

the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

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Summer 1995

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

Vic Madsen, Audubon

Over the past few years hundreds of articles have been written and thousands of hours have been spent discussing sustainable agriculture. Perhaps it is time to think about the people.

I am afraid that if we are not careful, sustainable agriculture has the potential to burn out or consume people no differently than does an industrial management style. In both cases it would seem to me that the families involved need to be able to feel in control of events rather than being propelled by them.

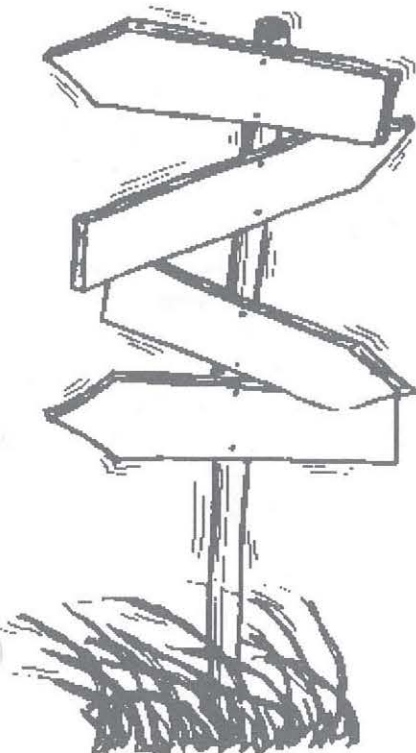
For example, a farmer may be doing several farming practices that are considered to be sustainable. But because of being on the front of the learning curve, that farmer and his family may experience a high level of frustration and low profit.

There have been cases where farmers have attended a field day and seen clean fields of corn and soybeans grown without herbicides. So the next year they use low or no herbicides on their corn-soybean

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rotation and become a nervous wreck fighting weeds and trying to combine the mess. Maybe what they missed on the field day was the long crop rotation that included a couple years of hay or pasture as well as timely cultivation in the row crop year. The visitor may have missed the idea that when mowing the second cutting of hay in 1992, the host was lowering the weed pressure for the soybeans in 1994.

A successful farming system often works because of the secondary effects of the farming practices. Could it be that a sustainable lifestyle is also tied to the secondary effects of farming practices?

It would seem to me that the goal of developing a profitable farm that operates in harmony with nature and has several enterprises which also work in harmony will lead to a pleasant place to work and an enjoyable lifestyle. Notice there is nothing said here about having to follow a textbook list of farming practices.

Late summer is an excellent time to think about how you can make your farm and home a more enjoyable place to live and work. And consider cutting yourself and your family a little slack. Some of the stress and frustration families go through is because we set unrealistically high standards for the people closest to us. We all have times when the most accurate description is the elementary school "duh!"

So the point of all this is that if we can manage the farm and not let the farm manage us, and if we can choose the farming practices that fit our needs and goals, we have better odds of living an enjoyable life.

IS YOUR JOB SUSTAINABLE? A QUESTION FOR FARMERS AND EXTENSION

by Jim Barney

(Editors' note: Jim Barney is a dairy farmer from Sherman, New York. This article is reprinted with his permission from the spring 1995 *Farming Alternatives* newsletter, which is published by the Farming Alternatives Program at Cornell University. Jim's

phone number is 716-761-6611. He noted that people who are interested in talking about this article should give him a call.)

In the future, will others be willing and able to pay you for what you can do? Will the assets you invested in for your retirement have value? I started dairy farming 30 years ago by investing in the skills and assets of dairying. Those assets have changed a great deal in 30 years, but [it] now seems that the rate of change necessary to stay competitive is increasing rapidly. Those of us who have invested in the current food and agricultural system have a stake in its future; we have a deep interest in its sustainability because our security is tied to it.

To me, there are two dimensions to sustainability: external and internal.

To me, there are two dimensions to sustainability: external and internal. The external dimension is our customers' needs and expectations of price and quality. In addition, our local communities have needs and expectations that we will protect the environment and strengthen their institutions. The internal dimension is our individual and collective capacity to satisfy those needs and expectations.

The nature of our markets is also changing. The mass markets of the past are being replaced with niche markets. This transition is being driven by our customers' expectations of having ever greater choice. As the value added to agricultural products by processors and marketers increases, the value added by farming decreases. This trend is neither unique nor new to agriculture.

In my mind, the central issue of the sustainable agriculture debate is one of organization. Will farmers continue to allow the supplier and market sectors of the food and agriculture system to gain in their share of the food dollar while the farmers' share decreases? Will suppliers and/or marketers continue to vertically integrate farming into their operations?

Continued on page 9.

OUT AND ABOUT, SUMMER 1995



Matt Stewart, Oelwein, demonstrated stringing a temporary electric fence at the July 25 field day. Later Laura Jackson showed her prairie plots.



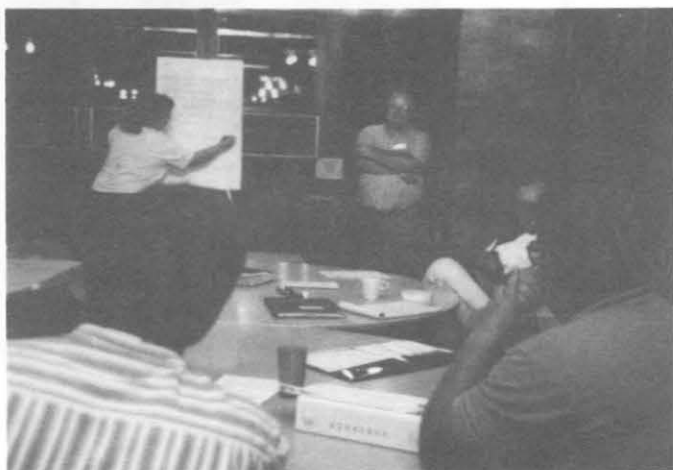
The LP tank on the back of the tractor fed the flames of the weeder on a hot July 14 field day at the New Melleray Abbey (farm manager Joe Fitzgerald at left).



At Mark and Julie Roose's field day, July 18, everyone huddled in to check for signs of alfalfa weevil. Entomology graduate student Cris Giles holds the sample.



Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan, took part in a field day organized by ISU ag engineer Mark Hanna. Ron demonstrated cultivation of both corn and soybeans.



The PFI board retreated to the Iowa 4-H Center July 8-9 to "vision" the future and fill up some flip charts.



Bring on the hogs! Vic and Cindy Madsen's new "hoophouse" will be part of the field day Aug. 31.

SHARED VISIONS



farming for better communities

RECRUITMENT UNDERWAY FOR FINAL SET OF GROUPS

Recruitment is underway for the third and final set of groups planned for the community groups network of *Shared Visions*. Marketing materials have been developed and distributed. There have been about a dozen inquiries so far. Some of these inquiries are bound to lead to applications, while others may not.

The application deadline is Friday, Sept. 8, so if you have an interest, now is the time to call. Contact Gary Huber at 515-294-8512.



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUPS

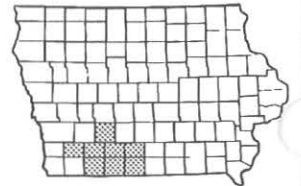
Groups involved in *Shared Visions* may be interested to know that two funding sources recently announced calls for preproposals. These announcements are noted at the beginning of the Notes and Notices section of the newsletter, which starts on page 9.

GROUP UPDATES

The five groups added to the *Shared Visions* community groups network last fall have been implementing the projects they developed last winter. Here's what these groups have been doing.

Ag Connect

Ag Connect was established in September of 1994 as a non-profit corporation. Based in Lenox, its purpose is to assist retiring and beginning farmers in transitioning farm assets in an eight-county area of south-central and southwest Iowa. It is overseen by a twelve-person Board, and its executive director, Don Robertson, began work last spring.



AG Connect

Specializing in Farm Transitions

The part of the Ag Connect program being supported by *Shared Visions* is the development of a database of retiring farmers. A survey was designed, which local Consolidated Farm

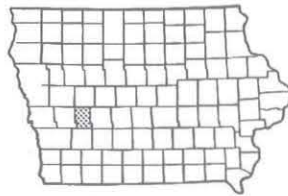
Services Agency offices have been including with their newsletters. To date over 7,000 landowners in three of the eight counties have been sent the survey. The last of the surveys will be sent in September.

As for progress of the overall program, Mr. Robertson reports that Ag Connect has completed its first match. Thus, a new family will be moving to the area to begin farming next year. He also notes that three other matches are in the works, and twelve more retiring farmers have made verbal commitments to work with Ag Connect to transition their operations to beginners.

Contact: Don Robertson
124 N. Main
Lenox, IA 50851
515-333-4656

Audubon Graziers

This group has held three pasture walks this spring and summer on group members' farms. Each involved a supper, a pasture walk, and guest speakers.



Guest speakers were Daryl Strobehn, Dan Morrical, and Carl Neifert of ISU Extension, Bob Blomme, a local veterinarian, Rick Sprague of the Adams County CRP Project, and Dave Brand, the local NRCS District Conservationist. Seventeen adults attended each of the first two walks, and 25 attended the third. Also attending were quite a few children, which the group was happy to see.

The group has started a grazing library at the county Extension office. The library was on display at a booth at the county fair. The booth also displayed grazing photos and pots containing different species of grasses. The grasses were provided by Dick DeLoughery, area crops specialist for ISU Extension.



Roger Barten of the Audubon Graziers points out a feature of his pasture from the back of a pickup.

The group organized a trip to the August 3rd field day at the Adams County CRP Research farm. Organizing the trip involved, among other things, sending letters of invitation to all Audubon County CRP owners. At last notice it looked like they had enough people to take a couple of vans.

Future activities include pasture walks on August 4 on the Dennis and Cheryl Hansen farm, August 24 on the Virgil and Charlotte Sorensen farm, and September 7 on the Roger and JoAnn Barten farm. The group will also travel to the September 1 field day at the Neely-Kinyon farm near Greenfield, at which there will be an opportunity to talk with the Neely-Kinyon Farm Committee, which is also involved in *Shared Visions*.

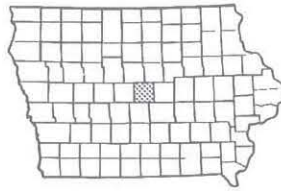
Contact: Donna Bauer
1667 Hwy. 71
Audubon, IA 50025
712-563-4084

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Central Iowa Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project

This group is developing a Community Supported Agriculture project in the Story County area. Typical CSAs connect producers of fresh, healthy food with consumers who purchase shares at the beginning of the season. This CSA project is similar in this regard. There are 29 shareholders, or members.



Unlike most CSAs, this one is also linking consumers to local sources of poultry, eggs, pork, beef, honey, baked goods, and fiber products. The group has linked consumers to local producers of these food and fiber items by identifying producers and determining how and at what price they would provide these items.

This information was included in the CSA's brochures and membership forms. Also, the producers described their farms and how they raised their produce and animals to CSA members at a May membership meeting.

Produce items are handled as in most CSAs. Some of the 29 members purchased full-shares, which cost \$250, while others purchased half-shares at half that cost. In return, they receive fresh produce on a weekly basis for 24 weeks.

The spring weather, which was cooler and wetter than normal, delayed early-season deliveries. Members began receiving produce in mid-June. The first few shares were delivered to members' homes, but now there are two locations in Ames where members pick up their shares. Distribution happens once a week, either on Wednesday evenings or Saturday mornings. Currently, the varieties and amounts members receive are impressive.

The main grower for the CSA is Mark Harris. His farm, which is called the Prairie Sky Market Garden, is about eight miles northeast of Ames. Mark is



Omagene Smith, a member of the Ames-based CSA, opens her trunk while Mike Abbas, the group's coordinator and historian, holds her box of fresh produce.

growing about 30 different kinds of vegetables for the CSA. Another area grower, Michelle Ward, helped the project through the early season delays by contributing some of her harvest. A third grower is providing sweet corn.

The group has included a simple, two-page newsletter with each delivery. Short updates on how the crops are doing are provided along with recipes for items included in the delivery.

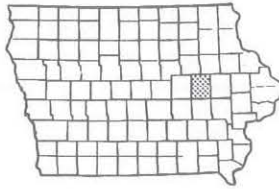
Monthly potlucks for shareholders have gone well. A field day at Prairie Sky Market Garden will be held on Sunday, August 13, giving members and others an opportunity to see Mark's operation.

Contact: Jeff Hall
P.O. Box 1452
Ames, IA 50014
515-294-0429



Farm Fresh CSA

This group, which draws its members from across Benton County, is also developing a CSA. Twenty-two \$160 shares were sold to area families, some living as far away as Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. In return, the families receive produce once a week. The plan is to have a 20-week delivery period. Shareholders are also given the option of receiving four deliveries of apples for another \$10.



The apples will be provided this fall by Bill Hurley and Emil Chalupsky, who operate the Apple Cart Orchard near Vinton. Four other group members grow produce for shareholders. Their names, the names of their farms, and their home towns are: Jodi Biershenck, Blue Ridge Garden, Newhall; Helen Grunewald, Bittersweet Acres, Blairstown; Marion and Virginia Moser, Wildwoods, Garrison; and Katherine Ollendieck, Heirloom Gardens, Dysart.

Deliveries began in early June. Shareholders will receive about 60 different varieties of produce before the season is over. The original plan of having people pick up their food items at a central drop-off point has changed to include several drop-off points and some door-to-door deliveries. This method has worked well, but group members recognize a need to find a less time-consuming process for future years.

An "Open Gardens" day was held on Sunday, June 25th to give shareholders and others in their communities a chance to visit each of the farms of the growers. Also, the group has had very good



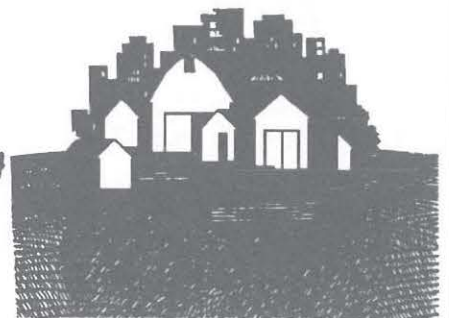
Katherine Ollendieck (center) describes her vegetable garden to members of the Central Iowa and Farm Fresh CSA groups.

publicity in the local papers, as well as the regional papers from Waterloo and Cedar Rapids. The group also hosted a visit from six of the people involved in the Central Iowa CSA to talk about their experiences.

The core group has been very pleased with their efforts so far. As Katherine Ollendieck, a group member and one of the growers, noted, "This project has been very exciting and a lot of hard work, but rewarding...very rewarding."

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

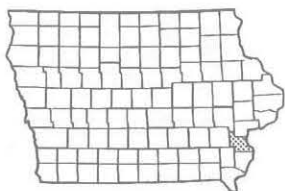
Farm Fresh...We produce what we eat
116 East 4th Street - Vinton, Iowa 52349
319-472-5545



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Farms Forever

This Louisa County group has been meeting on a monthly basis since January. The group recently decided on a new name – Farms Forever – because it captured the ideas of sustainability, community, and agriculture.



The group established a goal of enhancing communication between urban and rural citizens of Louisa County. Its first project was a series of three "Evening Entrees." The first was held at the Turkey Run Berry Farm near Wapello, which is owned and operated by of John and Lois Wanfeld.

The Wanfelds raise asparagus, crawdads, and various small fruits such as strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries. The Wanfelds and Patrick O'Mally, an ISU Extension horticulture specialist, discussed start-up costs, the pros and cons of organic production, irrigation techniques, and labor management. About 15 people attended.

The second Evening Entree focused on agroforestry and was held at Chestnut Acres, the farm of Bryan and Jill Hoben near Grandview. The Hobens grow corn and soybeans and raise hogs, but they have also been establishing a chestnut plantation.

Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice, two other members of Farms Forever, joined the Hobens in talking about topics such as nut and fruit tree products, woodlot management, and grafting multiflora rose to spread disease in these plants. About 35 adults and children attended.

The third Evening Entree will be held on Monday, August 21 from 6 to 8 pm. Its focus will be on Management Intensive Grazing and crafts/recreation from farms. Hosts will be Roger and Marrienne Hunt and Tom and Janet Utter. A dinner will be provided after the entree.



Tom Wahl of the Farms Forever group explains the techniques of grafting multiflora rose as a way to spread disease during one of the groups Evening Entrees.

These events, as well as the group's goal of enhancing rural-urban communication, were chosen because the group wanted to involve more people in deciding what should be the group's "big project." Discussions at group meetings this summer have narrowed the focus of their ideas toward direct marketing.

The group has discussed a variety of excellent, creative ideas related to this topic. They will continue to pursue these ideas at their monthly meetings, with the next one being on Monday, August 28.

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



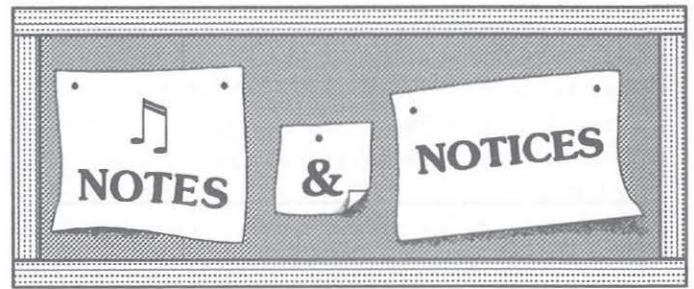
(Is Your Job Sustainable? Continued from page 2.)

Isn't it about time farmers began to consider horizontal integration? For such a system, farmers would collaborate with each other and other rural community-based businesses and institutions for such purposes as marketing, technology development and supplier sourcing. Farmers would stop allowing themselves to be divided by such things as commodity groupings, cropping practices, sources of technology, the "sustainability" of different farming practices, market niches and the ideologies that support the divisions.

Instead, farmers would be the organizing force and reap the benefits of creating and controlling the organization. Farmers and rural communities would add more value through information. Working together and using concepts like strategic planning, Total Quality Management and marketing, all common in larger organizations, farmers could begin to reverse the trend toward poorer rural communities.

Such sweeping changes can only happen in rural communities that are based on a few key values which focus that community's vision. The idea that people will see the opportunity to grow and the expectation that people *will* grow must be widely held. Next, diversity must be respected. Even more, diversity must be *valued* as an essential element in the community's ability to develop niche markets and creative approaches to the use of technology. People must have pride in their local community.

While information, ideas and influence can exist in the cyberspace of the global community, we must all go home to some *place* to raise our children. Healthy communities with strong local institutions are fundamental. It is every citizen's responsibility to support his or her community with both word and deed. These are the powerful values upon which our great nation was built. Periods of rapid and sweeping change cause people to search their most basic values for guidance. Strength and courage can be drawn from those values if they are relevant to the challenges ahead. We are truly blessed. We need not create them. We need only to apply them once again. ☘



♪ SARE and Leopold Center Issue Calls for Proposals

Organizations, groups, and individual scientists may be interested in two recently issued requests for proposals from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program of the USDA. Both funders request short preproposals, which they review before inviting full project proposals.

The preproposal deadline for the SARE program in our north central region is September 15.

Priority areas listed are: sustainable livestock systems, networking, developing markets, sustainable agriculture curriculum, environmentally sensitive areas, environmentally sound management practices, and emerging issues. This year the SARE and related ACE (Agriculture in Concert with the Environment) proposals will be handled together, with projects allocated to these categories by the SARE Administrative Council. For additional information, contact:



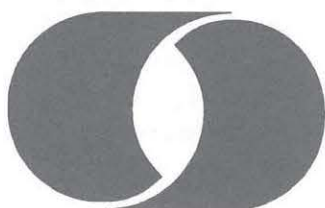
Steven S. Waller, ACE Program Coordinator
Office of the Dean, 207 Agricultural Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE, 68583-0704
402-472-7081

Early next year, SARE will request project proposals from farmers under its Producer Grants program. This year four Iowa projects were funded under Producer Grants. PFI member Dave Zahrt of Turin will document the transition from continuous grazing to managed grazing on loess hills bluff land.

The other grants to Iowa producers were: *Intensive Grazing Economic Study*, Dr. M.O. Pitcher, Maquoketa; *Suitability of Non-Native, Hardy, Forage-Adapted Mutton Sheep to North American Management Intensive Grazing System*, Stephanie Mitcham, Tripoli; and *Evaluation of Kura Clover in Intensive Grazing Systems*, David Kendall, Bellevue. The PFI newsletter will carry the next call for proposals in the Producer Grants program of SARE.

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture request for preproposals gives a deadline of Wednesday, September 6. The stated purposes of the Center are:

- 1) conduct and sponsor research to identify and reduce negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts of agricultural practices;
- 2) research and assist in developing emerging alternative practices that are consistent with a sustainable agriculture; and
- 3) develop, in association with the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service, an educational framework to inform the agricultural community and the general public of its findings.



LEOPOLD CENTER

The Leopold Center competitive grants are available to researchers, educators, and individuals at Iowa educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and foundations. Projects emphasizing collaboration with users (farmers, conservationists, communities, agribusiness) are encouraged. For more information contact:

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
126 National Soil Tilth Laboratory
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011
515-294-3711

♪ August 24th Tour of Ames Waste Recycling Effort

A Town and Country Tour to view efforts to recycle municipal sludge will be held on Thursday, August 24. The tour will start at 6 pm at the Ames Water Pollution Control Facility, which is located ten miles southeast of Ames. For more information, contact the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at 515-294-3711.

♪ Northeast Iowa Forage Management Workshop Set for Sept. 15

A forage management workshop will be held on Friday, September 15 at the Gilbertson Conservation Park just east of Elgin, Iowa. Topics will include techniques for renovating pastures, the pros and cons of different forages for intensive and continuous grazing, and cover crop options.

The workshop will also cover non-conventional forage species, such as cowpeas, Kura clover, Cicer milkvetch, and others. The workshop will run from 10:30 am to 2:30 pm. Bring a bag lunch – liquid refreshments will be provided. For more information contact Brian Lang, ISU Extension Crops Specialist, at 319-382-2949.

♪ Field Day Times Changed

The August 21 field day will be hosted by Jeff and Gayle Olson, Winfield, and two graziers in the Louisa County *Shared Visions* group. They are Roger and Marianne Hunt and Tom and Janet Utter. Roger and Tom attended a grazing school in Missouri this summer.

The time for the Louisa County portion of the tour has been moved up to 6:00 pm to make the best use of the daylight. After the pasture walks, the local Cattlemen's Association will furnish a barbecue.

The September 1 field day at the Neely-Kinyon Research Farm, near Greenfield, has been moved to afternoon to avoid conflicts with local sporting events. A light supper will be served after the field tour. To find out the time for the field day, call the Adair County Extension office, 515-743-8412.

FARMING SYSTEMS CONFERENCE DEVELOPING

Rick Exner

As reported in the last newsletter, in November Iowa will host the North American conference of the Association for Farming Systems Research and Extension (AFSRE). Producers and researchers from around the country have been putting together a program that will have everyone involved. This will be a chance to sit down with people who have interests in farming systems, sustainability, and farmer-to-farmer sharing – but who come from all different parts of the continent.

One of the goals of the conference is to explore new ways farmers and other ag professionals can work together. Tom Frantzen, PFI farmer from northeast Iowa, will be the keynote speaker. Tom will touch on ideas of “control versus trust” and how we relate to information and information-providers. He is also a producer who thinks about the farm as both a system in itself and a part of larger systems.

With so many different kinds of people at the meeting, it will be good to get the different definitions “out on the table.” The first day will feature a panel discussion on “just what is farming systems.” Various producers and researchers will offer their views.

Wherever possible, the programs will be led by teams consisting of producers and non-producers. For example, a team panel will look at current “hot” technologies from a “systems perspective.” How do you decide whether global positioning or high-tech hog production is right for your farming

system? This panel should spark a good discussion. Other sessions will use team approaches to problem solving using real world situations. Farmers and many scientists at the last conference valued over all other activities the opportunity to “tell their story”. Never thought of yourself as a story teller before? You might be surprised.

Producer “photo albums” will be part of the poster sessions, and PFI farmers are invited to contribute. The date for reserving a place in the producer posters has been moved back from Aug. 1 to October 1. The PFI board has agreed to contribute \$50 toward registration for the first five PFI members who bring a farmer poster. So get out this summer and take some pictures of your farm or community, showing how things “fit together” to make the system.

On Sunday, November 5, a pre-conference “farm and community” bus tour will stop at two farms and the community of Greenfield. Greenfield is not unlike many rural Iowa towns, but local farmers and town leaders are trying to plan a sustainable future. Bus tour participants will share lunch with community members and discuss how they see their town’s relationship to agriculture. Later they will tour the farm of Clark and Linda BreDahl, PFI members who raise cattle, sheep, hogs and poultry and who practice management-intensive grazing. The first farm visit of the day will be with PFI members Dick and Sharon Thompson, near Boone.

Farming systems might just be the break you need after harvest. For more information about the conference, call Rick Exner, at 515-294-1923.

Request Form

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____



**Farming Systems Conference
& producer posters information**

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



AFSRE

A Farmer's Legal Guide to Production Contracts, by Neil D. Hamilton

reviewed by Rick Exner

Contracting is more and more common in crop and livestock production. Sometimes we hear about contracting in a negative context, and sometimes the term comes up as a tool for the smart farmer. Neil Hamilton, director of the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University, has written a handbook for agricultural contracting. This 174-page guide was produced with support from *Top Producer Magazine*, from which it can be purchased for \$16.95 (230 West Washington Square, Philadelphia, PA, 19106, quantity discounts available). The text is enlivened on almost every page with "sidebar" examples from actual contracts, legal rulings, and relevant laws.

Neil Hamilton wants producers to know where they stand.

Maybe you have been producing under contract for years with no problem. Do you understand everything in your contract? Do you know what *isn't* in your contract? Neil Hamilton wants producers to know where they stand. The book starts off with a discussion of basic terms and potential benefits and risks – "Contract Law 101." Then it describes the relationship between the contract and the Uniform Commercial Code. "The what?" The Uniform Commercial Code is one of those things that may not be in the contract but nevertheless affect the business relationship.

Chapter 5: Walking through a Production Contract. Having laid the groundwork, Hamilton then takes apart a production contract that was used on his parents' farm. Section by section, he "translates" the legal language into common English. If you get this far into the book, you'll be hooked. The real life example makes it clear that this is

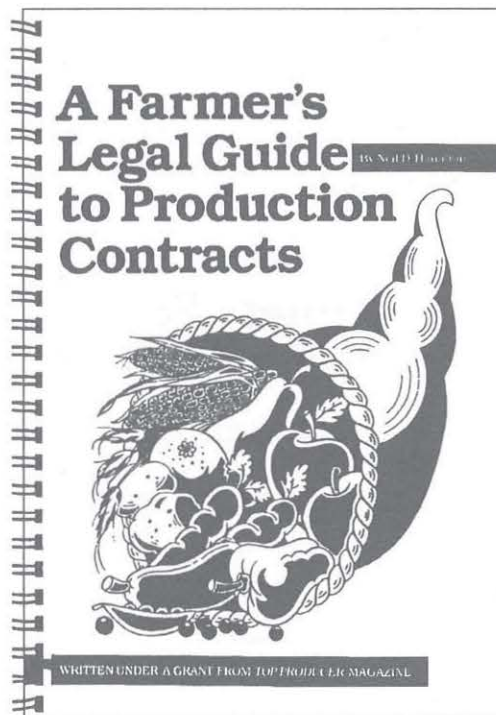
no game. Of course, maybe you knew that from your own experience.

Chapter 6: Performing the Agreement. The kind of legal relationship between the parties determines how the courts will treat them in disputes. There are several basic kinds of contractual relationship. A contract will usually specify the type of relationship, but you may not realize that unless you know what to look for.

Chapter 7: Getting Paid. Does the contract clearly state the basis for payment? With all the bonuses and deductions present in some contracts, this may not be clear. Who or what has title to the crop or livestock between the time of delivery and payment? Can a bank lay claim to the crop or livestock because of some other dispute? What interest does a landlord have? What can you do to make sure you are paid? It's also important to know what *not* to do that might jeopardize your case in these disputes!

Chapter 8: Resolving Disputes. Contract disputes can be resolved through the courts, through mediation, or through arbitration. The contract usually specifies both the method and the location for dispute resolution. Locations are generally near the home office of the contracting company, where the contractor is familiar with applicable state laws. Mediation, which served farmers well in the farm crisis, is sometimes used by contractors to keep producers away from the courts. In some states legislation offers specific protections for growers of certain products. Hamilton provides "Twelve Questions to Consider if a Dispute Arises."

The book then devotes chapters to grain production contracts, livestock production contracts, and vegetable production contracts. Two issues in grain production contracts are eligibility for farm program participation and crop insurance. If ownership of seed, the growing crop, and harvested grain is retained by the contractor, does



Mediation, which served farmers well in the farm crisis, is sometimes used by contractors to keep producers away from the courts.

the producer have anything to insure? State grain dealer laws also play an important role in regulating the activity of those who buy grain from farmers. The book also discusses the effects of genetics patenting laws. Hamilton shows how livestock production contracts are different from other contracts, and he describes the influence of the Packers and Stockyards Act (another factor that may not be explicitly stated in the contract).

The final chapter reviews state and federal legislation, showing how particular issues are developing and the different approaches states have taken to regulating agricultural production contracts. Hamilton notes that farmer groups or individual legislators have drawn up "model contracts" that in some cases have been adopted by the industry. He recommends this process for making contracts fair and mutually beneficial, so that they are more than just a tool for exploiting farmers. Neil Hamilton notes that "production contracts perceived as unfair will only lead to more litigation and to new proposals for stricter regulation of contracting practices." 🐄

COLEMAN'S SEEKS CATTLE PRODUCERS

Rick Exner

Readers may be aware of Colorado cattle rancher Mel Coleman and his company Coleman Natural Meats. From a beginning in health-food and other specialty stores, Coleman is gradually growing to reach more consumers who want beef that is healthy, tasty, and that benefits the environment. Coleman beef is from animals not treated with growth hormones or antibiotics, and the meat is of the better grades. The company is now seeking growers in Iowa. This may represent an opportunity for those Iowa farmers who already raise quality beef.

The Coleman contract bases premiums on weight and grade. The company wants heifer carcasses between 600 and 850 lbs hot weight and steer carcasses between 600 and 900 lbs. The top premium, for yield grade #1 carcasses, is \$18 per hundredweight above dressed base price. Dressed base price is the USDA average of markets in Colorado, Kansas, and eastern Nebraska in the week of slaughter.

Carcasses outside the weight range or of lower grade bring a lower effective price. Senior cattle buyer Jim Coakley said that the average premium paid last year was around \$8.50. The best premiums are for cattle finished by the producer, although there may be a couple of dollars premium for unfinished stock with good records if a finisher can be located.

Coleman requires cattle be "raised from birth in a humane, unconfined manner." No subtherapeutic or therapeutic antibiotics are allowed, and no growth hormones are permitted. On the other hand, the contract does not prohibit dewormers or lice treatments. The "suggested protocol" for vaccinations is quite detailed. Company reps will also work with a farmer on feed, minerals, and vitamins, said Coakley. He noted that producers may want to "back off" a bit on protein when they raise cattle without antibiotics.

Coleman is presently slaughtering in Windom, in southwestern Minnesota. The contract premiums apply to cattle delivered to slaughter. A Coleman buyer, Gary McCoskey, has been taking cattle from the Tama Livestock Auction, but these animals are not under contract and receive a minimal premium. So how can a small or medium-sized producer get the premiums without driving a few head at a time up to Minnesota? One solution: a finishing cooperative based in Benton County is pooling cattle for shipment to Coleman.

Continued on next page.



In our phone conversation, Jim Coakley also said he has pooled cattle from several small producers to fill a truck. I pointed out that a small producer contemplating a contract would want it in writing if pooled trucking would be provided, since they could otherwise be stuck with significant trucking expense when the cattle were ready to market. Coakley did not say any such arrangement is provided in writing.

Coleman Natural Meats will be an unknown quantity until a few more Iowa producers gain personal experience with the company. Jim Coakley will be in Red Oak or Creston on Sept. 7, and you can visit with him or buyer Scott Coakley by calling 800-442-8666. Local representative Gary McCoskey may be reached at 515-827-5460.

PFI PROFILES: PHIL SPECHT

Gary Huber

Phil and Sharon Specht are new PFI cooperators. Their 490-acre farm is located between Marquette and Monona in Clayton County.

The farm has 265 crop acres and 70 acres of pasture, with the rest in woodlands. The rotation used on the crop acres is corn followed by barley and three years of hay, though the hay is sometimes left longer. The barley is mixed wet with second crop hay using a bagger for their 110 milk cows. They also buy corn from the local coop to round out their herd's feed requirements.

The Spechts have used rotational grazing since 1974. When asked how they came to use rotational grazing long before most, Phil noted, "I think it was an article in *Farm Quarterly* magazine about New Zealand style of grazing. It had lots of pictures and happy looking cows."

Phil then talked some about his views toward farming. "I've had a lifelong commitment to soil and water conservation, and it seemed to me grass was what gave the best conservation of the soil. I try to be as extensive as I can, meaning getting the most acres I can into grass."

"There are two things I try to do," Phil continued. "One is protect biodiversity, and the other is to

observe nature and try to fashion a system that imitates a natural community."

"There was a two-year period where I would walk into a woods or a prairie and stand there and count how many different species of plants I could see. The number I seemed to consistently come up with is seventeen. I asked myself, 'With what kind of a farming system could you get seventeen different species?' Pasture comes as close as you can get. What I've been trying to do is mimic successful patterns I've seen in nature."

Phil credits the writings of Wes Jackson, Aldo Leopold, and Wendell Berry as influencing his views about farming. "What I read from them in the '70s and early '80s were seminal," he noted. The latter of these writers and Phil have something in common. "I consider myself a farmer-poet," he explained. Several of Phil's poems made it to Ames after the Specht's June field day. One that was read at a recent PFI board meeting was "Mutual Caring."

MUTUAL CARING

*After a storm, checking timber fences,
sometimes I'd run into my neighbor,
and oft as not it would be
him at my end as me at his. (The un-
spoken understanding; if you are out there
check it all.)*

*We would visit about the state of the world,
(How it was all going to Hell)
as if this mutual caring
didn't ever happen anywhere else.*

"I do write poetry," Phil continued. "I consider myself a poet. The poems you've got were ones I happened to have handy when Mike [Bell] and I visited the day of our field day." One of these was "Bobby's Corn."

BOBBY'S CORN

*"Bobby, don't get hurt over there. War is hell."
"You made it Dad. I'll be home in time to help
get the corn out next fall."
a conversation echoing for years
as each fall it got harder to put the picker on,
tears and coffee were shared in the kitchen
the pain so plain the neighbors knew.*

*When the emptiness and cancer
led to a second folded flag
the twice grieving farm wife
was joined at graveside by a neighbor
who had grown up with her son.
"Don't worry. We'll get Bobby's corn out."
was the promise, now kept by who-ever rents
that ground."*

"That one happened as I was driving across western Iowa in late March," Phil noted. "There was a cornfield that hadn't been harvested – the only cornfield left in Iowa. And I was musing about who didn't get done with their work and why."

Phil continued, "Then later at a fair booth, this guy sat down next to me and started talking about how bad he felt because he wasn't able to keep up with the farm work. He was worrying about what the neighbors were thinking, and he said, 'It's pretty hard to farm with cancer.' Then the poem just came out. That's how they usually come out."

Returning to the topic of farming, Phil noted, "Grazing is an easy system to take care of land and utilize the strengths and complimentary nature of different species to produce quality food. So, I do it with 100 cows and seventy acres of grass. And I probably raise more row crops than I'd like to, though I haven't used fertilizers or chemicals for a long time. I farm organic, but I buy corn from the co-op, so I'm not strictly organic."

When asked about fertility, Phil explained, "My cow manure is my number one asset. I value that product highly. I compost a lot of it, and I use it carefully where I need it most."

He continued his thoughts about grazing by noting, "One of the most important advantages to the recent trend to grazing is that it puts the human up front observing. That's the key to it." He continued with an example. "We've been having a mini-drought going on up here, and I didn't have grass ready in the next paddock of the rotation. So, I released my 10-year [CRP land] early, and for the last eight days the cows have been walking up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. I was hesitant to make them do that, but it's worked out."

"Then this morning there was this certain sheen on the dew that's there when the grass is ready, and



Phil Specht points towards a pasture during the part of their field day that focused on IPM techniques.

then I realized that this sheen was what I was looking for, and I had internalized it. The cows will get that grass tomorrow."

Phil continued with another observation, "When you stand in the middle of your farm, you've got to feel good about what you see, about what you do. Last year I had a nesting grasshopper sparrow, and I put up four fenceposts around the nest, and I got one little baby out of the deal. I haven't seen them this year – at least they are not nesting in the same place. But that baby sparrow was one of my most prized productions last year."

Another of Phil's poems that made it to Ames was written in memory of Dixon Terry, a Greenfield farmer and activist who was killed by lightning in an accident while baling hay.

SALT OF THE EARTH (Dixon Terry)

*One race won, wet hair, dry hay
the last load backed into the barn's driveway
embracing it with the labor of love of a different
year*

*Sweat wet shirt, salty sea air sweat,
rain, the barn's beasts, and a man, wet
clouds giving fields a moist promising embrace*

*Now the good race run, wet eyes, earth's arms,
salt of earth, sweat, tears, and empty farms
comes the final embrace of God's Labor Of Love*

"Dixon Terry I knew through my and his involvement with the same issues in the 1980's," Phil

Continued on next page.

explained. "I'm proud to acknowledge my democratic activism and my association with Dixon Terry and the things we were working for," he continued. "Father Norm White has been an inspiration for me as well." Father White was Rural Life Director for the Catholic Archdiocese of Dubuque until earlier this year.

The Specht's have two sons who have already moved away from home. Then there is Nathan, who is 16, and Jon, who is 8. Phil and Sharon have been married twenty years.

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

W. Edwards Deming: "What does that have to do with grass farming?"

by Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

Recently, Public TV ran a program about the late W. Edwards Deming, a management consultant known for his provocative philosophy. Deming was born in Sioux City, Iowa in 1900. Most of his early years were spent in academic circles teaching business management. In 1950, Deming was selected by General MacArthur to assist the Japanese in rebuilding their devastated economy.

In Japan, Deming became a legend. His management principles are really a philosophy that calls for radical changes in how we think about everything we do. It represents a holistic view and rejects the fragmented, analytical, reductionist approach westerners are traditionally comfortable with.

"Deming insisted that what he taught the Japanese starting in 1950, was an entirely new management system based at least in part on statistical analysis. The idea was that you could not consider each process complete in itself, you had to look at the system as a whole, and the system must include not only your processes but also your supplies and customers. Your customers likes and dislikes, wishes and desires had to be monitored and fed back into the system so that the system would continually improve, always delighting your customers with results that exceeded their expectations."

The Deming philosophy dispels many traditional beliefs (paradigms) that we base our thinking

A key principle of Deming is that cooperation is a requirement in any quality system.

on. One of the core beliefs most of our actions are based on is that competition is the key to success. We are told that competition is part of human nature, that it brings out the best in us, that it is fun, and that it builds character. According to Dr. Deming, "None of this is true. In fact, competition is our own ruination."¹

A key principle of Deming is that cooperation is a requirement in any quality system. Every component in every aspect must contribute on a cooperative win-win basis to produce quality results for everyone involved. Competition is not ruled out but is accepted within rules and with a cooperative aim.

Watt's steam engine ushered in the industrial revolution. Management principles concentrated upon quantity production. The Deming philosophy maintains that quality is more important than quantity and that it is less expensive long term. A quality-minded organization must have quality at all levels, from design and purchased inputs to operations and marketing. For this to be a reality, every person involved must be a true team member.

What does that have to do with grass farming? The Deming philosophy, while similar to (but not nearly as ecologically complete as) Holistic Resource Management, is a distinct alternative to conventional management. It represents another example of an improved decision-making process that can help improve our operations.

A visioning process, "Who are we and what are we doing?" lies at the very beginning of this management style. Continuing education, developing leadership, building up trust, driving out fear, breaking down barriers – are all components of business management. These principles apply directly to farms and farm management.

You will hear more about Deming in the future. These principles can help us overcome the barriers we meet in developing a sustainable agriculture.

¹ ("Thinking About Quality," by Dobyns and Crawford-Mason, 1994. Available through the PFI library network – contact your district director.)

FROM THE KITCHEN

Marj Stonecypher, Floyd

What a summer, if you can call it that! First it's wet and cold, then so hot you can't stand it. I took a trip to Fallon, Nevada, to see my son and his family. He has two girls, ages 3 and 5, and a son 12. Fun to be with them but nice to come home. Those little ones have a lot of life in them.

Just marinated some sirloin tip steaks to put on the grill this evening. Here is what I marinated them in. It's really delicious.

MARINADE

- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1 tsp. dry mustard
- 1 tsp. thyme
- 1/2 cup sherry
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. onion powder



Place steak, pork chops or roast in marinating dish and pour mixture over. (Some cuts of meat I sprinkle with tenderizer seasoning, or you can add 1/4 cup oil to above mixture.) Let set for about three hours or overnight, turning occasionally. Grill and eat.

EASY BROWNIES

Melt together:

- 3 1/2 Tbsp. cocoa or 1 square chocolate
- 1 stick margarine (1/2 Tbsp. more if cocoa)

Take off heat (you can melt in microwave).

Add:

- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup flour
- 2 eggs
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips

Mix together and bake for 15 minutes at 350 degrees in a 9x13" pan.

FROSTING

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/4 cup margarine
- 1 square chocolate (or 3 1/2 Tbsp. cocoa plus 1 Tbsp. margarine)

Boil for one minute.

Have a good and safe harvest. Take time out for yourself and come to the house for meals.

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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

Individual or family membership: \$10 for one year, \$25 for three years.

Please enclose check or money order payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa" and mail to:

Practical Farmers of Iowa
2035 190th St.
Boone, IA 50036-7423

CORRESPONDENCE

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.

District 1 (Northwest): Paul Mugge, 6190 470th St., Sutherland, 51058. (712) 446-2414.

District 2 (North Central): Don Davidson, RR 1, Box 133, Grundy Center, 50638. (319) 824-6347.

District 3 (Northeast): Laura Krouse, 1346 Springville Rd., Mt. Vernon, IA 52314. (319) 895-6924.

District 4 (Southwest): Vic Madsen, PFI President, 2186 Goldfinch Ave., Audubon, 50025. (712) 563-3044.

District 5 (Southeast): Jeff Olson, PFI Vice President, 2273 140th St., Winfield, 52659. (319) 257-6967.

Associate board member for District 1: Colin Wilson, 5482 450th St., Paullina, 51046. (712) 448-2708.

Associate board member for District 2: Doug Alert, 972 110th St., Hampton, IA 50441. (515) 456-4328.

Associate board member for District 3: Walter Ebert, RR 1, Box 104, Plainfield, 50666. (319) 276-4444.

Associate board member for District 5: David Lubben, RR 3, Box 128, Monticello, IA 52310. (319) 465-4717.

PFI Executive Vice President & Treasurer: Dick Thompson, 2035 190th St., Boone, 50036. (515) 432-1560.

Coordinators: Rick Exner, Gary Huber, Room 2104, Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa, 50011. (515) 294-1923.

Internet: dnxexner@iastate.edu x1ghuber@exnet.iastate.edu

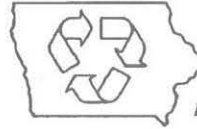
Public Relations Coordinator: Maria Vakulskas Rosmann, 1222 Ironwood Rd., Harlan, 51537. (712) 627-4653.



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