

the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 7, #2
Summer 1992

TAKING STOCK

The frenzy of planting and cultivation are behind us, and while midsummer may not be as slow as midwinter, it does provide a breather. You can take in the county fair, attend a PFI field day, relax a bit and look around. Here are some ideas to take with you to that hammock under the shade tree:

- A centerfold bulletin based on a farmer's experience in weed management;
- A look at the options in different systems to cut weed control costs;
- Reviews of three books from authors who have something to say about rural life;
- More on the PFI education initiative;
- The debut of a column on grazing from PFI cooperater and president Tom Frantzen;
- And a couple more recipes from the kitchen of Marge Stonecypher.

So ease yourself into that hammock and take a look inside!



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EVENTS IN THE FIELD

Farm tours are in full swing. Among the features this summer are a field day on farming with wildlife and a "Train The Trainers" session.

PFI 1992 field days got under way with spring tours at the Dick and Sharon Thompson farm that demonstrated planting and cultivation techniques. The first of the summer field days, held in Keokuk county, included demonstrations of Larry Conrad's latest inventions — an updated electronic check planter, a flexing cultivator with an electric eye to watch for the crop, and a detachable metering device for dry materials.

The unusual weather pattern of 1992 is casting practices and many on-farm trials in a new light. Weed management, cover crops, and starter fertilizers are three such topics. Take the opportunity to attend a field day or two and see how cooperators are dealing with the year's surprises.

In addition to the regular PFI field days, two other coming events offer something a little out of the ordinary:

Field Day to Feature Agriculture and the Environment

On Tuesday, September 8, 1992, Iowa State University Extension will host "Soil, Water, and Wildlife: A Land Management Field Day" at the Iowa 4-H Education and Natural Resources Center, near Madrid. The purpose of the field day is to demonstrate how wildlife and agriculture can coexist. Participants will also explore how sustainable agriculture interacts with other environmental factors, focusing on soil and

water. The field day is free with only a small fee charged for lunch.

The field day will begin with a tour of various demonstration sites at the camp. The sites include a ridge-till field, a strip intercropping demonstration, a residue management demonstration, a constructed wetland and farm pond, a fish cage culture demonstration, a rotational grazing pasture, field buffer strips, an upland wildlife area with food plots, and a reconstructed prairie.



After the tour there will be concurrent sessions exploring these areas in depth, including the techniques used in constructing or utilizing these practices. Posters and exhibits on a wide variety of topics will be a special feature of the field day, and all participants will receive a packet of take-home materials that will help them put the practices to use on their own land.

The field day will include sessions and information specifically designed for teachers and their students, particularly those in high school vo-ag and life sciences programs. The field day will also

include tillage demonstrations that will be of particular interest to farmers.

Co-sponsors are ISU Extension, Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Successful Farming Magazine, Hertz Farm Management, and the Iowa 4-H Foundation. For more information, contact Jim Pease or

FIELD DAY CORRECTION !

Oops, there were some errors in the PFI 1992 field day booklet! Please note:
Don and Sharon Davidson, Doug Alert field days

- 1) The date should be Friday, September 4, not August 14, as shown on the map.
- 2) Directions were given to Doug Alert's *old* farm. To get to Doug's field day, go 4 miles S. of Hwy. 3 on Hwy. 65, 6¼ miles W. on gravel. Past schoolhouse on N. side of road.

Georgia Bryan, Dept. of Animal Ecology, 124 Science II, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, 50011.

Train-The-Trainers Program

As PFI members know, in sustainable agriculture you find information sharing occurring farmer-to-farmer, farmer-to-researcher, researcher-to-farmer, and in just about every other combination you can think of. A session to be held Sept. 11, after the Thompson farm field days, will give producers, extension personnel, researchers, and other agriculture professionals a day of practice both in the ways to share information with each other, and in some of the methods used to generate information. Speakers and topics include:

John Haberern, President, Rodale Institute — *Why Train the Trainer?*

Dennis Keeney, Director, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture — *Leopold Center Education and Research Programs*

Jim Tjepkema, Midwest Rodale Coordinator — *Conducting Research in Nine States*

Carmen Fernholz, Rodale Cooperator — *Conventional Tillage Research*

Rick Cruse, ISU researcher — *Conducting Research On Farms*

Mike Reicherts, PFI cooperator — *Ridge-till Strip Intercropping Research*

Jerry DeWitt, ISU Director of Agriculture Extension — *On-farm Research and the Land Grant University*

Rick Exner, ISUE/PFI Coordinator — *Arithmetic For A Replicated Trial*

Gary Huber, ISUE/PFI Coordinator — *Mentoring and Other Train-the-Trainers Ideas*

Dick Thompson, Rodale/PFI Cooperator — *Farmers Presenting Farmer Data*

Registration for Train-the-Trainers is \$25, \$40 per couple, and \$10 for students, and it includes a booklet and other materials. The noon meal can be purchased on site. Contact: Thompson Field

Days, c/o Barbara Bruno, Rodale Institute, 222 Main St., Emmaus, PA, 18098, (215) 683-6383.

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE TO BE HELD IN DES MOINES

Des Moines will be the site of the 26th National Young Farmer Educational Institute on December 12-15, 1992. With the theme, "Discovering the New World of Agriculture," the Institute is being hosted by the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association, a statewide organization of young farmers that conducts ongoing educational programs.

The Institute will include a wide variety of activities, both educational and social. There will be numerous seminars, including one by Dick Thompson. A panel discussion on environmental issues is scheduled, as well as a variety of contests, including one on farm inventions and one on farm management. Numerous tours are being offered, including one to the John Deere plant in Waterloo and one to Iowa State University.

The Institute will include a wide variety of activities, both educational and social.



High school agriculture teachers visited the Dick and Sharon Thompson farm for an in-service training session.

The registration fee is \$145 per person if postmarked by November 1 and \$165 after that date. For more information, contact Sue Vantiger, Registration Chairman, RR 1, Box 11, Mt. Union, IA, 52644 (319-865-5241).

PFI EDUCATION PROGRAM UPDATE II

by Gary Huber

Work on PFI's education initiative is progressing. In the last newsletter I described the youth mentoring program and the sustainable ag demonstrations at the 4-H Center near Madrid. Here I describe: 1) the status of 4-H and youth group tours of PFI farms; 2) work on sustainable ag curriculum materials for high school agriculture teachers; 3) in-service training for high school agriculture teachers; and 4) the status of on-farm trials by high school agriculture classes and FFA chapters.

4-H and Youth Group Tours of PFI Farms

A key idea of the education program is that because PFI members have skills that can help sustainable agriculture in Iowa, designing educational activities that draw on these skills is important. One way to draw on these skills is to take young people out to PFI farms to learn first hand about sustainable agriculture.

This will be done in two ways. One is with a brochure that says, "Here are PFI farms you can visit, these are the sustainable practices you can see, and this is how to set up a visit." The other is with field days designed especially for young people. Since PFI's 1992 field days are already set, these are being planned for 1993.

Seven sustainable agriculture in-service training sessions for high school agriculture teachers were held in June on the farms of PFI cooperators, with 96 teachers attending these sessions.

In-service Training for High School Agriculture Teachers

Seven sustainable agriculture in-service training sessions for high school agriculture teachers were held in June on the farms of PFI cooperators, with 96 teachers attending these sessions. The first was a five-day workshop in Ames that combined sustainable agriculture and creative teaching techniques. "Tom Frantzen's speech was excellent and really set the stage" was how one teacher described the PFI President's opening talk. Teachers also spent an afternoon at Dick Thompson's farm and a day at the 4-H Center near Madrid.

The other six sessions were held on the farms of PFI cooperators Mike and Jamie Reicherts, Tom and Alesia Lacina, Steve and Gloria Leazer, Ted and Donna Bauer, Doug Alert, and the Ag Stewardship Center at Dordt College. The cooperators talked about how to conduct on-farm trials, as well as why they farm the way they do. The teachers really liked the tours of the cooperators' farms and the interaction with the cooperators.

Curriculum Materials for High School Agriculture Teachers

The ISU Agricultural Education and Studies Department created a set of sustainable agriculture curriculum materials with a REAP grant received by the Iowa FFA Foundation. I helped write two of the 32 activity sheets included in the materials. These activity sheets cover a wide range of practices and describe hands-on activities for in the classroom or in the field. The entire packet was given to agriculture teachers attending the in-service training sessions.

On-farm Trials by High School Agriculture Classes

One high school is conducting a replicated, on-farm trial this year. Jim Lundberg, agriculture teacher at Charles City, is



PFI Pres. Tom Frantzen spoke to high school agriculture teachers at a sustainable agriculture workshop in Ames.

working with his students on a trial on land next to the Floyd County fairgrounds with the help of Ray Stonecypher, a nearby PFI cooperator. The trial will compare corn yields where N is applied based on traditional ISU recommendations with yields where N is applied based on late spring soil nitrate test results.

All strips received 90 pounds N before planting. The previous crop was corn and no manure was used, so a yield goal of 150 bushels required applying another 90 pounds to the high rate strips. Late spring nitrate test results were 42 ppm, so no additional N was applied to the low rate strips. An agriculture chemical dealer across the road from the fairgrounds will weigh yields from the strips this fall on his scale. Late season stalk tests for nitrate will be done to test for excess nitrogen. The students will also have a field day to showcase the trial during the Floyd County Fair.

TOXIC CLEANUP DAYS SET

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has announced fall 1992 Toxic Cleanup Days in cooperation with 12 Iowa communities. These events will take hazardous waste from households and farms but not other small businesses. Materials to be received include household cleaners, stains, used oil, lead-acid batteries, pesticides and fertilizers.

Used engine coolant can be taken, although municipal sewage treatment plants can handle the coolant, according to Jeff Fiegle of the IDNR Waste Assistance Division. People are encouraged to give away paint if it is still useable. Dried paint can simply be landfilled. The exception is paint manufactured before 1979, which contains lead and should be taken in.

Prior appointments will be necessary so that Cleanup officials and volunteers know what wastes to expect. Publicity providing contact phone numbers will appear in the targeted communities in the weeks prior to these events. Additional information can be obtained from Jeff Fiegle or Marilyn Krogulski at the IDNR by calling 1-800-367-1025. Here are the locations and dates for Toxic Cleanup Days.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>TOWN</u>
Sept. 12	Cerro Gordo	Mason City
	Plymouth	LeMars
	Monona	Turin
Sept. 19	Allamakee	Waukon
	Winnebago	Forest City
	Palo Alto	Emmetsburg
Sept. 26	Shelby	Harlan
	Cass	Atlantic
	Sac	Sac City
Oct. 3	Jones	Monticello
	Cedar	Tipton
	Howard	Cresco

NOTES AND NOTICES

🎵 911 Addressing Causing Returned Newsletters !

If your county has adopted so-called 911 addressing, you now have a street address instead of a rural route. Please make sure PFI knows about your current address. Some postmasters are returning PFI newsletters as undeliverable. All are charging PFI 35¢ for address corrections.

Because the decision to switch addresses is made by county government, the federal Post Office accepts no responsibility for easing the change. Some postmasters are allowing a 12-month transition period, others say they can start returning mail as soon as the new addresses are in effect. You can ensure that your PFI newsletter reaches you by checking the address on this newsletter. If it's outdated, please drop a note to PFI, 2035 190th St., Boone, IA 50036.

♪ Membership Perks Distributed

For the past three years PFI has been able to say "thanks" to new and renewing members by offering a small "freebie." In 1992 members had a choice of one free plant tissue test, four free soil nitrate tests, or a PFI cap. Members indicate their option on the PFI Membership Agreement and Information Form, which also collects information about their farming operations and interests.

This summer 209 of these freebies were sent to members. That number was made up of 53 soil nitrate tests, 36 plant tissue tests, 43 winter style PFI caps, and 77 PFI summer mesh caps. Thank you again to all new and renewing PFI members!



Dave Lubben shows that the PFI cap is really useful, especially around electric fence!

♪ PFI Winter Meeting Set

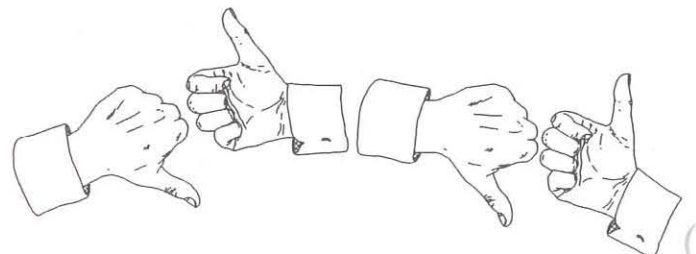
Mark your calendar for Thursday, January 7. That's the date for the PFI annual meeting, which once more will take place at the Ames Best Western Starlite Village Inn. The featured speaker is to be H. Allan Nation, editor of the *Stockman Grass Farmer* and proponent of intensive rotational grazing. Workshops will focus on grazing, results of PFI on-farm trials, and other current topics. If you have an idea for a particular workshop, let your district PFI board representative know about it.

♪ Growers Sought To Try Berseem

Richard Cruse is an ISU soil scientist who has recently been evaluating some unusual green manure crops, and now he would like some help. He is looking for about 15 Iowa farmers to grow something called *berseem clover*. Cruse will supply seed for up to 15 acres. In return, he will ask growers to evaluate the legume.

Participants will be free to use the berseem clover any way they want — as a green manure crop, a hay crop, pasture, under oats, or in a sole seeding. Cruse hopes to learn how the clover can be used and how it performs in Iowa. In the southern U.S., where berseem is a common perennial crop, it is reported to fix large amounts of nitrogen. No one knows what the plant can do under midwestern conditions, however.

Several farmers at PFI field days have already expressed interest in trying the clover. If you would like more information, contact Cruse at (515) 294-7850.



WEED MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: ECONOMICS AND ENERGY

Rick Exner

Does a move toward sustainability mean financial sacrifice? Nine model farming systems give a look at cost reduction strategies and energy conservation in weed management.

Last summer I read the summary of a talk on weed management by an individual connected with a state university outside of Iowa. It was written to get laughs at the expense of "LISA," or sustainable agriculture. A little ribbing is healthy, and maybe the humor helped the audience to come to terms with some of the changes facing agriculture.

But in trying to damage poor LISA's character, the speaker let drop a few insinuations. He didn't have to back them with facts because his audience was in his corner anyway. "Will farmers return to

banding?" he asked. "How often will they cultivate as energy costs increase?"

Practical Farmers of Iowa has some facts and figures that apply to the questions of profitability and energy costs of weed control. For one thing, PFI members have shown that you can have effective weed control in a *variety* of systems. Secondly, the economics and energy pictures contradict the tradeoff suggested by the speaker.

Consider the following nine scenarios for weed management. They were assembled using ISU figures for average input costs and energy use. These nine use one of three tillage systems: ridge-tillage, "conventional" (chisel/disk) tillage, or no-till. Within each tillage system several approaches to weed management are shown, representing different balances between chemical and mechanical control and whether herbicides are banded or broadcast.

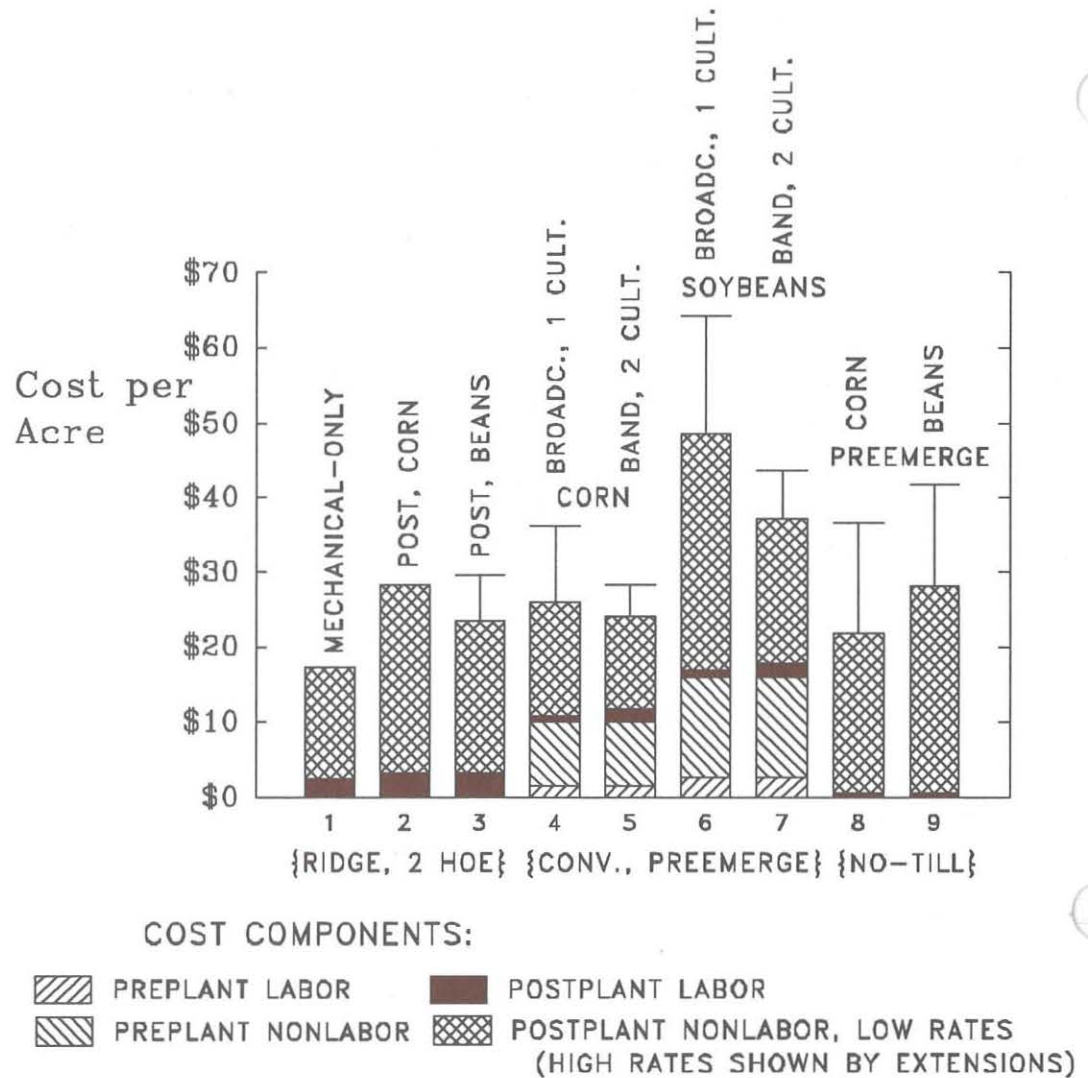
The table gives operations and inputs for nine systems. Read the table by looking down each of the nine columns to see what practices are used in each system.

INPUTS		CROPPING SYSTEM								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
TIL- LAGE	Crop	C, SB	C	SB	C	C	SB	SB	C	SB
	Ridge-Till	X	X	X						
	Chisel/Disk				X	X	X	X		
	No-Till								X	X
HERBI- CIDES	Lasso/Aatrex Preemerge				Brd	Band			Brd	
	Dual/Amiben Preemerge						Brd	Band		Brd
	Accent/COC Postemerge		Band							
	Poast Postemerge			Band						
	Gramoxone Burndown								X	X
CULTI- VATION	Rotary Hoe	2x	2x	2x						
	Row Crop Cultivator	2x	2x	2x	1x	2x	1x	2x		

The table gives operations and inputs for these nine systems. These are only nine out of the many approaches possible within each type of tillage, so keep in mind that other combinations could differ in economics and energy use.

Within seven of the nine scenarios, the labels of herbicides used provide a range of application rates. So separate figures were worked out based on the low label rates and on the high label rates. The bars in the two bar charts indicate costs and energy use at the low application rates, with high rates shown by extensions over those bars. Planting and cultivating with ridge-till

(Continued on page 9.)



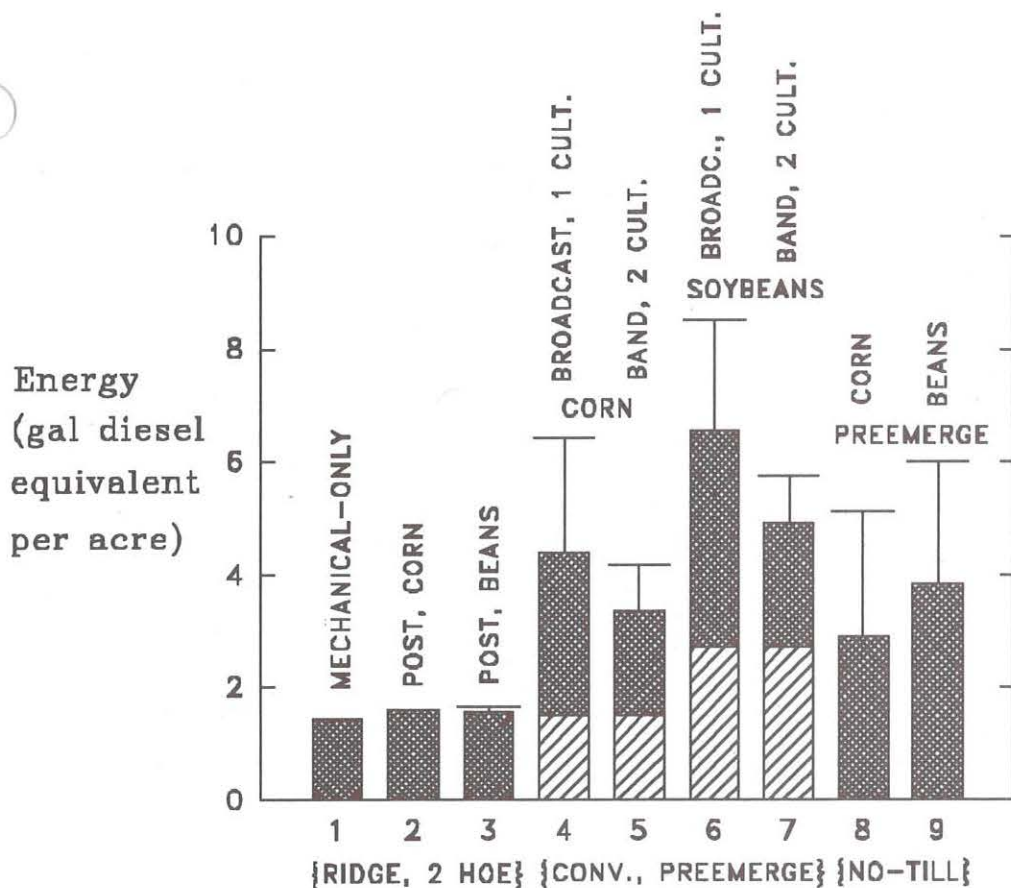
SUSTAINABLE AG WEED MANAGEMENT BULLETIN RELEASED

The weed management bulletin at the center of this newsletter is one of the first in a series from Iowa State University. As the logos on the back show, it represents the cooperation of ISU Extension, Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Rodale Institute, and Thompson On-Farm Research.

Dick and Sharon Thompson, Boone, were the driving force behind this publication, which is the distillation of their experience with weed management in ridge tillage. While the Thompsons prefer not to use herbicides, the bulletin contains practical tips for any ridge tiller seeking to cut costs and optimize weed control.

Dick Thompson often says "there is no perfect system." That certainly applies to weed management. In 1992 the spring drought in Iowa often hurt the effectiveness of herbicides. Wet springs, in contrast, keep the rotary hoe and cultivator from doing their best.

ISU Extension weed specialists often recommend a flexible approach to weed management, one that includes "backup" options. That may translate to: "don't get rid of the spray rig," or "don't sell the cultivator," or "think about how your crop rotation may benefit weed control." Common sense says make the cheaper options your first line of defense. Don't spend the extra money unless you find you have to!



ENERGY COMPONENTS:

PREPLANT ENERGY

 POSTPLANT ENERGY, LOW RATES
 (HIGH RATES SHOWN BY EXTENSIONS)

(Continued from page 8.)

and no-till equipment were charged higher operating costs and energy use than were corresponding operations in conventional tillage.

Figure 1 shows per acre costs for these nine systems, and Figure 2 indicates energy use. Harvest, land, and other inputs such as fertilizers are not included. But preplant tillage cannot be left out, since it is part of the total weed management strategy. In Figure 1, each bar is broken into preplant costs (both labor and nonlabor) and "postplant" costs (labor and nonlabor) incurred at planting and after. The cost of labor was set at \$6 per hour.

The conclusion? In each of the three tillage systems there are opportunities to cut costs and energy consumption.

Why is it important to break out labor costs? Labor, unlike purchased inputs, is a resource that is internal to the farming operation. Critics of sustainable agriculture argue that it requires too much labor. Some proponents, on the other hand, see in these methods the opportunity for young and "undercapitalized" farmers to keep money in their pockets by paying themselves to do the farming.

The conclusion? In each of the three tillage systems there are opportunities to cut costs and energy consumption. These can be summarized as:

- 1) banding instead of broadcasting;
- 2) reducing rates within the label; and
- 3) substituting mechanical operations for herbicides where appropriate.

An implicit fourth strategy is to choose the cheapest tool that will do the job right, be that an herbicide or an implement. The new ultra-low-volume herbicides should be less affected by the cost of energy than other materials. The Accent® treatment in system #2 is a case in point.

You can play around with your own scenarios. The published sources of input energy and costs are shown below, and you may have developed your own numbers that more accurately reflect your operation. If your costs and energy inputs come out to be less than those

shown here, you may already be following the strategies discussed above. There is no perfect system, but in the real world there are real options and some real solutions.

Sources for costs and energy use:

CRC Handbook of Energy Utilization in Agriculture, by David Pimentel, CRC Press, Boca Raton.

Estimated Costs of Crop Production in Iowa — 1992: Fm-1712.

Estimating Field Capacity of Farm Machines: Iowa State University bulletin Pm-696.

Fuel required for Field Operations: Iowa State university bulletin Pm-709.

ROSMANN CONNECTS TO NATIONAL AUDIENCE

The May 4, 1992 issue of *Newsweek Magazine*, in its *My Turn* column, contained an editorial by PFI cooperators Ron Rosmann entitled "This Land Is Your Land." In it Rosmann decried the concentration of land ownership in the United States and the fact that the largest 400 farms in the country reap 15 percent of total U.S. farm income. "This country has lost the capability even to recognize the needs of rural America," wrote Rosmann. "Even farmers have been brain-washed into thinking little can be done: technology and big business's control of agriculture are just too powerful to counter, they figure."

In the article, Rosmann described sustainable agriculture as "practical farming" that makes the most of management and skilled labor. He wrote that moderate-sized family farms are in a better position to practice sustainable agriculture than large farms and that they contribute more to vibrant rural communities. He described how his

Rosmann attacked three "agricultural myths" that work against agriculture: 1) that bigger is more efficient; 2) that sustainable agriculture means the elimination of pesticides; and 3) that food costs would rise significantly if producer prices increased.



PFI cooperators Ron and Maria Rosmann farm near Harlan, Iowa.

own father intentionally helped establish several young farmers, going out of his way to rent them land.

Rosmann attacked three "agricultural myths" that work against agriculture: 1) that bigger is more efficient; 2) that sustainable agriculture means the elimination of pesticides; and 3) that food costs would rise significantly if producer prices increased. He suggested that both government and society as a whole has a stake in a stable, profitable and sustainable agriculture.

Ron and Maria Rosmann have received many responses to the editorial. Nearly all have been supportive, and many have been personal and touching. The article has helped give some people the courage of their convictions, and it has raised important issues with the public.

A THOUSAND ACRES, by Jane Smiley, 1992, Alfred A Knopf, New York

Reviewed by Pam Henderson

(Editors' note: This review, titled *King Lear on an Iowa Farm*, is reprinted by permission from the February 1992 issue of *Farm Journal*. Jane Smiley is a professor at Iowa State University. Her book *A Thousand Acres* was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for literature earlier this year.)

In her new novel, Jane Smiley takes readers to America's heartland and cuts right to a farm crisis more threatening than financial problems. *A Thousand Acres* (Alfred A. Knopf, \$23) is about relationships and the perils of combining families, personalities and land.

It's Zebulon County, Iowa, 1979. Larry Cook farms 1,000 acres of flat, unencumbered land. He amassed his kingdom from the failures of neighbors and a single-minded shrewdness.

Trouble begins when a neighbor, Harold Clark, throws a community pig roast to welcome home his prodigal son Jess. The companion exhibit for the evening is a brand-new International Harvester tractor replete with cab, air conditioning and tape deck.

Not to be outdone, Larry Cook uses the event — to the surprise of all the partygoers — to announce his retirement and decision to divide his holdings among his three daughters: Ginny, Rose and Caroline. For Ginny and Rose, who stayed home to farm with their husbands, the idea seems like a reward for years of hard work. But Caroline, who escaped to become a lawyer in Des Moines, isn't sure. For her hesitation, she is disinherited.

The older sisters and spouses set to the task of making the new venture a success — expanding the hog operation and taking on debt. But the real changes occur in Larry Cook. Giving up the farm unhinges him. Retirement means driving for endless, aimless miles or sitting silently in his armchair watching the cornfields. Rose sums it up

In her new novel, Jane Smiley takes readers to America's heartland and cuts right to a farm crisis more threatening than financial problems.

by saying, "Perfecting that death's-head stare will be his lifework from now on."

It soon becomes clear that the transfer of the land is just the first in a series of events that will tear apart the farm and the family.

In this book, Smiley has accomplished what most novelists fail - her pen feels farm life, farmers and farm families. She shows an uncommon understanding of the complex relationships between neighbors, nature's uncertainties and even the wives' battle to keep the farm from taking over the house. Smiley's hand becomes a bit heavy on the subject of agricultural chemicals and organic farming. But she regains her realism in the lengths the family goes to keep their personal problems from becoming community scandal. All that quiet and caution is thoroughly Midwestern.

As the family ends up in court - sister pitted against sister, husbands against wives, father against his own demons - the reader keeps believing things can't get much worse. But they do, as Ginny, narrator of the novel, looks back for clues to try to understand what is happening. Her discovery process brings back hidden traumatic events of her past, and a world that once seemed solid and secure splits apart.

A Thousand Acres is not a pleasant book. For farmer readers, parts will be painful and yet, oddly



compelling. Some will say the story is too fantastic, that things don't happen like this in farm country. But we know they do.

Some may compare *A Thousand Acres* to *King Lear*. The forces that bound Lear and his daughters in Shakespearean tragedy are here with a farming twist. *A Thousand Acres* is not about the loss of a farm, but the loss of a family. That's the tragedy.

BROKEN HEARTLAND: THE RISE OF AMERICA'S RURAL GHETTO, by Osha Gray Davidson, 1990, The Free Press, New York

Reviewed by B. Osh Andersen

Editors' note: Osh Andersen is a PFI member with a background in landscape ecology. She lives in Decorah, Iowa.

This book focuses on the economic, social and political forces which have been radically transforming rural communities in the United States for decades. The book starts on a myth-shattering note with the words of one Iowa farmer: "You can still pursue your dreams in America," she says, staring at the ground. "You just can't obtain them."

This tone of discouragement and realism is a repeated theme in *Broken Heartland*. Seventeen percent of rural Americans (ten million people) live in poverty. This is not what some people want to hear. It doesn't fit the mass-media image of cheery nostalgia — dairy farms with neat, red barns, crisp white villages and happy, healthy people living close to the land. The issues that Davidson raises are not "easy listening music," but urban people, especially, need to read this book as an antidote to the cherished rural images we are bombarded with in advertising.

Davidson lived in Mechanicsville, Iowa from 1986 to 1989, while working on this book. He

As Davidson says, using the term "dying" both overstates and understates the problems that are troubling rural communities.

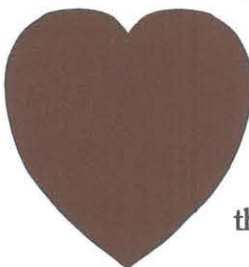
researched government documents and talked with farmers, farm activists, laborers, educators, senior citizens, field organizers, economists, rural development experts, business owners and employees, newspaper editors, and politicians.

Many of the rural residents with whom he talked admitted that there have been "some problems lately" with rural communities. For example, one man in his 90's was asked what's happening to Mechanicsville. His answer, "It's dying," hangs in the silence of the dusty 110 year-old hardware store that they are standing in.

Is rural America dying? As Davidson says, using the term "dying" both overstates and understates the problems that are troubling rural communities. Small towns throughout the Midwest have not simply disappeared. Basic characteristics about them have changed. Communities used as examples in this book show once viable small towns changing into rural ghettos — centers of poverty where people are isolated without jobs or hope.

Rural demographics have changed dramatically in recent decades. U.S. farm size has doubled from the 1940's to the 1980's. At the same time, the U.S. farm population has plummeted from 30 million in the 1940's to 5 million in the 1980's. Average net farm income in Iowa declined from \$17,680 in 1981 to \$7,376 in 1982 and was a negative \$1,891 in 1983.

What frightens and angers Davidson about the economic, social and political changes in rural America is the thought of what could come next, given the trends up until now. Five percent of



American landowners own seventy-five percent of our land, and the bottom seventy-eight percent of the landowners own just three percent of our land. Charles Geisler, a sociologist, uses the term "landshed" to refer to the coming transfer of ownership of over 300 million acres of farmland now owned by older farmers. What will happen soon when they retire?

This landshed gives us a tremendous opportunity to do it the right way — by transforming our economic, social and political structures to be more efficient, sustainable and equitable for the long haul. Strong rural communities are one part of this whole. As Davidson writes in the last chapter, what we need in rural America is not more jobs or more money, but more democracy.

If nostalgia is a form of depression and depression is a form of sleep, this book is an alarm clock. It is a starting point for democratic action — information for citizens to use in influencing change in rural America.

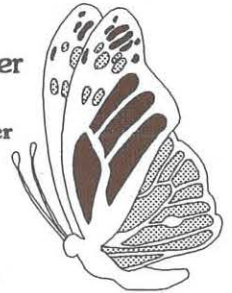
And there are individuals bucking the trends. A young Iowa farmer I know of had considered returning to college until he was able to rent-with-option-to-buy some excellent land from a retiring couple who wanted their farm home to be lived in. They could have sold to big land owners in the area but decided to act on principle.

There also are now some organized efforts to help young people enter farming. The Center for Rural Affairs, in Walthill, Nebraska, started *LandLink Realty*, which gives young people opportunities to work their way into the operations of older farmers. The Iowa State University Extension Service recently announced the *Farm On* program, which will match willing landlords with young people who want to farm. Osha Davidson's book shows why these courageous actions are so badly needed.

BUTTERFLY AGAINST THE GALE, by Norris W. Alfred

reviewed by M. Eileen Exner

Editors' note: Eileen Exner is a PFI member who lives in Ames, Iowa.



A daily newspaper column for nearly 30 years can be a particularly effective way to glimpse the life and times of a rural community and the widening world with which it is connected. The selected columns in this neat little volume do this in a most appealing way.

Norris Alfred, it seems, decided, as did another remarkable man — Henry David Thoreau, to "live deliberately." Not removed, as was Thoreau, from human contact ("to front only the essentials of life and learn from them") — but to combine his great appreciation of the natural world with his deep love of people. Alfred did all this after briefly pursuing a career in art. The impressive engravings that grace these pages suggest a considerable talent.

Mr. Alfred takes us through a period that manifested a certain dependable stability, a time when neighbors were important, and their worth assured. But it was also a time of foreboding change in which farmers — once 90% self-sufficient, independent, hard-working, creative, and taking pride and enjoyment in their life and calling — came to be producers, not for themselves, but for "federal subsidized storage."

Alfred is starkly eloquent when he documents a march to mechanization and bigness in which people become less important than machines and the aura of power. He feels, by the way, that the centralization of news gathering and publishing — his business — is as much an abhorrence as this concentration in farming.

But all is not gloom. From moments of seriousness to the light-hearted story of a small child's greeting delivered to "Grandma, Polk, Nebraska,"

...this unique individual who names the calamitous but does not bow to it, and who believes that humans are capable of solving their problems, even when they are formidable.

on an S&H Green Stamp, there is a wonderful smorgasbord of subjects to delight you.

They will make you smile and warm your heart; they may make you sad or get your dander up. They will surely evoke your respect and affection for this unique individual who names the calamitous but does not bow to it, and who believes that humans are capable of solving their problems, even when they are formidable.

That is reflected in the title of this little treasure, and in Alfred's comment that follows: "I have watched the flight of a butterfly against the gale, and the performance gives me hope." In like vein, as expressed by another: "Faith is the bird that surmises the dawn, and sings while the darkness still is there.

Available for \$7.50 (includes shipping--no tax outside Nebraska) from the Center for Rural Affairs, Box 405, Walthill, NE. 68067, (402) 846-5428.

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

by Tom Frantzen

With just three years of intensive grazing experience, I can now see what a powerful tool it is. Today my farm has two grazing cells for gestating swine and one cell for stocker cattle. Using different species of livestock to graze the same land is a definite improvement. Land on our farm that used to grow continuous corn with all the chemical inputs now hosts a perennial sward of complex

grazing forages. Quackgrass, dandelions, and lambsquarter — hated weeds in row crops — are readily eaten in paddock grazing. Sows and gilts absolutely *love* lambsquarter! Caring for stock and managing paddocks sure beats handling insecticides and watching soil erode!

I am writing this column in late June. We have received timely rains and our pastures look great. The two swine grazing cells improved remarkably after stock density was increased to over 60,000 pounds. Forage consumption is uniform, and I have made hay on the surplus paddocks. Four hundred eighty-five pound stocker heifers were purchased in late May. I used to rotate row crops into pasture farrowing land to break up disease cycles. My current intention is to rotate livestock species on the land and skip the tillage.

...remember this rule of thumb: fast growth — fast rotation, slow growth — slow rotation .

The late Andre Voisin, in his fabulous book "Grass Productivity," detailed a common hazard grass farmers fall into. He termed this grazing error "untoward acceleration." This happens when a grazer increases the speed of rotation as the grass growth slows. The farmer is running short of grass, and that shortage is pushing him/her into grazing paddocks before they have recovered. To avoid this problem, remember this rule of thumb: *fast growth — fast rotation, slow growth — slow rotation*. As the season progresses, most experienced graziers either bring more paddocks into the cell or they reduce stocking rates to compensate for slower forage growth.

Some of the Practical Farmers of Iowa field tours scheduled this summer will include intensive grazing practices. Visit one of these farms to see grass farming firsthand.

FROM THE KITCHEN

Marj Stonecypher, Floyd

Well, here goes with some more of my good and fattening food. First, some bread or rolls that really disappear fast around here. Happy baking.

EASY DINNER ROLLS

- 2 cups water (luke warm)
- 2 pkg. dry yeast
- 7 cups flour
- ½ cup shortening (I use lard)
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup dry milk
- 1 T. salt
- 2 eggs

Add yeast to 1 cup of warm water and 1 teaspoon sugar. Set aside.

Beat shortening. Add sugar, salt, eggs, and dry milk, alternately. Add yeast mixture, water, and flour, alternately. Rest 10 minutes. Knead and let rise.

Make into finger rolls, round rolls, cinnamon rolls or loaves.

Bake 18-20 min. for rolls, loaves about 30 min.



APPLE OR RHUBARB CRUNCH

Mix:

- 1¼ cups flour
- 1¼ cups oatmeal
- 1¼ cups brown sugar
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¾ cup butter
- 1 tsp. cinnamon

Press mixture in bottom of 8x11" baking pan. (Save remaining for topping.)

Cover with 8 cups apple or rhubarb fruit mix.

For apples:

- 1 cup sugar
 - 2 tsp. cinnamon
- Mix together and pour over apples.

For rhubarb:

- 2¾ cup sugar
 - 6 T flour
 - 1 tsp. nutmeg
 - 2 T. butter
 - 4 eggs, well beaten
- Mix together and pour over rhubarb.

Top with rest of crumb mixture. Bake at 450° for 10 minutes, 350° for 35 minutes or until done. Serve warm with ice cream.

PFI Membership Application and Renewal Form

Name _____

Address _____

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?

_____ yes _____ no

Please enclose check or money order (\$10 for one year, \$25 for three years) payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa" and mail to:

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

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Correspondence to the PFI directors' addresses is always welcome. Member contributions to *the Practical Farmer* are also welcome and will be reviewed by the PFI board of directors.

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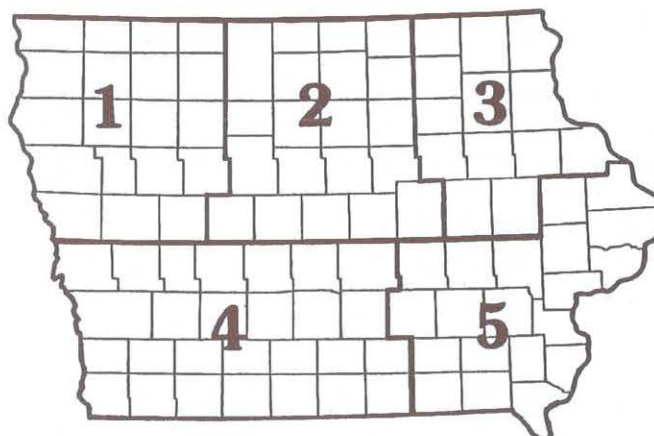
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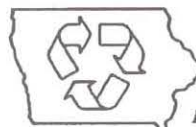
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