few organizations in which the people involved display diversity, creativity and entrepreneurship. It has been exciting to watch PFI evolve over the last fourteen years from ridge till, to grazing, to test plots, to shared visions, to CSA's, to organic, to sustainable systems. As President, my goal is to keep that enthusiasm and creativity alive for the next generation.

Colin Wilson, PFI Vice President and District 1, Northwest, Director

I was born and raised in northwest Iowa and, except for the seven years that I was in high school and college, have lived in the same community since I was five years old. I attended a boarding high school in southeast Iowa, had two years at ISU and one year at Wilmington College in Ohio before returning to the family farm on a full time basis in 1976. I started farming in partnership with my father and older brother, Dan. Dan and I still farm in partnership.

Carla and I were married in 1983 after importing her from South Dakota by way of Colorado. Over the next fifteen years God brought us five children from India and Haiti. They are: David, 20, now living in the Denver area; Becky, 19, our chief goat milker and household assistant; Levi, 16, the sheepherder; Caleb, 14, swine herdsman; Jacob, 14, goat feeder and assistant milker; and last, but not least, Rachel, 4, entertainment and "the boss" whenever possible. Along with outside chores there are the usual dishes to do, laundry, the garden and lawn, helping Dad and Mom, babysitting and, of course, school. We homeschool our children and our farm has become a very large classroom.

The farming operation has grown from the original 240 acres to the current 800 acres with hogs being the primary enterprise. Along with the hogs, Dan's family has added a sheep flock, laying hens and broilers. Our family has added laying hens, a small sheep flock and a few milking goats. On the cropping end we grow corn, soybeans, seed beans, oats, barley, hay and rotated pasture.

We started ridge-tilling in 1985 and have continued with it today. Most of our acres are in a 2 or 3 year rotation with the oats and barley shifted around to periodically break the 2 year rotation. About half of the oat/barley acres are grown without a hay crop and are used for summer manure application after grain and straw harvest and rebuilding ridges.

Our swine operation is farrow to finish with a lot of our pigs custom finished by two neighbors. Our production system has two different parts: the pasture part and the deep-bedded part. The pasture part includes about 200 litters farrowed in May/June and August/September as well as breeding/gestating sows and growing replacement gilts. The deep-bedded system includes a 44 sow/litter barn at my place, a 24 sow/litter nursery and an old barn with 32 farrowing pens at Dan's place, and the breeding/gestation hoop house at my place. The custom finishing farms have 4 hoop houses and an old barn and hog house with concrete lots. We've been working with Paul Willis and Niman Ranch for about two years.

We've been members of PFI for about fourteen years. We've been cooperators since 1994. A lot of

PFI has been a great forum ...because of the great diversity and wealth of experience within the membership.

our research has centered around the hog enterprise, since it is our most important enterprise. We have done feed trials comparing barley and corn. We did another trial comparing twin-row soybeans and single-row soybeans on ridges. Our most recent trials are with composting hoop-house and deep-bedded farrow/nursery manure. This year, along with the composting, we are working with two different oat trials.

One of our major goals is to add greater diversity to our farm, which we have done the last two years by adding different livestock enterprises. A second goal is to reclaim agriculture for family, but we are working on several different avenues. First was the Niman Ranch marketing option to add more profit to the operation. We are also looking at some direct marketing options at the local level to help connect local people with local food. Carla is working with a local group to improve and expand the farmers market. We are also investigating on-farm processing of our goat milk as a way to improve marketing options and provide locally produced food to the area markets.

For us, PFI has been a great forum for exploring new and different ideas, as well as a very good source of information because of the great diversity and wealth of experience within the membership. In the future I hope to see PFI make even better use of this valuable resource (the wealth of membership experience and knowledge) and expand the availability of this resource. Things like the directory, Winter Workshops, the cooperator's meeting and, of course, field days all give people a chance to share, to get better acquainted and see what others are doing. I think there needs to be ways for even more people to be a part of this information exchange.

Donna Bauer, District 4, Southwest, Director

I have farmed with my husband, Ted, since 1977 in Audubon County, Iowa. We have participated in a traditional crop-share partnership with the same family for twenty-two years. The farm is a conventional mid-size farm where oats, hay, corn, soybeans and cattle are raised. Typical of western Iowa, the land has beautiful rolling hills where contouring and rotations are a must and erosion is a constant concern.

I've been a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa since the early eighties and on the board since 1997. PFI represents my farming philosophy which is to strive toward a more sustainable agriculture through "farmers helping farmers." My personal goal to "leave the land better than we found it" leads me to become involved in pursuits for a more sustainable farm, community, and world for future generations. A pet project that applies to that goal is the planting of four acres of bushes and hardwoods on the farm this spring. Another is a CRP planting of thirty-four acres to selected prairie grasses.

I helped start the "Women's Gathering" in 1995. Knowing that it is difficult for both partners to get away from the farm at the same time, the Women's Gathering was started as a chance for PFI women to get away and relax. It has also become an opportunity for PFI women (not all of whom are directly involved in farming) to learn about each other.

As with many women living in rural Iowa, I've had multiple roles over the years. These include farming partner (operating equipment, raising livestock, keeping books); off-farm employee; mother (to son Bryce, age 12); student (graduating from ISU in 1994 with a BS in sociology/environmental studies); community coordinator (presently working for Audubon County Family Farms); and research assistant.

My hope for PFI in the future is that it will remain a diverse organization that is inclusive of those committed to sustainable agriculture. In coming years it will

My personal goal... pursuits for a more sustainable farm, community, and world for future generations.

be even more important for farmers, scientists and consumers to talk to each other about how we can all work together to attain a better environment and food system.

Steve Weis, District 2, North Central, Director

My name is Steve Weis. I live between Osage and Stacyville in North-central Iowa, about six miles from the Minnesota border. I am married to June and we have five kids: Val, a senior in high school; Dave, a freshman in high school; Greg, a sixth grader; Renae, a fifth grader; and Lisa, a third grader. Val is enrolled at ISU for next year and plans to pursue a degree from the ag college, although she is undecided at this time as to a specific major. All our kids have been active in 4-H, and Val and Dave are also in FFA at St. Ansgar High School.

I farm with my dad and two other brothers, and we farm in a family corporation called Pork 'N Pine Hill Inc. I have been farming since 1977, after I graduated from ISU with a degree in Animal Science. We raise corn, soybeans, oats, hay, hogs and veal calves. My family also raises some pasture chickens, both to sell and for us to eat, and some sheep mostly for the kids to show at the fair. We lambed for the first time this spring and enjoyed that a lot. We're trying to decide now where the sheep project should go – keep it small or expand?

Some things we are working on here at Pork 'N Pine include a para-till sub-soiler versus no subsoil plot, a fall deepbanded fertilizer versus no fertilizer plot, still experimenting with composting our hoophouse manure, and I'm looking at running some trials in our hoophouses this summer with feed grade antibiotics versus probiotics.

Besides farming, I'm a strong believer in being active in your community.

Besides farming, I'm a strong believer in being active in your community. I've served on our school board for six years, been a 4-H leader for about eight years, and helped start a Jaycees chapter in Stacyville. Presently I'm on the Endowment Committee of our local school, and I am active in St. Ansgar Rescue, where I'm an EMT. I'm on call with Rescue for 7 to 10 days a month. June and I also belong to a farm management group that formed during Shared Visions. We meet once a month and rotate hosting the meetings. Currently we have two off-farm members in our group and five farming families. We use Holistic Management in our decision making.

When I get some free time, I enjoy reading or going fishing in the summer. I enjoy my family time even if its just kicking around the farm. June and I are also planning a trip this fall to Ohio, where we signed up for an Amish Study Tour with Ed Martstoff. As far as PFI goes, I have been a board member for just over a year and been a member for probably six years. I joined PFI after going to a field-day at Tom Frantzen's and Mike Reichert's. What impressed me with PFI wasn't what I learned at the field-day but the people I met there. As the members are today, they were so friendly, caring and open with their thoughts and feelings. It's the people I meet in PFI that make it such a special organization. I wish that more people would take a look at joining PFI. With agriculture undergoing some trying times now, I feel it's really important that you have an organization that supports you with good

Steve's father, Paul, points out features of the family operation at the Holistic Management workshop led by Ed Martoff (left).

ideas and also provides a place to share common philosophy. At the annual meeting I always enjoy not only the sessions but the informal sessions in the hallways. PFI simply offers something for everyone.

Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, District 5, Southeast, Director

I grew up on a dairy farm in Minnesota, one of six children. I went off to college and from there lived in various western states including Alaska, California, Wyoming and Illinois. I married Jeffrey in 1983 and we have four children, Frances (almost 15), Reuben (13), George (10), and David who just turned 7. Our children are and have always been home schooled.

When we made our move to Iowa in 1994, we decided, as a family that we wanted to have a "real farm" as the kids called it. After much searching we found our 80 acre farm and it and we have been growing ever since. We call our farm ZJ Farm - lots easier to spell than Zacharakis-Jutz. Currently we have a 50 ewe flock which we rotationally graze. We feed the lambs on organic and transitional grains using no growth promoters or antibiotics. We direct market these lambs to mostly local customers.

Our children purchase and raise 20 to 30 pigs and these are also direct marketed to local customers. The money they earn goes in the bank for college!

Our most time consuming enterprise on a daily basis is our 55 doe commercial dairy goat herd. We milk ten months of the year and our milk goes to a cheese plant in Wisconsin. We are currently in the midst of our third growing season as partners in Local Harvest CSA. This year, with the help of a second veggie grower we have expanded our CSA to include 35 families. We are in our second growing season with 40 acres of crop land and these acres are certified organic. Jeffrey works off the farm as a community development specialist which frequently ties in nicely with our farming operation.

...we decided, as a family that we wanted to have a "real farm" as the kids called it.

We are actively involved in our church, and 4-H. I am a founding member of Prairie Talk, an organization which maintains a collection of resources on organic farming. Prairie Talk was a Shared Visions project and through that we became involved in PFI. Becoming members of PFI has been a great experience for our entire family. Everyone enjoys participating in the winter meeting and PFI camp is an annual event for our children. Being a part of PFI has been an inspiration for us and I feel honored to be a part of the PFI board. I hope to see PFI continue to grow and be an inspiration for other farmers. I would like to see PFI become more active at a local level.

No surprises, Nan, except that I'm writing this in my pajamas and now need to do a quick change and get out to milk and then plant before it rains. ❦

SOILS WEARING OUT FROM AGRICULTURE?

Rick Exner

Research suggests that over-use of nitrogen amendments may be causing irreversible changes in Midwestern soils. The Feb.-March issue of *NPM Field Notes* describes research led by Phillip Barak, of the University of Wisconsin. Barak used a fertilizer trial begun in 1962 to measure soil changes brought about by nitrogen fertilizer.

Farmers know over time nitrogen fertilizer acidifies the soil. So does nitrogen from alfalfa and manure. While N fertilizer reactions in the soil are acidifying, nitrogen reactions in plants tend to neutralize acidity. However, when the crop is removed from the field, the net effect is a reduction in soil pH (acidifying). When the pH drops low enough to affect crop yields,

farmers usually apply agricultural lime. Barak's team believes even moderate degrees of soil acidity may be causing soil changes that ag-lime cannot erase.

For 30 years different rates of nitrogen were applied to the plots, and no ag-lime was applied. The above-ground portion of the crops was removed at harvest. The greatest acidification of the soil (pH 4.8) resulted from the highest N rate (150 lbs per acre). This annual application also apparently resulted in a 15 percent reduction in the soil cation exchange capacity that is not reversible. Cation exchange capacity (CEC) reflects the soil's ability to hold positively charged nutrients like potassium, calcium and magnesium in crop-available forms.

The relatively high CEC of soils in the Upper Midwest is partly due to clay minerals characteristic of these younger, unweathered soils, some of which are as little as 15,000 years old. As soils "age," these clay minerals break down and/or are reformulated as other minerals. From the CEC reduction measured, the researchers suggest that the soil receiving the most nitrogen in this trial has aged the equivalent of 750 years in three decades. The aging rate would be even greater compared to soils that did not receive acidity and nitrogen from precipitation (acid rain).

The researchers point out that fertilizer nitrogen efficiency plunges at higher rates of fertilization. The unused nitrogen at 150 lbs per acre created three times the acidity of the 100 lb N treatment. As you might expect, Barak thinks farmers should apply more ag-lime, more often in order to minimize soil aging. He says tile lines and soil leachate are carrying off not just nitrogen, but hundreds of pounds of the positively charged nutrients that acidity is replacing on the soil cation exchange complex. In order to produce high crop yields on a sustainable basis, we may have to pay closer attention to how crop nutrients affect the soil. And in this case the beneficiaries of good farming practices won't live somewhere downstream.

Napgezek, A. 1999. Aging soils? NPM Field Notes, Feb.-March, 10(2):1-2.

Barak, P., B.O. Jobe, A.R. Krueger, L.A. Peterson, and D.A. Laird. 1997. Effects of long-term soil acidification due to nitrogen fertilizer inputs. Plant and Soil, 197:61-69.

... acidity may be causing soil changes that ag-lime cannot erase.

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE: A WETLAND WEED

Amy Wiebe, ISU Department of Entomology

Editor's note: This article ran in a previous edition of the newsletter. We reprint it here as the researchers are still looking for participants in the control project.

Originally from Europe, purple loosestrife accidentally arrived in the United States in the early 1800's. It spread first across the northeastern coast of the United States, and at the turn of the century loosestrife had reached the Mississippi river. In the mid 1900's, purple loosestrife seed was planted near Storm Lake, Iowa and several nearby streams to establish a new plant species for honey bees.

Today, this area is heavily infested with purple loosestrife. Purple loosestrife colonizes many diverse wetland habitats in North America, e.g., riverbanks, marshes, and roadside ditches. Plants bloom from mid-June to late September. The inflorescence is composed of numerous small brightly colored purple flowers closely attached to the stem. Each plant may produce an average of 2.5 million seeds that are viable for many years and remain in the seed bank.

Since 1940, it has spread at an annual mean rate of 250 square miles. Loosestrife seed is easily dispersed and new infestations of purple loosestrife have been observed along the Raccoon River and its tributaries. Loosestrife has displaced native plant species, for example cattails (*Typha* spp.), sedges (*Carex* spp.) and smartweed (*Polygonum* spp.) in North American wetlands. Loosestrife is an inferior wetland habitat for diversity: many waterfowl can not utilize loosestrife for nesting or breeding.

In cooperation with community groups, the Biological Control Laboratory at Iowa State University has developed a mass rearing program for a parasitic beetle, *Galerucella* species. Since 1994, over 300,000 beetles have been released in Iowa wetlands. Releases of *Galerucella* species have been concentrated in northwest Iowa (Lake View, Storm Lake and Lytton, IA) where the loosestrife problem is most severe. In 1998, releases were also made at three sites in central Iowa (Cummings, West Des Moines, and Stratford, IA). If you have purple loosestrife in your area and would like to get involved in the control project, please contact John Obrycki at (515) 294-8622.

CAN TROUT AND COWS COEXIST?

Laura Paine, Department of Agronomy,
University of Wisconsin

Rotational grazing may be a good alternative to fencing livestock out of streams, say researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The researchers are comparing the ecological effects of grassy buffer strips, woody buffer strips, continuous grazing and rotational grazing along trout streams. Their findings indicate that rotational grazing, when practiced with careful management, demonstrated very good stream bank protection and habitat qualities.

A team of researchers including John Lyons, researcher and watershed ecologist with the DNR, and Laura Paine, agronomy research specialist with the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and others at UW-Madison are evaluating fish communities, aquatic insects, stream bank conditions, forage production, and wildlife species on 19 farms in southwestern Wisconsin. Paine explains: "Instead of working at odds toward often opposing goals, we are looking at ways to work together to find practices which are acceptable to both (biotic communities and farmers), and that farmers can adopt practically and profitably."

First year results indicate that although there was less bank erosion and better trout habitat on the rotationally grazed sites than on continuously grazed sites, researchers did not find more trout in the stream near rotationally grazed pastures. "Rotational grazing does develop more sod than continuous grazing on banks, but if you're going to have a big influence on fish it will take more than 5 or 10 percent of farms in the watershed to make a difference," said Lyons. "Rotational grazing has some real promise," said Lyons. "If you don't want to end up with a wooded buffer, it may be the best alternative overall."

Paine emphasizes that careful management of rotationally grazed sites is key. A particularly critical time for stream bank erosion is the spring thaw – a few hours of cattle grazing at a critical time can actually worsen natural erosion processes.

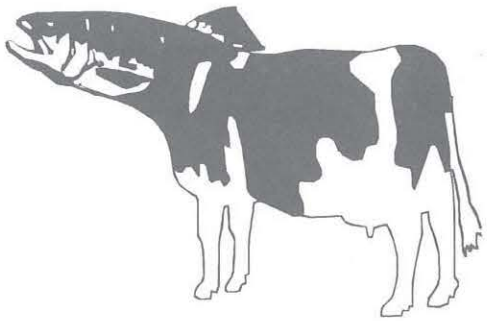
When studying other wildlife at the sites, researchers found that the habitats created by various management approaches benefitted different species. "Both rotational and continuous pastures supported more diverse bird communities than grassy buffer strips," said Paine. "The size and shape of grassy buffers (long and narrow strips) are not appropriate for many bird species." Paine explained that these buffers would need to be several hundred feet wide before they would be likely to make a difference for bird habitat. Some of the bird species attracted to the streamside pastures included species whose populations have been declining, such as eastern and western meadowlarks and savanna, grasshopper and vesper sparrows. Amphibians were also found in much larger numbers in the grazed areas than in the grassy buffers. However, small mammals preferred the grassy buffers over the grazed areas.

...rotational grazing, when practiced with careful management, demonstrated very good stream bank protection and habitat qualities.

Both the rotationally and continuously grazed sites had a more diverse plant community than the grassy buffers. Grassy strips consisted of mostly reed canary grass, while the pastures were a mixture of several grass species, legumes, and wildflowers. Rotational grazing clearly provided higher forage production and quality than continuous pastures, but in terms of plant diversity there was no significant difference between the rotational and continuously grazed sites.

According to Paine, the study indicates that no single management approach will meet the goals of all farmers, fishermen, and wildlife managers. "The idea of watershed management is looking at the ecosystem from a landscape scale, rather than focusing on individual pieces of land or individual land owners." (borrowed from Teresa Miller, CALS Science Report)

For more information contact Laura Paine (608) 262-6203 lkpaine@facstaff.wisc.edu or John Lyons (608) 221-6328 jdlyons@facstaff.wisc.edu



PFI 1998 ON-FARM TRIAL RESULTS – II

(Editors' note: Results of PFI 1998 on-farm research will appear in *The Practical Farmer* over the course of this year. What is a weed? What's a forage? What's a rare wetland wildflower? More importantly, how do we get along with these plants in the different situations where we encounter them? If weeds are on your mind these days, you'll be interested in the information shared below by 1998 research cooperators.

Weed Management Trials

You can have the soil fertility just right, the right variety and perfect planting conditions, but the weeds can still sneak up and bite you. Lose a few plants to an early hailstorm or to greensnap – and here come the weeds to use the available light! Sit and watch the rain the whole month of June, and you know you're going to have some problems. It all happened in 1998.

There are all kinds of ways to approach weed management, and three cooperators examined options that "fit" on their farms. At the New Melleray Abbey, Peosta, farm manager Joe Fitzgerald put their flame cultivator to the test in corn. Flame weeders use jets from a propane tank to "burn down" weeds much as do burndown herbicides, but without the use of synthetic chemicals. Flamers are generally most effective with weeds whose leaves are thin and tender and whose growing points are above the soil surface.

Both treatments received a rotary hoeing and two cultivations. Half of the plot strips also received a pass with the flame cultivator. Because there were only three replications in the trial, it is not possible to separate a flaming effect from the natural variability of the field (Table 2). The nonsignificant yield advantage seen for flamed corn is consistent with better control of weed pressure, although there was no count of

Reading Numbers, Knowing Terms

When you see the outcome of a PFI trial, you also see a statistical indication of the strength of the difference observed. The following information should help you to understand the reports of the trials contained in this report. The symbol "*" shows that there was a "statistically significant" difference between treatments; that is, one that likely did not occur just by chance. We require ourselves to be 95% sure before we declare a significant difference. If instead of a "*" there is a "N.S.," you know the difference was "not significant" at the 95 percent confidence level.

Comparing Two Practices Many on-farm trials are of a straightforward "A versus B" type. These trials, which are easy to design and analyze, correspond to the typical experimental question "Is alternative 'B' better than, worse than, or the same as my customary practice 'A'?" This approach can be used to evaluate individual practices or whole systems of practices.

There is a handy "yardstick" called the "LSD," or "least significant difference," that can be used in a trial with only two practices or treatments. If the difference between the two treatments is greater than the LSD, then the difference is significant. You will see in the tables that when the difference between two practices is, for example, 5 bushels (or minus 5 bushels, depending on the arithmetic), and the LSD is only, say, 3 bushels, then there is a "*" indicating a significant difference.

Multiple Treatment Trials The LSD doesn't work well in trials with more than two treatments. In those cases, letters are added to show whether treatments are statistically different from each other. (We usually use a statistical test called a Duncan multiple range grouping.) The highest yield or weed count in a trial will have a letter "*a*" beside it. A number with a "*b*" next to it is significantly different from one with an "*a*," but neither is statistically different from a result bearing an "*ab*." A third treatment might produce a number with a "*c*" (or it might not), and so on.

Economics Average 1998 statewide prices for inputs were assumed in calculating the economics of these trials. Average fixed and variable costs and time requirements were also used. These can vary greatly from farm to farm, of course. The calculations use 1998 prices of $2.00 per bushel for corn, $5.20 for soybeans, and $1.10 for oats. Labor was charged at $9.00 per hour.

weeds in the trial. The results are encouraging if inconclusive, and the Abbey will likely repeat the trial.

Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone, tweaked their ridge tillage weed management, examining the effects of throwing up an extra high ridge with an additional (third) cultivation of soybeans. The Thompsons do not ordinarily use herbicides and rely on cultural controls and mechanical removal of weeds. Throwing up a high ridge of soil around the base of the crop will smother smaller in-row weeds – the kind you have when a wet spring hinders rotary hoeing. In the Thompson trial (Table 2), the extra ridging operation did significantly reduce broadleaf weed numbers. Unfortunately, there was also a small but statistically significant yield reduction. The third cultivation may have pruned some soybean roots. Overall, in this trial weed numbers were probably below the threshold at which yields were affected. The results suggest that if weed pressure were heavier, a third cultivation could do more good than harm.

...if weed pressure were heavier, a third cultivation could do more good than harm.

Multiple-Treatment Weed and Planting Trials

Tom and Irene Frantzen, Alta Vista, obtained a SARE Producer Grant to investigate methods of quackgrass suppression. Quackgrass is a valued forage species on the diversified Frantzen farm. However, as the operation transitions into organic production, Tom is searching for cultural controls to keep this aggressive perennial under control in row crops.

Working with University of Northern Iowa biology professor Laura Jackson, the Frantzens designed four combinations of practices for 1997, a year prior to corn:

1) *Red clover*, the control treatment representing their usual practice. The clover was seeded with oats and allowed to grow following harvest of oat hay. Grazed in the fall of 1997.

2) *Summer and fall fallow*. After harvest of oat hay (underseeded with berseem clover), the ground was kept bare with tillage for the remainder of the growing season.

3) *Summer fallow, fall millet cover crop*. Tillage after oat/berseem hay harvest until the third week of July, then millet cover crop seeded. Grazed in the fall.

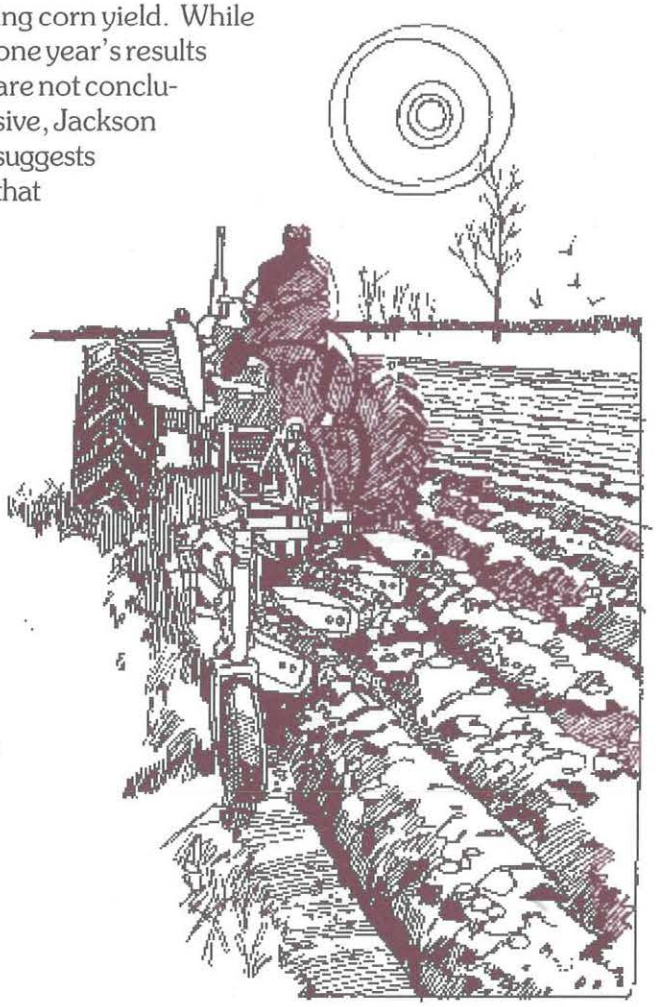
4) *Summer fallow, fall sorghum cover crop*. Tillage after oat/berseem hay harvest until the third week of July, then sorghum cover crop seeded. Grazed in the fall.

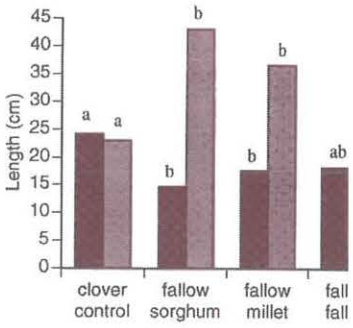
Figure 2 shows that by the spring of 1998, the fallow treatments had significantly reduced quackgrass cover compared to the red clover control. Contrast that outcome to the trial yields shown in Table 3. The corn following red clover showed the greatest yields

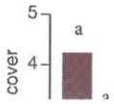
Table 2. Weed Management Trials

COOPERATOR	LOW RATE TREATMENT					HIGH RATE TRT
	DESCRIPTION	TREATMENT COST	YIELD	BROADLEAF WEEDS/ACRE	OTHER WEED INFORMATION	DESCRIPTION
NEW MELLERAY	FLAME WEEDER + 2 CULTIVATIONS	$19.29	155.4	—		2 CULTIVATIONS
THOMPSON	LOW RIDGE	$0.00	59.2	320	TWO JULY CULTIVATIONS	HIGH RIDGE

and the least-limiting nitrogen status, as indicated by the late spring soil nitrate test and the end-of-season stalk test. Laura Jackson concludes that in 1998 quackgrass weed pressure was not as important as other factors in determining corn yield. While one year's results are not conclusive, Jackson suggests that fallowing be reserved for the most extreme cases of quackgrass pressure, given the financial cost of fallowing (Table 3) and the potential soil erosion.







Jackson suggests that fallowing be reserved for the most extreme cases of quackgrass pressure

Weed Management Trials

HIGH RATE TREATMENT				TREATMENT DIFFERENCES					
TREATMENT COST	YIELD	BROADLEAF WEEDS/ACRE	OTHER WEED INFORMATION	YIELD DIFF.	YLD. SIG.	YLD. LSD	BRDL. WEED SIG.	LOW RATE $ BENEFIT	COMMENTS
$9.04	146.5	—		8.9	NS	22.7	—	–$10.25	BOTH TRTS HAD 1 HOEING AND 2 CULTIVATIONS
$4.74	56.1	205	THREE JULY CULTIVATIONS	3.1	*	2.2	*	$10.96	EXTRA RIDGING REDUCED WEEDS AND YIELD

Table 3. Multiple-Treatment Weed/Planting Trials

				TREATMENT "A"				
COOPERATOR	CROP	PREVIOUS CROP	YIELD SIGNIFI-CANCE	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	$ BENEFIT
FRANTZEN	CORN	VARIED	**	RED CLOVER CONTROL	142.8	a	–$1.04	$100.53
					16 LSNT		37.5 STALK	
MOSER	POPCORN	GRASS	**	ROTOTILL	1.32	b	$54.11	$56.82
TEDESCO	ONIONS	SQUASH	**	MULTIPLE/MULCH	174.7	a	$27.28	$94.98
	FACTOR: PLANTING SINGLE PLANTS VS. MULTIPLES		**	PLANTING MULTIPLES	151.4	a	$29.66	$76.31
	FACTOR: MULCH VS. NO MULCH		**	MULCH	118.6	a	$40.23	$42.78

Tom writes "My fear was that removing the chemical from the control strategies would produce quack out of control!... I learned that quack comes and goes, chemical or organic.... (in 1998) the weather provided a larger influence on the quackgrass vigor than our tillage cover crop attempts... if (quackgrass) gets really serious, then consider extensive fallow work with possibly a cover crop, but by all means watch the weather. Plan field activities aimed at quack control for times when quack is under stress."

Virginia and Marion Moser, Garrison, raise vegetables for their own CSA and a number of farmers' markets. They were looking for a better way to control weeds in sweetcorn and wanted to compare use of a rototiller (22-inch, 8-hp Troy-Bilt), a cultivator (2-row, International), and mulching with grass clippings. The trial showed significant yield differences, with the cheapest practice – cultivation – yielding the least and the most costly method – mulching – yielding most (Table 3).

The Mosers noted that the mulched corn was taller and contained more ears, and that the ears were bigger and more completely filled than the rest of the corn. Because of the greater yield, shelling the mulched corn took more labor, but the greatest labor input was applying the grass clippings to the field. From a dollars-per-acre standpoint, net profit for mulched corn was half that for cultivating and rototilling.

Another CSA market gardener is Angela Tedesco, Johnston. Onions were her focus. She had two questions – how to plant them and how to keep the weeds down in the beds where she grows them. The planting choices were to set out individual seedlings or to plant multiples of about four onion plants that had

...net profit for mulched corn was half that for cultivating and rototilling.

Multiple-Treatment Weed/Planting Trials

TREATMENT "B"					TREATMENT "C"					
DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	$ BENEFIT	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	$ BENEFIT	OVERALL COMMENTS
SUMMER-FALL FALLOW	141.1	a	$79.59	$16.50	SUMMER FALLOW, FALL MILLET	131.8	b	$69.89	$7.60	TESTING EFFECT OF PREVIOUS FALLOW, COVER CROPS ON QUACKGRASS IN CORN
	10 LSNT		28.5 STALK			13 LSNT		33.1 STALK		
					SUMMER FALLOW, FALL SORGHUM	127.5	b	$68.89	$0.00	
						12 LSNT		27.7 STALK		
MULCH	1.67	a	$117.19	$23.44	CULTIVATE	1.00	c	$31.72	$52.66	MULCH 4 WEEKS AFTER PLANTING INCREASED BOTH YIELD AND LABOR COST
MULTIPLE/ NOMULCH	128.1	b	$32.05	$57.64	SINGLE/ MULCH	62.5	c	$53.18	–$9.43	FACTORIAL EXPERIMENT: +/- MULCH AND PLANTING SINGLY VS. IN MULTIPLES. YIELDS IN LBS ONIONS PER 100 FT. OF BED
					SINGLE/NO-MULCH	29.0	d	$52.99	–$32.70	
PLANTING SINGLE PLANTS	45.8	b	$53.09	–$21.06						
NO MULCH	78.6	b	$42.52	$12.47						

grown together in cell packs. The weeding issue was whether or not to supplement hand weeding with mulch, applied after the first weeding. Each of these questions is an "A or B" choice. Put them together and you have four possible combinations of treatments, forming a "two-by-two factorial" experiment.

Table 3 shows that both planting in cell-pack bunches and mulching improved yields and profitability. When the mulching and planting practices were combined, onion yields and profits were even better. Table 4 shows that mulching and bunch planting also improved the percentage of plants that survived transplanting and the average weight per onion harvested. The time spent in mulching was offset by labor saved in the second weeding. Planting in mul-

Table 4. Tedesco Onion Trial – Mulch and Planting Pattern

FACTOR	LBS/ 100' BED	OZ/ONION	SURVIVAL %	HRS LABOR/100'
MULTIPLE /MULCH	174.7 a	2.5 a	94% a	3.0 b
MULTIPLE NO MULCH	128.1 b	1.8 b	92% a	3.6 b
SINGLE/ MULCH	62.5 c	1.5 b	55% b	5.9 a
SINGLE/ NO MULCH	29.0 d	0.8 c	45% b	5.9 a

When the mulching and planting practices were combined, onion yields and profits were even better.

tiples instead of single plants reduced total labor by shortening the time needed for planting and for weeding.

Angela Tedesco shows tools of the trade at her CSA farm field day.

STREAM MONITORING ON THE NORMAN BORLAUG FARM

Mike Natvig, Protivin

How does a person determine whether a stream ecosystem on their land is healthy, and how can you recognize the impacts your farming practices have on a stream's natural processes? Those were questions I had a couple of years ago, as a circumstance arose on the boyhood home farm of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Norman Borlaug. That farm had 25 acres of stream pasture that had been continuously grazed until 1987 by a previous renter's beef cow herd. The pasture then was not grazed until I had the opportunity to graze my beef cow herd there in 1997.

The farm, which adjoins mine, is now owned by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. I have rented parts of it from them for several years. Kyle Swanson, their land stewardship director, has been very knowledgeable and helpful, working with me on a long-range land use plan while keeping my goals in mind. The cropland that had been in continuous row crops for many years is being planted to either native grasses and forbs or to a grass-based crop rotation using organic practices.

The pasture with Borlaug Farm barn in background.

Prior to grazing the field, I wanted to collect a baseline of information so I could tell if grazing had any negative or beneficial impacts on stream health. Just as I was asking myself "How do I collect that information?" the Land Stewardship Project in Minnesota asked me if I would evaluate their new guide to on-farm monitoring, the *Monitoring Toolbox*. The guide has chapters on monitoring quality of life, finances, birds, frogs and toads, soil, and streams.

The section on streams clearly and simply describes ways to collect baseline stream data. One of the first things I did was collect samples of stream bottom organisms. The organisms collected are classed according to how pollution-tolerant they are. For example, group 1 consists of pollution-sensitive organisms found only in good quality water (stonefly and caddisfly larvae are two). Group 2 organisms are found in good-to-fair quality water (crayfish, clams, damselfly and dragonfly larvae, for instance). Group 3 organisms can be found in any quality of water (leeches, snails and aquatic worms are examples).

I found examples of all three groups in the stream. Having this range of types indicates good stream health. I marked all sample areas and took photos for later reference. Monitoring will also include measuring streambank angle, percent of exposed soil, and stream width-to-depth ratio.

In the pasture, areas of native grasses and forbs were burned in the spring to stimulate growth and reduce competition. I will manage the pasture for native vegetation. This pasture includes fens, areas of wet, peat-like soil that support rare plants like the fringed gentian. I fenced the fens to prevent grazing. Other areas were fenced to protect the nests of grassland birds and build up grass fuel to be burned next spring.

This streambank shows signs of erosion. There has been no grazing in ten years.

I believe grazing management needs to be at a higher level in this kind of pasture. The cow herd should be regulated day-to-day according to what you see taking place on the land and in the water. A balance needs to be found between continuous overgrazing, which leads to stream degradation, and no grazing at all. Total lack of grazing can lead to exposed and collapsing streambanks or excess tree and brush growth with little understory vegetation to protect exposed soil.

A stream is only as healthy as the watershed that it is in. Farming and forestry practices upstream affect its overall health, but when the stream passes through our farms, we are responsible for the continuing stewardship of this vital element, clean water.

A numbered stake marks a reference spot where changes will be noted in the field and stream.

PERSISTENCE MAY PAY OFF FOR KURA CLOVER PASTURES

Teresa Miller, Agricultural and Consumer Press Service, Madison, WI

Kura clover may be a solution for Wisconsin farmers who need a persistent forage legume in pastures, research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has shown. Forage legumes, such as alfalfa and traditional clovers, do not live long in Midwest pastures. "Kura clover is the most persistent legume that is currently available for production in the north-central states:' says Ken Albrecht, an agronomist at UW Madison's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

There has been no death or decline in productivity of kura clover seven years after establishment in research plots at the Arlington Agricultural Research Station, says Albrecht. This includes two winters that killed half of the alfalfa in Wisconsin. "Kura clover survived the 1991-1992 winter while alfalfa in neighboring fields was killed," Albrecht says. Kura's ability to survive in pastures longer than alfalfa may outweigh its lower forage yield, which is 20 percent less than alfalfa, according to Albrecht.

Unlike other clovers or alfalfa, kura clover spreads by rhizomes or underground stems, similar to quackgrass. "This allows the plant to propagate itself vegetatively and spread one to two feet per year in mixed grass pastures, filling in the bare spots," says Albrecht.

Establishing kura clover is challenging. According to Albrecht, the plants remain small the first year because they put so much energy into establishing taproots and rhizomes. "Strategic grazing or clipping can be used during the first year to reduce competition from grass and weeds," he says. Nutrient requirements of kura clover have not been extensively evaluated; however, they seem to be similar to those of red clover.

Kura clover is compatible in mixtures with Kentucky bluegrass, orchardgrass, and smooth bromegrass, says Robert Zemenchik, agronomy research assistant. "We observed that over a seven-year period these grass/clover mixtures can be harvested three to five more times per year without affecting the mixture's yield or kura clover's persistence in the stand," says Zemenchik. Kura and grass mixtures can

"... persistence may be a large enough benefit that it would make up for the high establishment costs and low yield.."

also be grazed or harvested to a 1.5-inch or 2-inch stubble height without hurting the clover.

As with other legumes, kura clover contributes nitrogen to the pasture system. Mixtures of kura clover and grass can yield up to 50 to 200 percent more than a grass-only pasture. "Nitrogen fertilizer required for this type of response would cost up to $80 per acre," Zemenchik says.

Kura clover originates in Caucasian Russia and is grazed in native meadows there. Until recently it had not been available for commercial use in the United States. Kura clover rhizobia (bacteria important for root nodulation) are now available from several sources. "The seed must be inoculated with rhizobia specifically for kura clover before planting," says Albrecht. "This ensures that the legume will nodulate and supply nitrogen to the pasture system."

Kura clover's seed costs are high because of low yields and difficulties in cleaning the seed. The seed costs around $6 per pound, which is almost double the cost of alfalfa, says Phil Geertson, owner of Geertson Seed Company, who has worked with kura clover seed production for eight years. "The persistence of kura clover may be a large enough benefit that it would make up for the high establishment costs and low yield," says Albrecht. "We're not sure."

Beginning in 1998, trials at the Lancaster Agricultural Research Station compared kura clover with other legumes in pasture systems. The research will determine animal performance and the cost of pasture establishment and maintenance compared with other pasture systems. For more information contact Ken Albrecht (608) 262-2314.

Seeding rate - 8 lbs./acre (seed size is smaller than alfalfa). Herbicide selection if seeded alone - no products have Kura clover on their label but these postemergence herbicides have worked in research studies: Pursuit at the 3/4 rate without a nitrogen additive - Butyrac -Poast Plus or Poast

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

A Place for Small Grains

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

As I write this column, we are having a good spring. Dry March weather provided enough time to seed the oats in excellent conditions. The five year organic rotation used on this farm relies on timely small grain seeding. Oats and the following forages are the heart and soul of this farm plan. Some ask about what I do with small grain, the straw, and the forages. They all have a place in an integrated farm.

For years I have put 15% -20% ground oats in the sow, growing pig and finishing diets. I do not use oats in starting pig feed due to their sensitivity to fiber at that age. Feed textbooks say that oats can replace corn up to that level. I notice favorable changes in the pig stools when oats is in the diet and there is definitely less odor.

This is my third year of feeding three pounds of whole oats per day for six weeks prior to the cows having their calves. A 25 year cow/calf veteran advised me to feed oats to late gestation cows. He started this practice over twenty years ago on advice from a retired farmer who told him it was "common knowledge." Last winter I asked a beef cow nutritionist about this oat feeding. He didn't see any reason to ever feed grain to a cow and added that " all grains are about the same." He works for a major feed company.

Calving difficulties have been rare. With fifty calves born this year, so far there are no problems. Scours, however, do continue to afflict some calves. My observations of feeding oats to cows is a significant reduction in birthing difficulties and an "elimination" of nursing problems (none in three years). Oats are high in protein and fiber. The cows go "crazy" when feeding time comes and leave not a kernel. I am convinced that this is a good practice.

Fifty acres of oat straw in conjunction with some corn cobs and baled stalks provide plenty of bedding for three hoop buildings and the other bedded facilities. I strongly prefer straw for farrow bedding. It is reassuring having two bedding seasons baling seasons, one in summer and one in late fall.

My observations of feeding oats to cows is a significant reduction in birthing difficulties and an "elimination" of nursing problems .

Hay is the winter feed source for our seventy stock cows. I have great reservations about selling any hay especially from organic crop land. Replacing the fertility loss would be expensive. I dislike the haying expenses and keep an eye open for winter grazing ideas. But most of the hay is stored inside as dry large and small bales.

Last fall, I made 180 large bales of high moisture plastic wrapped balage. The cost was too high for stock cow feed, but it did allow for a good quality hay crop made late in October. Where I do plan to use wrapped hay is for protein and vitamin E source for organic sows. Wrapped bales of top notch organic hay compete easily with $400+ a ton organic soybean meal. Sows like to eat high moisture hay. I found it to work especially well when the hay was frozen solid. The sows would chew off hay as it slowly thawed. This took several winter days.

As the cow herd expanded, I began to graze some rotated hay ground in addition to permanent pasture. The recommended seeding rate of three pounds of red clover and three pounds of alfalfa produce too high a legume/grass ratio. I have cut this seeding rate to two pounds of clover and two pounds of alfalfa while maintaining the recommended grass seed mix of three pounds Timothy, two pounds Orchard grass, and four pounds Brome. I hope that this mix produces more grasses than legumes.

Oats are ranked as a low income crop. When I compared a five year organic rotation of corn-beans-oats-hay-pasture with $3 corn, $10 soybeans, and a ten year average calf price to the traditional corn-soybean monocrop, the five year rotation is more profitable. It is a more ecologically sound rotation. Small grains make the rotation work. I think that they are an important part of a farming system.

SOMETHING TO ANTICIPATE : THE WOMEN'S WINTER RETREAT

Deanna Hansen, Audubon

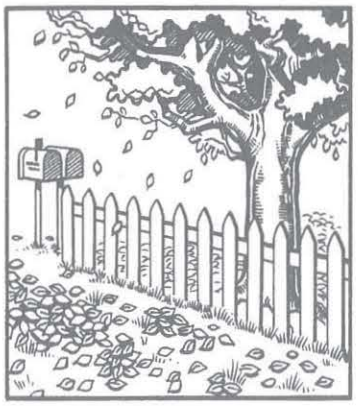
I want to thank the PFI board for sponsoring the annual women's winter gathering. It has been a great program for four years now. I'm writing this in case there are some women out there who feel as apprehensive as I once did about attending. Let me reassure you, you have nothing to fear.

The first year the retreat was at the 4-H Camp in Madrid. Being a stay at home mom and living far away from it all, I thought I would be totally out of place. What could I have in common with the women who would go to this kind of thing – college women, farm wives who had a hand in all aspects of the farm, women who ran farms themselves? I almost talked myself out of going!

What could I have in common with the women who would go to this kind of thing? I almost talked myself out of going!

Then, with a little boost from a few supporters, I went. What I found that first year were friends for the weekend, friends for the future, and, hopefully, friends for life. What I discovered about PFI women is that they are helpful, supportive, and a wealth of knowlege all wrapped up in one big group. After four years of attending the winter weekends, I am eagerly looking forward to next year, who I will meet, and what I will learn from these great people.

P.S. My "To Read" book list is now so long, it will take many heavy winters to get through it.



BITS OF SUSTENANCE

The Bits of Sustenance pages are a place where PFI women can share their writing – stories, poems, letters, book reviews, experiences. Hopefully, Bits of Sustenance will give every reader something to ponder.

Editors note: Perhaps the piece about the snowstorm birth of a spring calf in the last newsletter triggered a connection for this Bit of Sustenance. Or maybe it's coincidental and there's just something about cows.

Something About Cows

Jenny Aquino Kendall, Earlham

I've not owned a cow, although now we live comfortably with the cows and calves belonging to our neighbor. We have a bartering arrangement - the momma's and babies graze on our hilly pastureland and in exchange he cuts our hay. He takes most of the bales, and makes sure our horse and lone ewe have their big round bale through the winter time. These cows are of some breed that didn't exist in my days as an animal science student at Purdue. They are cows of many colors and are curious, active, always watching ladies. How one gal managed to squeeze under my hi-tensile horse fence I can't imagine, but we found her there one day, grazing peacefully with Jasmine.

Just yesterday, I read a moving and harrowing account of a woman's fight with bulimia. At the end of her disease, when she had come to a strange kind of peace with herself and her disease, her disease took a strange turn - she began ruminating. I can imagine how horrible that might sound to city folk who haven't been around cows or sheep on a lazy ruminating afternoon. But when I read that, I had a sense that her disease was coming to its conclusion, and, indeed it was. One day, she stopped ruminating and began to live her life more as the rest of us do. There is just something about cows.

When I was a student, my best friend, Kay, worked at the university dairy barn. I worked at the horse barn. The cows took more time and individual energy, and Kay was always treating or warding off mastitis. Before we could go to a movie, we would have to stop at the dairy barn to check on one lady or another, sometimes don the big plastic glove for a quick palpitation. We didn't make it to many of those movies. Kay's brother owned Jersey cows. I can still taste that first glass of milk, fresh from the big holding tank. I'd pay a few dollars for a huge jug of the stuff, the cream would rise to the top and we served the best coffee in the world. Her brother named his cows Buttercup and Flora and Jezebel, and he talked their names in his sleep.

I ended up changing careers and moved to the east coast and worked for a software development company. We lived in town, I boarded my horse, and had a lovely herb garden. Suddenly, I started listening to country music and I wrote a poem. Shortly before I was offered a job to come to Iowa, I then had a dream. Then that dream became a poem, and even won the Borders poetry prize last year, so there is just something about cows.

Once I was a cowgirl

Once I was a cowgirl
wearing tight jeans
permeated
with the honest scent
of the sweat
of a red-headed pony.

My dress boots were the color
of desert sand, my work boots
of red cowhide, they had
roper heels and I drove a green
Chevy pickup.

I tied my hair in a thick braid
that hung to my butt and swayed with me
when I carried my cue stick
to the bar
for a long cool one.

The cue was handmade, I never
had to use it to claim my quarter
from the guy in the black Stetson.
I shot an okay game, but, sometimes,
I was just so hot.

Now I work in computers
I can't drink beer
and I go to bed at ten.
There are no coyotes here
and my cue stick stands
warped
in a closet.

I still have my name belt, though.
It's handmade too, the deep hand-tooled
roses are tinted a dusty red.
backed in gold suede, buckstitched white,
my name is carved in bas relief
across the back
my initials in the tongue.

Sleeping in cows

I have dreamt of sleeping
in the rumens of cows
petite golden cows
Jersey cows

Jersey cows with liquid eyes
eyes damp with compassion
Mother eyes

I have dreamt of sleeping
in the rumens of cows
four-chambered and warm
cozy beds

such a soft and cozy place
chewed hay and saliva
make a soft bed

Crawling into the rumens of my cows

I curl up comfortably

drift off to sleep

dreaming of cows

❦

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