# • the Practical Farmer

### Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 16, #1 Spring 2001

#### Field Day Forecast: 100% Information Mixed with Scattered Celebrations

We make no guarantees on the weather for the 2001 field day season, but we're confident you'll get plenty of opportunities to expand both your knowledge base and circle of friends at any of the PFI events. This year we're combining our traditional field days featuring on-farm research with five PFI community days.

#### **Fifteen Years of On-Farm Research**

That's right. PFI's been monitoring on-farm research almost from the organization's start. It's no accident that PFI's tag line is "Farmers helping farmers make better decisions." And the majority of producers who attend a PFI field day do say that it helped them in adopting at least one new practice. PFI field days combine management experts (farmers) and good reality testing (replicated trials) with the technical background of ISU researchers and PFI's Extension coordinators.

It seems as if markets drive everything these days, and there are plenty of people looking for markets that help them farm sustainably and profitably. The comment coming back from the 2000 field days was, "More about the marketing!" There are a growing number of value-added products and more and more options for reach-

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ing the consumer. Expect to see marketing co-ops, regional and national businesses, and farm gate approaches. Some people are contracting, some are going it alone, and some are jumping on business opportunities as they arise.

If you want a preview of the practices to be featured at the field days, look at the markets. **Veggies** are moving into the big time as growers try to meet the demand for local produce – while retaining their quality of life and community roots. **Pigs** are moving uptown too. The rest of the country (including Washington, D.C.) is getting a taste for the "happy hogs" of Iowa sustainable farms. On-farm research this year will look at hoops, rations, parasites, and compost. **Crops?** Flaming, fertility paradigms, open-pollinated, nitrogen budgeting worksheets, nut trees, and even prairie.

More people come to PFI field days through a personal invitation than from newspapers, radio or television. And the personal connection is probably what people most remember from their visit. Farming practices come and go, but there is something enduring about people solving problems, sharing their experiences and questions, and making the wheels go around in their communities. With more than 100 cooperators and over 350 events since the first PFI field days, there is still plenty to talk about.

#### A new twist – Community Days

In addition to these research-based field days, PFI is piloting some community days. (See p. 3.) The producers at these sites may not be doing onfarm research, but they still have innovations to showcase and stories to tell. They're opening up their farms to the public in support of PFI's mission:

We see these community days as a hybrid of a traditional field day combined with an open house. Farming practices come and go, but there is something enduring about people solving problems, sharing their experiences and questions, and making the wheels go around in their communities.

to promote farming systems that are profitable, ecologically sound, and good for families and communities.

We see these community days as a hybrid of a traditional field day combined with an open house. Or think of them as a picnic with a purpose – in fact, multiple purposes:

- to reach out to new people in each community and better acquaint them with PFI. Here's an opportunity to let more people, including nonfarming consumers, learn more about PFI's mission, culture, and activities. Maybe we can debunk a few myths and pick up a few new members along the way.
- to give PFI members in each district another opportunity to get together. So many PFI members acclaim the value of knowing others in their district, but it seems like winter meetings are the only time we get together. Let's try it in warmer weather and see what happens.
- to network with other like-minded organizations. With so many stakeholders in sustainable agriculture, there will be at least one other agency or organization partnering with PFI at each event.
- to showcase enthusiastic PFI members and let more folks see the fine work they are doing. We're proud of you!

#### Still looking for a site in Southwest Iowa

This is the pilot year for the community days. So we're starting small to work out the kinks. We have five sites identified, one each in Allamakee, Boone, Jefferson, Johnson, and O'Brien County. (See pages 3 and 4.) But we'd like o spread out a bit more geographically. If you live in southwest Iowa and are willing to host such an event, give Nan a call <u>right away</u> at 515-294-8512. But hurry.

#### Details in your Field Day Guide 2001

As we go to press, the line-up is just about finalized. The dates are coming together, but some details are still fuzzy. Rest assured that if you got this newsletter, you will also get the complete printed guide to the summer field days as fast as we can drop it in the mail. We'll see you there!

ON-FARM RESEARCH FIELD DAYS

Mark your calendar. Here are the dates and locations for *some* of the on-farm research field days. No, it's not a misprint. There really are some dates with more than one event. We'll keep you posted.

Wednesday, June 20 New Melleray Abbey, Peosta

Saturday, June 23 Joe and Arlene Keenan, Ogden

Sunday, June 24 Amy Miller Henry Wallace Center, Greenfield

Saturday, June 30 Gary and Nancy Guthrie Growing Harmony Farm, Nevada

Saturday, July 14 Angela Tedesco Turtle Farm, Granger

Saturday, August 25 Dave and Becky Struthers, Collins Thursday, September 6 Paul and Karen Mugge, Colin and Carla Wilson, Dan and Lorna Wilson Paullina

Saturday, September 8 Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice Red Fern Farm, Wapello

Saturday, September 8 Rob De Haan, Dordt College Ag Stewardship Center Sioux Center

Wednesday, September 12 Dick and Sharon Thompson, Boone

Saturday, September 15 Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraff One Step at a Time Garden, Kanawha

Saturday, September 15 Susan and Jeff Zacharakis- Jutz Z-J Farm, Solon

#### NEW FOR 2001 – COMMUNITY DAYS

Join us in this pilot project designed to: reach out to new people build membership reconnect PFI members and supporters network with other like-minded organizations showcase ingenuity and innovation celebrate!

#### Saturday, June 9

Sunflower Fields Family Farm, Postville Hosted by Linda and Michael Nash

Open house, beginning at 1 PM and running through 5 PM, hosted by the folks at Sunflower Fields, Northeast Iowa Organics Association, the GROWN Locally Growers Cooperative and the Practical Farmers of Iowa. This event is for everyone – not just farmers! You are invited to come and tour the farm, sample food from our local farms prepared by local caterers. Learn about exciting programs promoting local food choices, get information about how to find locally grown and raised food. Meet the folks who make it their priority to grow food and make it available locally. For more information about this event, contact 563-864-3847 or sunspot@netins.net. For more about the host, Michael Nash, see page 10.

#### Tuesday, August 28 D&D Ranch, Swisher Hosted by Deb and Dave Hofmann

Join us for a community evening in northern Johnson County. D & D Ranch is Iowa's largest and only permitted vermicomposting facility. The

open house will showcase Hofmann's vermicomposting operation, and educate others interested in the process and benefits. If you are already composting and want to increase the value of your finished product in less time and with less effort, this one's for you. The information will cover both smallscale homeowner options and mid-scale farm possibilities, including indoor and

outdoor systems. This event is open to the public and continues the vermicomposting education campaign launched in fall 2000 with the support of PFI. More info at 319-857-4478.

#### Saturday, September 22 Full Circle Farm Hosted by Don Adams and Nan Bonfils

Celebrate the equinox while you investigate a SARE-sponsored oak savanna restoration for

#### And the personal connection is probably what people most remember from their visit.

rotational grazing. Farm tour will also highlight projects in agroforestry, CSA, and direct marketing natural beef. The program is designed with prairie enthusiasts, grazers, and beef producers in mind, but all are welcome to come learn about how sustainable agriculture practices are incorporated into a diversified farm. This community day includes a DNR-guided prairie walk at Ledges State Park, adjacent to Full Circle Farm in Boone County. For more information call 515-795-3288.

#### Sunday, September 23 Radiance Dairy, Fairfield Hosted by Francis and Susan Thicke

This 60-cow, grass-based, organic dairy processes milk on the farm for sales through local

> grocery stores. See a 50-paddock grazing system on a hilly countryside, with a variety of forages, surfaced lanes, water in the paddocks, and trees for cow shade. Tour will include the swing-style milking parlor and milk processing plant. Co-sponsored by Southeast Iowa Organic Association (SEIOA), and Growing the Future, one of PFI's original *Shared Visions* projects. Call 641-472-8554.

#### Saturday, September 29 D&C Farm, Paullina Hosted by Colin and Carla Wilson, Dan and Lorna Wilson

The last Community Day is especially designed for local FFA chapters, with support from Dordt College and ISU Extension. The Wilsons will showcase sustainable agriculture through practices and philosophy in action. Presentations may include: Swedish farrowing/nursery, hoophouse gestation, diversity of livestock and crops raised, rotational grazing with multiple species (cattle, sheep, broilers and laying hens), pasture farrowing, composting and composting dead animals. Contact Colin or Carla for details at 712-448-2708.



#### CHANGES, CHANGES, CHANGES

Robert Karp, Executive Director

I know the main things on your minds are seeds, earth, foals, weather, field days, fresh locally grown food, and, perhaps, for some of you...vacations. Nonetheless, we felt it was important to let you know about some upcoming staffing changes at PFI so they don't catch you by surprise. Here's the scoop:



For the last three years Nan Bonfils has managed a wide variety of tasks in her "half time" position, including communications, membership services and annual meeting coordination. As you all know, Nan has accomplished these tasks with enormous passion and wisdom and skill. Combined with the demands of Full Circle Farm, however, not to mention her work at the United Community School District in Boone, it's all gotten to be a little much. So we have decided to do some restructuring here at PFI that will allow Nan to continue with PFI, but with a more focused and less time consuming set of responsibilities.

Starting in July, Nan's focus will become communications and community outreach, through newsletters, brochures, press releases, and special events. In addition, Nan will be moving off campus and carrying out her responsibilities from her home and from the PFI off-campus office in downtown Ames.

In the meantime, PFI will be hiring a new hourly person to work on campus to handle member renewals and mailings, database management and basic phone inquiries. In addition, we will also be

...it may mean that you reach an answering machine more often than before.

#### STAY CONNECTED WITH STAFF

PFI has two offices. Robert **Karp**, Executive Director, has an office at 300 Main Street - Suite 1, Ames, Iowa, 50010. Main Street address above. You can reach him at 515-233-3622; rkarp@isunet.net

The Food Systems Program office is also located at the Main Street address above. You will find **Gary Huber** and **Rick Hartmann** there. Gary's phone is 515-232-5649; ftf@isunet.net Call Rick Hartmann at 515-232-5661; rick@isunet.net

Membership services and on-farm research operate out of 2104 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, IA 50011. That's the address to use for **Rick Exner**. Rick's phone is 515-294-5486; dnexner@iastate.edu

Nan Bonfils will also be at the ISU address above until July 1st. Call 515-294-8512; nanb@iastate.edu

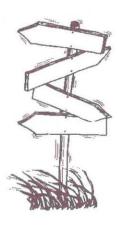
looking for a new person to coordinate the annual meeting – with a good deal of help from Nan and myself! **Please let me know if you or someone you know may be interested in either of these positions.** 

As I said, changes, changes, changes.

Perhaps the biggest change all this implies for PFI members, is that Nan will no longer be your point of first contact on the telephone. And as our hourly person on campus will be working fewer hours than Nan did, it may mean that you reach an answering machine more often than before. We greatly apologize for this inconvenience, which we plan to remedy as soon as possible. In the meantime, please remember that all the PFI staff people can be reached at their direct lines (listed above) and we are more than happy to take your calls and answer your questions. When in doubt about who to call, call me, at 515-233-3622. There may be a little bit of office chaos over the summer while we make these changes and we appreciate your patience. PFI has a fabulous staff and we want them to be happy, focused and motivated. These change are designed to accomplish that.

Happy planting and have a great summer!

#### **BOARD BUSINESS**



Colin Wilson, Paullina PFI President

The board met on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives in Ames. As ever, the agenda was jam packed, including a ninety minute executive session before the full board gathered. But unlike previous meetings, I found the stress level much lower. Why?

Because this was our first board meeting with Robert Karp as Executive Director. Observing Robert at the helm, I am more convinced than ever that we have picked the right person for the job. Robert adeptly reported on crucial meetings with ISU leaders to discuss working relationships with PFI. He presented the eight PFI sub-systems that he is directing and the board approved a budget for his work. He also laid out a possible road map for future directions being explored by PFI which the board endorsed.

There will be opportunity for more detailed long term planning when board members and staff attend a two-day retreat in July. Unresolved issues remain such as changing the voting status of associate members. As thoughts on this issue or any projections on PFI's future come to your mind, I encourage you to stay in touch with the board members of your district. Their contacts are listed on the back cover of every newsletter.

#### ...turning out for a field day may be just the summer tonic you need.

I also want to add my personal endorsement of the entire array of summer field days. Events like these built the solid foundation on which PFI stands. Your attendance sends a message to the media and the public about the organization's strength. Besides, turning out for a field day in your part of the state may be just the summer tonic you need. You'll learn something, meet some new folks, and get a reassuring sense that we're all in this together. I hope to see you out there!

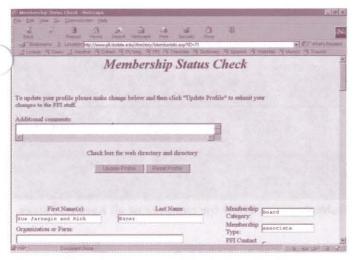


#### UPDATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION ONLINE

**Rick Exner** 

So you've given up raising chickens in favor of ostrich? Started farming with terraces? Finally hooked up with email? These bits of information are significant to PFI. And now you can do your own updates via the PFI website. The changes you make will appear in the online database after a few days. You can make sure we have your current address and that we know you have taken up rotational grazing of elephants.

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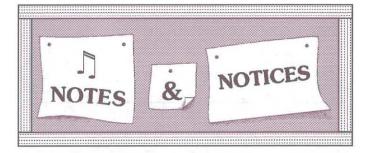
This online form lets you send your information changes directly to the PFI staff.

To enter the PFI membership database, start with www.pfi.iastate.edu and go to member services area. Type in your last name or organization/farm name as it appears on the label of your PFI newsletter. Also enter your membership ID. Didn't know you had a member ID? It too appears on the mailing label, likely just below your name. This will take you to both the membership database and the new online PFI directory.

## Find out about other PFI members' practices interests and innovations

Can't lay your hands on your old copy of the PFI Directory? Now the PFI website can supply upto-date information on your fellow PFI members. The Online Directory contains the same types of information as the hard copy, with tables organized by farming and marketing practices, skills and interests, and geography. The tables are searchable, meaning you can select just those records that have what you are looking for.

The Online Member Directory is just like the paper version, in that **you must give permission for PFI to share your information in order to have access to the directory yourself**. A couple of check boxes are provided on the web page so that you can join both the Directory and the Online Directory. Those changes will also be registered in a matter of days.



#### J Leopold Center Faces Funding Cuts

As most of you are aware, there was a big commotion recently in the Iowa Legislature over funding for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The Center, in turn, supports multiple PFI projects. To stay updated on what you might do to turn things around,

contact Susan Heathcote at the Iowa Environmental Council, 515-244-1194 (phone) 515-244-7856 (fax) e-mail: heathcote@earthweshare.org www.earthweshare.org



LEOPOLD CENTER

## J July Composting Workshop in Madison, Wisconsin

PFI member Tom Richard gave us the heads up on this event. Choose from a one day workshop, July 9, on basic principles of composting or three days, July 10,11,12 on quality, uses, and marketing of compost. Contact Leslie Cooperband at 608-265-4654 or lrcooper@facstaff.wisc.edu

#### Feed Corn for Sale

Non-certified organic corn for sale, 3000 bushels, excellent feeding quality. Contact Phil Hueneke, by phone 563-872-4327 or e-mail at pbljl@cis.net



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The 1999 picnic was a crowd pleaser.



Habitat games 2000 for campers of all ages and sizes.



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#### JUST AHEAD – MORE GOOD TIMES AT THE PFI YOUTH AND FAMILY CAMP



#### **TEEN COUNSELOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING CANOE TRIP JUNE 16-17**

This will be the most adventurous teen counselor training yet for teens 14 and up. (Let us know if you will turn 14 soon, and you could be a counselor-in-training.) This river canoe and overnight camp-out trip will give us a chance to learn about riparian river habitats, watershed management, and water quality. Our trip will be full of cool primitive outdoor skills, led by Stoneage Steve, Mike Marsh, and Catfish Rick Hartmann. We will find berries to pick, set bank lines and weave nets to catch fish and we'll cook them over the fire and much more.

Teens will also have fun personal and group challenge games to work through to help them develop their leadership skills and learn more about how to be a great counselor for youth campers. Teen counselors need to arrive at Y-Camp (in Boone County) by 10 am on June 16, 2001. Teen counselors attend free and receive a \$20 stipend. For more information please call or write: Shelly Gradwell at (515) 233-3622 or (641)483-4027 shellyg@iastate.edu

Donations to support the PFI Youth and Family Camp Scholarship Fund are really appreciated! Thanks for your support.

Please register by June 5th or ASAP. More camp details will be sent after registration. Please send registration paperwork (see inside back cover of this newsletter) with a check payable to PFI to: Attention PFI Camp, PFI Food Systems, 300 Main St. Suite 1, Ames, IA 50010.

Check out the PFI Camp Website designed by PFI Camp Counselor Bryce Bauer. Thanks Bryce! Link to PFI Camp through www.pfi.iastate.edu for more about current and past camps.

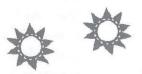


You'll find registration form for both the Leadership Training and Youth & Family Camp on the inside back cover of this newsletter.





Spring 2001





This year's theme is: 2001--A PFI CAMP ODYSSEY... An epic camp of adventure and exploration of the past, present, and future of sustainable food and farming systems!

PFI Camp will be held at Full Circle Farm and the YMCA Camp near Boone where we will "travel through time" for hands-on experiences in:

- -- Prehistoric Iowa Wild Plants, Agriculture, and Outdoor Skills
- Native American and Pioneer Prairie Farming
- Full Circle Farm Exploration: gardens and poultry; woodlot management; bird habitat establishment; then a hike and picnic at Ledges State Park
- -- Designing Food and Farming Systems of the Future!

Other camp activities will include: canoeing, team building, swimming, horseback riding, hiking, crafts, rappelling, campfire songs and stories, and games.

The fun begins Sunday, June 17 with a Fathers Day Family Picnic at Full Circle Farm 1579 P Ave., Madrid, IA 50156 Phone 515-795-3288. Just south of the Ledges State Park, Boone County

- 3:30 pm Early Bird Special staining bluebird houses
- 4:00 pm Back to the Future tour the farm by hay rack
- 5:00 pm Potluck Picnic--DADS EAT FREE! Beef and drinks provided. Bring your own plates, cups, and utensils plus something for the buffet.
- 6:00 pm 2001: A PFI Camp Odyssey kick-off

6:30 pm Bus leaves for YMCA Camp

Can't make the picnic? Meet us at the YMCA Camp by 6:45 pm on June 17.

Cost of PFI Camp 2001 is \$75.00 per participant--scholarships are available. Teen counselors attend free and receive a \$20 stipend. There is a registration form on the inside back cover of this newsletter.



For more information please call or write: Shelly Gradwell at (515) 233-3622 or (641) 483-4027; shellyg@iastate.edu



#### **KEEPING THE ROWS STRAIGHT: YOUR PFI BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MORE REGIONAL MEETINGS**

Editor's note: Here's an opportunity to become better acquainted with the board members who serve you. In this issue you can read about Michael Nash, district 3, Barney Bahrenfuse, district 4, and Tom Wahl, district 5. Interspersed with the profiles are reports on some district meetings that took place this winter.

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT AT DISTRICT 2 REGIONAL MEETING

#### Ron Brunk, Eldora

District two held their North Central Regional PFI meeting on March 3, 2001, 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. at First Congregational Church in Iowa Falls. Anticipated as an opportunity "to break bread with friends old and new, and share ideas for our farms and families."

District two member Gary T. Guthrie shared personal reflections on his journeys to Bolivia, El Salvador, Cuba and the US/Iowa centered around food, food issues and food systems. Gary led the discussion about food in our lives and in our world.

Participants were asked to bring a potluck dish that had special memories or a particular story behind it. Some brought the family's favorite dish or something that Mother or Grandma always made that they loved. Others contributed a particular ethnic dish that reminded them of their roots or travels or aspirations.

Additionally, some folks kept track of the country or state of origin and approximate miles from Iowa Falls of each ingredient they purchased for the potluck. This led to some lively discussions.

#### **PROFILE OF MICHAEL NASH**

Annie Nash, resident Blue Heeler, Postville

My Name is Annie and I have been the on-site Queensland Blue Heeler at the Nash household for the last 10 years. As background, I was raised by a family in Boulder, Colorado for my first 6 years and then went to live with Linda and Michael in Lyons, Colorado. I went to work making sure their barnyard full of horses, burros, goats, chickens and miniature pigs didn't get out and terrorize the folks in town. It was a great move for me even though I had to adjust to the new place and a whole different lifestyle – not to mention training the people.

Living with Linda and Michael over the years, I have found that, for the most part, they have been intelligent enough to listen to me when critical decisions have to be made. For example, Michael started out his life just fine – his Mom and I get along great and she was able to steer him in the correct directions at an early age. Even though Michael sometimes felt that milking cows at 4:30 in the morning was not what his life's calling was about, his parents were able to keep him on the straight and narrow for quite a while. The farm was in the boy, but it was not always evident to him. So I subtly pointed this out.

Everyone needs to be in a position to "make up their own mind" about their life directions, and so it was with Michael. He bounced around for years collecting this degree and that job, not able or willing to listen to his inner self telling him what it was that was really calling him. He will tell you that his schooling and job careers were "valuable experiences" but I knew better.

I came on the scene just in time. Michael was settling into a teaching career at the University of Colorado and was seriously lacking in true direction. Fortunately, I was able to talk sense to him and we all packed up and moved on to what he and Linda should have been doing all along - farming in Iowa! We now operate a rural CSA called Sunflower Fields and are grower members of GROWN Locally, growing vegetables for all sorts of nice folks and area institutions.

The farm was in the boy, but it was not always evident to him.





Michael and Linda Nash, with Annie

So now we are Iowans and loving it. Michael is currently serving on the Northeast Iowa Organics Association Board of Directors and also sits on the Allamakee Farm Bureau board. He is a member of the Farm Bureau State Horticulture Advisory Board and spends time pushing for reform in their policies and agendas toward sustainable agriculture. He was elected as a PFI District Representative in January. When he was asked if he might take on this position, he hesitated, stating that he was really busy and didn't want to get involved in too much. I had to remind him of the importance of PFI and that he should not turn down this opportunity. Being the smart guy he is, he listened to me and is happy he did.

We discussed how much PFI means to sustainable agriculture in Iowa and to our farm. I was able to show him that, short of me being nominated for the position, he was a good choice for the job and would be able to bring much to the PFI table in the form of enthusiasm and experience. He realizes that slow, sustained membership growth, a focus on current agricultural issues and how they affect PFI membership and a continuing stream of new program ideas relative to members needs are the important topics. But the most significant idea is that of the cooperation, collaboration and sense of belonging that PFI brings to its members. This is the foundation for all the activities surrounding PFI and without it, all the programs, discussions and activities in the world are nothing. The integrity of the PFI membership is what drives the organization and will continue to make it strong.

Thank you for allowing me to introduce Michael. I will be diligent in monitoring him as he serves his term as District Representative. He is actually quite trainable and a quick learner as soon as he grasps the language.

#### **DISTRICT 3 MEETING: MARKETING!**

#### Walt Ebert, Plainfield

The district three meeting took place March 10<sup>th</sup> in cooperation with the Northeast Iowa Organics Association. The main theme of the program was Marketing Organic and Identity Preserved Grains. Representatives of several companies that deal in organic and identity preserved grain gave us authoritative information on what is involved in marketing these products.

Marsha Laux from ISU Extension talked to us about the importance of diversity to farm profitability. Jeff Klinge and Greg Koether, district 3 members, told us about their plans and objectives for the proposed Northeast Iowa Meat Processing facility. Michael Nash and other members of the GROWN Locally food cooperatives told about their activities. They have about eleven members who market, fresh, locally grown produce to institutions, five hospitals and eight nursing homes, in their five county area.

#### HELLO, HELLO

#### Barney Bahrenfuse, Grinnell

Barney here, officially Robert Bahrenfuse, but Barney to fellow PFI folks, and now again a board member for district 4. I live just south of the I-80 rest area at Grinnell, about five miles from where I was raised. I farm on a 50/50 crop/livestock share with my folks, operating on about 600 acres. About 110 cows are now in the herd to take advantage of our rough timber pasture. I recently bought a Berkshire boar to use on my 30 sow farrow/ finish hog operation. For the last few years my sheep flock has had about thirty ewes, and I also raise broilers in portable chicken houses.



Barney Bahrenfuse - not in his chore clothes.

#### I have been

divorced for about six years and my two boys are with me every third week. Seth is now 16, does very well in school and band, is a computer and video game whiz, and is now into fencing (the type with swords instead of barb wire). Eli is now 12 and played football for the first time this year. Eli enjoys helping around the farm especially if it involves driving something. He's a first class chicken plucker. When my folks are not in Florida for the winter, my father is very involved with helping around the farm, especially doing mechanical work

I started farming in 1983 and had very few people, farmers included, who encouraged me. Used equipment was very affordable at that time and I was soon well known by all the local auctioneers. Our newest and largest tractor is from the mid sixties. My father and I try not to hire anything done, and do almost all our own plumbing, electric, repairs, and dirt work.

I'm excited about the many things happening on the local food scene around Grinnell. We have

I started farming in 1983 and had very few people, farmers included, who encouraged me. opportunities for many farmers selling to the college or the new CSA. On a personal level, my meat business continues to pick up new customers.

Off the farm, I am active in our local UCC Church where I serve on the C.E. and pastor/parish boards, teach Sunday School, and occasionally help out with youth groups among other things. One thing I do for fun is volunteer to read at our local grade schools, always taking along a book bag full of poetry. In my off time I enjoy listening to many types of music including blues, alternative, Celtic, and rock. If the TV is on I'm watching PBS or late night British comedies. When the boys and I go on vacation, we like to hike and climb around on rocks or go canoeing.

I am on the PFI board for a year to finish out someone else's term now, but have served a full term in the past. I have been a PFI member for seven years now and considering the high regard I have for PFI and the people in it, it was an easy decision to agree to fill out the term. Since the people are the best part of PFI, I am hopeful we can increase our number of members in the near future.

#### FREEZING FEBRUARY DOESN'T DETER DISTRICT 5

#### Tom Wahl, Wapello

Fifty-two people attended the meeting/workshop on February 24 that was co-hosted by PFI district 5 and the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District. Attendance probably would have been even better if it hadn't been for a forecast of freezing rain and icy roads. Those who made it were treated to presentations on a range of topics. Carl Kurtz of St. Anthony talked about native prairie establishment, and the production, harvesting, and marketing of prairie seed. Francis Thicke of Fairfield explained the operations at his grass based organic dairy, including rotational grazing, milking, processing, bottling, and marketing. After a wonderful pot-luck lunch which included pasture-raised chickens and organic milk, [Wahl] recognized that conventional agricultural practices were destructive of wild plants, animals, and even the very resources upon which agriculture depends.

Kathy Dice of Wapello described raising broiler chickens on pasture, and processing and marketing on the farm.

Tom Wahl wrapped up the program with a talk on high value crop trees for farmstead windbreaks and riparian buffer strips. The group was enthusiastic and many stayed to talk and ask questions. Many positive comments were heard and a few new PFI members were recruited. **\*** 

#### **GETTING TO KNOW TOM WAHL**

Kathy Dice, Wapello

Tom Wahl was born and raised in Iowa and graduated from Iowa State University in 1984 with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology. For the next 16 years he worked for various government agencies in wildlife research, wildlife management, forestry, and park management. He and his wife, Kathy Dice, bought a farm in Louisa County in 1986. Tom quit his job in January 2001 to work on the farm full time. Tom and Kathy raise broiler



Tom Wahl, left, in praise of persimmons.

chickens on pasture, high value tree crops such as chestnuts, hazels, heartnuts, persimmons, and pawpaws, and also operate a small tree nursery. They have two children whom they homeschool: James, 7, and Theresa, 5.

Tom's interest in sustainable agriculture started with his work in natural resources. He recognized that conventional agricultural practices were destructive of wild plants, animals, and even the very resources upon which agriculture depends.

Tom began working to find a way to make agriculture work in harmony with natural systems. He joined PFI in 1995 and in 1996 was awarded a SARE grant for his project Comprehensive Integrated Agroforestry.

#### LIKE A ROLLING STONE, THE CLUSTER GROUPS ROLL ON

#### **Rick Hartmann**

Nan and I were recently carpooling to Des Moines to attend the Growing Your Small Market Farm business planning class. As we veered off the highway to sneak in a delivery of local food to a hotel on our way, she posed the question, "So, how's all your clustering coming along?" She was referring of course to the Small Farm Project producer clusters – groups of farmers getting technical, marketing and other support from PFI to help them increase their share of the food dollar.

In response, I tried to name the clusters that Gary and I had met with in the last few weeks and where they were located. I tried to present a clear timeline of when we traveled, where we had visited and with whom we had met, but it had all become too confusing a blur. I likened it to a traveling rock and roll band – at the end of each day you wake up in a different city filled with different people.

It looks like we will have eight clusters to work with now that we've completed our 'Spring 2001' tour. Since our last update, the Kalona Organic Dairy Farmers have decided not to be a cluster and ...but it had all become too confusing a blur. I likened it to a traveling rock and roll band...

the Western Iowa Small Farm Collaborative Marketing Group has changed its focus to organic freerange poultry production. We are now getting down to business and I'm starting to help carry out specific projects for each group. They intend to keep me busy with business planning, grant writing, feasibility studies and numerous smaller tasks. I'll keep you updated on our progress.



The Hinkletown Group – just one stop on Hartmann's Small Farms Project spring 2001 tour.



Gary and Nancy Guthrie's field day is always hands-on with friendly competition – and tasty prizes. Below, cheerful chaos reigns at the Zacharakis-Jutz milking parlor. Come join the party!



Sharing information is the essence of field days. Angela Tedesco's research sparked a discussion of weed management. Some folks at Wilson's, below, were more interested in fishing for cats.



Field daze flashbacks here. Hope to see you out there for FIELD DAYS 2001. Preview on pages 1-4 this newsletter.



## PFI 2000 ON-FARM TRIAL RESULTS – II

(Editor's note: This is the second installment of PFI on-farm research results from 2000. As you prepare to out-fox the weeds in your fields or your garden, take a look at these trials of flame weeding in carrots (Gary and Nancy Guthrie) and corn (Dennis and Eve Abbas). Also included: some food for thought on seed treatments from the Neely-Kinyon Farm, Dave and Becky Struthers, and Gary and Venita Wilcox. "Walking" and "jumping" strips made another appearance last year on the Paul and Karen Mugge farm. And Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell sold their 1999 organic soybeans, closing out the books on the year's conventional – organic economic comparison.)

#### **Flaming for Weeds**

Iowa row crop farmers discovered flame cultivation several years ago. However, it's something new to the state's vegetable farmers. Gary and Nancy Guthrie, Nevada, decided to see what it could do for carrots. The Guthrie operation is just two acres including cover crops, so they aren't likely to be pulling a flamer around with a tractor. Instead, Gary used a hand-held setup. Table 1 provides results for two of the four times he flamed carrots, and Figure 1 shows all four dates. Actually, Gary's

#### **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 Gary's strategy was to flame before the carrots emerged from the ground.

strategy was to flame *before* the carrots emerged from the ground. In this way, he could clear the row of competition and lessen the tedious job of hand-weeding the tiny seedlings.

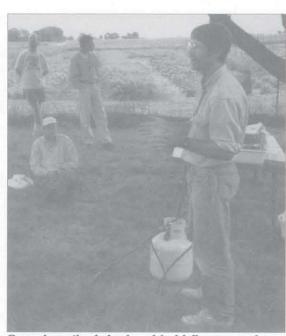
significant. You will see in the tables that when the difference between two practices is, for example, 5 bushels (or minus 5 bushels, depending on the arithmetic), and the LSD is only, say, 3 bushels, then there is a "\*" indicating a significant difference.

**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 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 2000 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 2000 prices of \$1.35 per bushel for corn, \$4.25 for soybeans, and \$1.15 for oats, and \$77 per ton for grass-

COOPER- ATOR		TREATMENT	TREATMENT "B"				
	CROP	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu.)	TREAT- MENT COST	DESCRIPTION		
ABBAS	CORN	FLAMED ONLY BEFORE 1ST CULTIVATION	131.3	\$4.85	FLAMED BEFORE 1ST AND 2ND CULTIVATION		
GUTHRIE	CARROT 4/1	FLAMED PRE- EMERGENCE	25.8	(STAND PER BED)	CONTROL, NO FLAME		
GUTHRIE	CARROT 6/3	FLAMED PRE- EMERGENCE	57.7	(STAND PER BED)	CONTROL, NO FLAME		
NEELY KINYON	CORN	TREATED SEED	126.8	\$43.41	UNTREATED SEED		
STRUTHERS	CORN	T-22 SEED TRT	141.4	\$1.00	NO SEED TREATMENT		

Gary writes, "In the first two plantings I walked along with the flamer lightly flaming the beds. I thought if the flame touched the small leaves that would take care of it. I had much less effective control. . . On the third and fourth plantings, I prepared the beds, waited one week, then planted the carrots, giving the weeds a head start. Then I flamed the beds, making sure the weeds desiccated and blew away before I moved on. . . This method of intense flaming was very



Gary described the hand-held flamer at the June field day.

effective. The treated plots were very clean for several weeks to allow the carrots a good jump start. . . The key is to flame the bed a day or two before the carrots begin to pop up through the soil."

Gary points out that the flame weeder "should be used with extreme caution. I use a lot of mulch in my garden system and had to be very careful with the flamer. I also burned my hand from a cold burn where the propane ex-

				TREATMENT "A"								
COOPERATOR	CROP	PREVIOUS CROP	YIELD SIGNIFI- CANCE	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT				
WILCOX	CORN	SOYBEAN	*	T22 SEED TRT	108.6	b	\$21.29	\$0.00				

				Weeding Trial	S					
C	TRT "B	99	DIFFER	ENCE						
	YIELD (bu.)	TREAT- MENT COST	DIFF LSD SIC		\$ BENEFIT OF TRT "A"	COMMENT				
	127.0	\$9.70	4.3	3.4	*	\$4.85	SECOND FLAMING SIGNIF. REDUCED GRASS AND BROADLEAFS, BUT LOW OVERALL WEED PRESSURE			
	22.0	(STAND / BED)	3.8	10.9	N.S.		FLAMED 4/17. NO EFFECT ON BROADLEAVES OR GRASSES			
	51.2	(STAND / BED)	6.5	10.3	N.S.	SAVINGS ON LABOR AND MATERIALS ABOUT \$1.30 PER 100' BED	FLAMED ON 6/9. BROADLEAVES REDUCED FR. 39 TO 5/BED, GRASSES REDUCED FR. 61 TO 6/BED.			
	123.0	\$43.41	3.9	10.4	N.S.	\$0.00	HYBRID WAS WILSON 1664			
	141.1	\$0.00	0.0	15.8	N.S.	-\$1.00	DRY, WARM CONDITIONS			

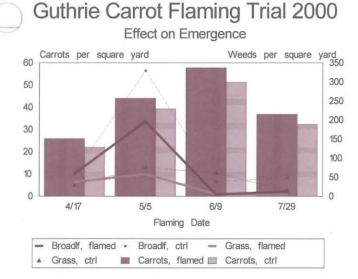


Figure 1. Carrot stands and weeds after preemerge flaming, four plantings.

panded down the steel tube. I recommend using gloves."

Back in the corn field, Dennis and Eve Abbas, Hampton, were also flaming. In 1999, they looked at the value of adding flaming to cultivation. Their corn yielded the same, but broadleaf weeds were nearly cut in half. In 2000, they flamed all the corn one day before first cultivation. Then in strips, they also flamed one day before the second cultivation (Table 1). The extra flaming significantly reduced broadleaf weeds and grasses, although overall levels were far below 1999. However, it apparently

#### Was the second flaming just one more shock that the corn didn't need in a dry summer?

		Wilc	ox S	eed 7	[ <b>reatm</b>	ent Trial			2		
TREATMENT				<b>"B"</b>		TR					
DESCRIPTI	CRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT	OVERALL COMMENTS
STAI	RTER			-\$0.46	CONTROL – NO STARTER OR SEED TRT	117.7				STARTER TRT LEA TISSUE HIGHER IN MANGANESE	

17

reduced the corn yield by 4.3 bushels. Was the second flaming just one more shock that the corn didn't need in a dry summer? More observation and trials will lead to better management of this tool.

#### Seed Treatments

The issue of treated seed is one that many organic producers confront. For example, in 1998, cooperators Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan, found that treated corn came out of rough weather with a much greater stand and 43-bushel greater yield than did corn from untreated seed. In 2000, in Adair County, the Neely Kinyon Farm compared treated and untreated hybrid corn planted May 5 at 30,200 seeds per acre (Table 1). In the 2000 trial, no significant yield difference resulted.

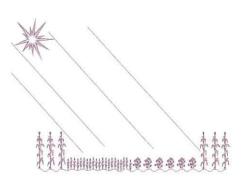
Dave and Becky Struthers, Collins, who don't farm organically, tried a microbial seed treatment called T-22. This "biological fungicide" is a planter box treatment that is said to colonize plant roots, providing protection from soil pathogens like *Fusarium*. Table 1 shows there was no difference in yield of corn between treatments in the Struthers' trial, but Dave wonders if results would have been different under cool, wet conditions. In northwest

#### This "biological fungicide" is a planter box treatment that is said to colonize plant roots

Iowa, Gary and Venita Wilcox, Correctionville, carried out a three-way trial, comparing T-22 to a starter fertilizer treatment and to a control treatment that received neither (Table 2). The yield of the T-22 corn was significantly *less* than that of both the starter and control treatment corn. The starter fertilizer did not increase yield compared to the control. Overall yields reflect the near-drought conditions. Possibly results would have been different in a year with adequate moisture, suggests Gary.

## Strip Intercropping – Walking and Jumping in a Dry Year

In 1999, Paul and Karen Mugge, Sutherland, worked with ISU agronomist Richard Cruse to compare two strip intercropping systems, dubbed "walking" and "jumping" strips. The goal was to jump the corn strips around the field ahead of the rootworm beetle larvae, which can migrate in the soil. In 1999, the jumping strips were successful, giving a 40-bushel yield bonus in the border rows of



corn that receive extra sunlight. The 2000 crop year in northwest Iowa was dominated by drought conditions.

Fig. 2 show that yields overall were down in the two systems. Perhaps due to moisture stress, there was no yield bonus in the #1 rows, located on the south edges of the strips. In strip north rows (#6), both walking and jumping strips exhibited a yield bonus of 30-40 bushels. The dry soil conditions may have made it more difficult for the rootworm larvae to migrate to the #6 rows in the walking strips.

#### Walking & Jumping Strips

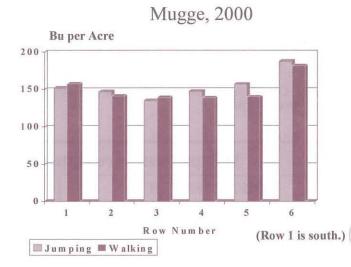


Figure 2. Corn yields in walking and jumping strips, 2000.

#### 1999 Organic Soybeans Production Budget

#### Jeff Klinge, Farmersburg

The soybeans started out very well; but foxtail came in later. I thought they looked very poor at our field day in late summer. But the experts thought they would make 30 bushels per acre and they were right. Vinton 81 soybeans normally yield 10-15 bushels less than conventional soybeans, but command the highest price. Most organic farmers consider 30 bushels per acre a fairly good yield for Vinton 81.

I think this chart (Table 3) shows that more emphasis needs to be put on profit per acre. Our organic soybean yield was only about half of the conventional farmer's yield, our profit still greatly exceeded theirs. While yield will always be important, it takes profit to keep a farm going. These figures are a year behind because I like to base yield on actual sales. The organic beans were not sold until late January 2000.

#### Summarizing the last four years:

We plan to stay in organics. While our yields in both corn and soybean are dropping a little each year, and the price per bushel for organics is also dropping, we still think it is the best alternative for our farm. Some of the reasons are:

- 1. no dependence on chemical and fertilizer use,
- 2. crop rotation adds diversity and also spreads risk,



Jeff explains his cropping budget in 1999.

#### "more emphasis needs to be put on profit per acre"

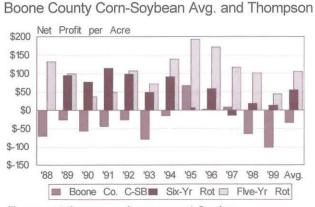
- use of recommended cover crops reduces soil erosion,
- 4. ground water quality concerns minimized,
- organic crop price is more stable than conventional market (buyers actively seek contracts and usually pay for all or most of transportation costs)
- organic crop premiums outweigh the possible lower yields, in most cases, and,
- 7. we, like most organic farmers, put a value on what we consider to be an improved quality of life (air, water, soil, etc.).

We just bought our first group of organic feeder cattle and plan to market most of our organic corn, alfalfa, and barley through them. \*

(Editor's note: Jeff Klinge has tracked the performance of organic soybeans for four years, building up a convincing case for organic beans. As Jeff cycles more of the farm into organics, we hope to present a fuller picture of the profitability of crops and livestock on the farm.

Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone, have documented the finances of five-year and six-year rotations on their farm for more than a decade, comparing these to a "typical" Boone county cropping system getting county average yields. No systems receive government payments in these calculations. As Figure 3 below shows, on a per-acre basis, it's hard to beat a diverse rotation.)

**Cropping System Documentation** 



Five-year rotation: corn-soybeans-corn-oats/hay-hay Six-year rotation: corn-soybeans-oats-meadow-meadow.

Fig. 3. Historical net profit in Thompson cropping systems and county average corn-soybean rota

1999 Crop Year.					
Item		Orgar	nic	Conventio	nal §
Pre-Harvest Machinery	_	\$27.50	†	\$15.50	#
Seed Organic	<ul> <li>@\$15.50/50# bag x 1.8 bags, Vinton 81.</li> <li>1.5 bu rye @\$4.50 as cover crop</li> <li>@\$22/50# bag x 1.5 bags, Kussmaul Roundup Ready<sup>™</sup></li> </ul>	\$27.90 \$6.75			
Conventional	@\$22/50# bag x 1.5 bags, Kussmaul Roundup Ready <sup>IM</sup>			\$33.00	
Fertilizer		\$0.00		\$0.00	
Weed Control Organic Conventional	(other than cultivation) none herbicide (Roundup)	\$0.00		\$12.00	
Crop Insurance		\$10.00		\$10.00	
Interest	Pre-harvest expense, 9.0% for 8 months	\$4.32		\$4.23	
Pre-Harvest Total		\$76.47		\$74.73	
Harvest Machinery	Combine	\$25.00		\$25.00	
	Haul grain from field	\$0.50		\$0.50	
	Trucking	buyer pd.		\$7.20	
Harvest Total		\$25.50		\$32.70	
Labor	@\$8.00/hr	\$40.00		\$20.00	
Land	cash rent equivalent	\$160.00		\$160.00	
Certification & user fees	(approx. 1% of sales)	\$7.56		\$0.00	
3 months interest and storag	ge	\$7.00	P	\$0.00	
Total Cost per Acre		\$316.53		\$287.43	
Crop Yield (bu/acre) #		31.5		60	
Cost per Bushel		\$10.05		\$4.79	
Sale Price (per bu)		\$18.00		\$5.00	
Value of Splits	(3 bu @ \$5.70/bu)	\$17.10		\$0.00	
Field Border Harvest	(½ bu @\$4.50/bu)	\$2.25		\$0.00	
Gross Income/Acre		\$523.35		\$300.00	
Net Profit/Acre	\$18/bu x 28 bu + \$17.10 splits + \$2.25 border \$5/bu x 60 bu	\$206.82		\$12.57	

## Table 3. Soybean production budgets, organic and conventional, Klinge farm,1999 Crop Year.

§ Conventional soybeans are no longer grown on the Klinge/Tidwell farm. The conventional information came from a neighboring farm, with similar soil type.

† Organic: tandem disk, chisel, field cultivate (2x), harrow, plant, cultivate (3x).

‡ Conventional: chisel plow, field cultivate (1x), harrow, plant, cultivate (1x).

# Organic yield based on actual sales from 62 acres. Conventional yield based on actual sales from 120 acres.

¶ The organic soybeans were not marketed until the end of January, 2000. Costs included storage and interest on all expenses.

**PFI CAMP 2001 Registration** 



For an overview of the program, see pages 8 and 9 in this newsletter. Please register by June 5th or ASAP. We will send you maps, equipment lists, and more details after registration. Please send completed registration form and check made out to PFI to:

Attention: PFI Camp PFI Food Systems 300 Main St., Suite 1 Ames, IA 50010

Camper Names c	of Parents	nd Age: s/Guard	s ians _					_					
We v I would I	ck if schol will contac ike to be ch these	ct you w aT	vith mo Teen C	ore ini ounse	lor		_Adult Helj						
PFI Membership Application and Renewal Form	Name	City	County	State	Zip Code	Phone # []	This is a new membership	renewal	Do you derive a significant part of your income directly from farming in Iowa?	ou yes	Individual or family membership: \$25 for one year, \$75 for three years plus a PFI cap.	Please enclose check or money order payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa" and mail to:	Practical Farmers of Iowa 2035 190 <sup>th</sup> St. Boone, IA 50036-7423

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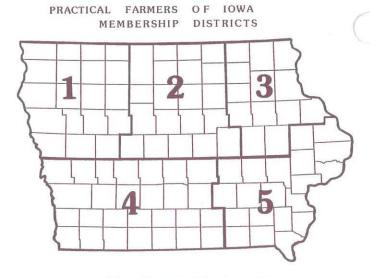
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Chonzonon Hiss