

the **Practical Farmer**

A Newsletter of Practical Farmers of Iowa | Vol. 20, #2 | Summer 2005



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Save the Date!

The 2006 PFI Annual Conference has been set for Jan. 13-14 at the Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn. We're planning some great things so stay tuned for developments.



Cover photo: Ron Rosmann demonstrates his Buffalo row cultivator for the crowd attending the PFI 20th Anniversary Field Day held June 30 on the Rosmann Family Farms. (Photo by Fred Iutzi.) More field day photos in the fall issue.

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www.practicalfarmers.org



PFI Glimpses

By Robert Karp

Summer is now upon us with all its physical demands and recreational opportunities. Knowing the impact of these upon our attention span, I propose in this article a number of quick updates drawn from the recent life and work of PFI. We hope you all have a safe, productive and enlightening summer.

New PFI Legacy Award established

For over 15 years now the PFI Board has awarded an annual sustainable agriculture achievement award at our annual conference. The purpose of the award is to recognize individuals in Iowa who through their work have courageously advanced sustainable agriculture principles in the world at large.

This spring the PFI Board decided it was time to also have a formal way to recognize PFI members whose work on behalf of sustainable agriculture has been felt not so much in the public sector, but rather directly on the land through their own lifelong farming or conservation efforts.

This award will be given no more than once a year and will be presented at a summer field day. Members may be nominated for the award at any time by submitting a letter to the PFI board of directors. Recipients receive a framed certificate and a profile in the PFI newsletter. A press release will also be distributed to the media.

See page 5 for a profile of Harold Wright, the first winner of the PFI Legacy Award! Harold received his award at the PFI 20th Anniversary Field Day on June 30 in Harlan.

Non-farmer representatives on the PFI Board

Those who missed the business meeting at this year's annual conference may be interested to know that members present voted overwhelmingly in support of changes to the PFI Articles of Incorporation that open the door for the PFI Board's expansion to include two non-farmer representatives. The PFI Board must now adopt bylaw chang-

es to move this process forward. Keep your ears peeled for a formal call for nominations. In the meantime, start thinking if you know of a non-farmer who would make an excellent PFI Board member, or if you yourself are interested.

Farewell to Sandra :-)

It is always difficult when a valued member of the PFI staff team leaves us, and so it is with Sandra Trca-Black, who has been the PFI office manager and membership service coordinator for the last three years. Sandra is having a baby in August and will be building a home-based business in the coming years.

Sandra's many accomplishments at PFI include setting up: a new computer server and network for staff that is both functional and legal (don't ask!); a centralized filing system that has revolutionized our capacity for staying on top of the 10 to 30 grants we administer each year; new and more efficient systems for accounts payable and accounts receivable; not to mention bringing order and clarity to the plethora of PFI and related publications that flow in and out of our offices like so many lost children looking for a home! A new PFI database and process for member renewals is also being put in place as we speak. For this and so much more, thank you Sandra!

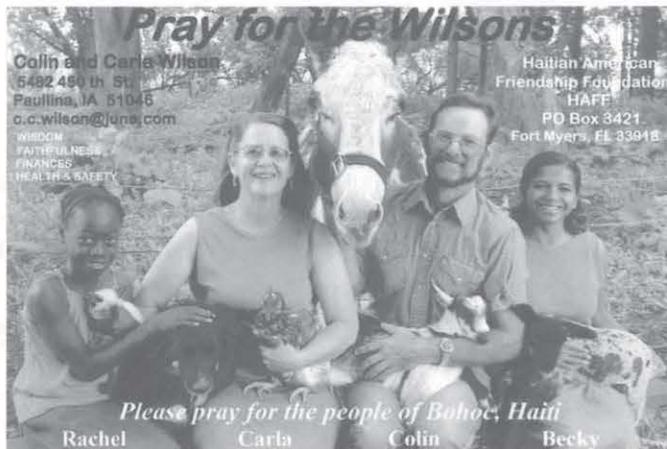
Where is my membership renewal form?

Many of you are probably wondering (what else do you have to worry about!) why you haven't received a PFI membership renewal form in the mail. The reason is that we have been in the process of putting in place a new member database that will allow us to implement a new process for member renewals, whereby each member has a given month for renewals rather than all members renewing at the same time each year. This new system has taken longer to set up than we imagined, which has delayed the mailing of renewal forms. Don't worry, no one's membership has been dropped during this transition, and you should get a form in the mail soon. Thanks for your patience! ☺

Wilson's Bring Ag. Know-how to Haiti

Every so often, we are given an opportunity to help those who need us. What's really great is when those with the ability make the sacrifices necessary to help. That's exactly what PFI members Colin and Carla Wilson did. They spent all of February and March in Haiti at a 40-acre farm and secondary school where they candidated to become full-time missionaries. At HAFF, the Haitian American Friendship Foundation, Colin helped with maintenance and repair and Carla taught in the school and translated for medical and veterinarian teams.

"Our most rewarding work," said Colin, "the work God is calling us back to, is listening, learning and sharing livestock husbandry ideas with local farm families there." Unlike American farmers, Colin said, there is not much transmission of knowledge from parents or neighbors, since parents often die young



and many people cannot afford livestock. "Haitian farmers feel isolated from the knowledge they so desperately need," he said. Eighty percent of the people there live in abject poverty and depend on one or two hogs as a bank account—for medical emergencies and to send their children to school.

"Haiti has seen the failure of many grandiose projects based on lots

of outside resources," Colin said. "Instead of projects, they need people—people who are committed to staying and helping them grow one step at a time in harmony with the fragile physical and economic environment around them, using resources available to them."

To help Haitian farm families, the Wilsons will be working together as a couple using what they call Christian Agricultural Mentoring. Colin credits their PFI experience, their spiritual background and the raising of five older adopted children as the basis for
(continued on pg 13)

February and March Board Meeting Notes

An abbreviated board meeting was held Feb. 10 in conjunction with the cooperators meeting. A review of the financial statements for fiscal year Oct. 1, 2003 to Sept. 30, 2004 showed that we were not as prosperous as years past due to some key funding ending. The flexibility of our staff has been instrumental in helping keep our organization in the black. Our staff is truly dedicated to the goals of our organization and has made sacrifices as needed to keep our organization fiscally responsible. The new unrestricted fund-raising activities of our organization are going well. We appear to be on track, based on our goals for this first year of the effort.

March 22, 2005

Director Robert Karp reported that a \$675,000 proposal for the Value Chain Partnerships Project would be funded by the Kellogg Foundation (although we learned subsequently that Kellogg only wishes to fund year one of the project). Also, the National Research Initiative will provide funds to create an "Integrated Research, Education and Outreach Program for Niche Pork Production." Approximately \$100,000 will go to PFI from this funding. In addition, Jean Wallace Douglas has committed grant support for PFI program work. All this should help improve finances.

Brad Miller reported on plans for youth camp held June 6-11 at the Boone Area Y-Camp. The theme was "Around the World in Four Days" and looked at different cultures throughout the world and how they interact with their environments. Discussion also included how PFI can address the needs of our mid-sized farmers and enhance farmer-to-farmer and member-to-member networking. Staff presented ideas that the board added to and critiqued. We also explored ideas of establishing a new relationship with ISU.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Franzenburg
District 3

Legacy of Conservation

Harold Wright has devoted his life to saving the soil

Harold Wright was given PFI's first Legacy Award June 30 as part of the 20th Anniversary Field Day at the Rosmann Family Farms near Harlan. See page 3 for more on the award itself.

At 89, Harold Wright makes the trip regularly from his home in Ames to the Tama County farm he's had a hand in working since he was a boy. Harold makes the trek to ensure his renter continues to plant on the contour lines and strips he carefully set out years ago. He makes the trip to walk and enjoy the land, while he's still able.

"I'll have my renter following that pattern as long as I'm around," Harold said with a smile.

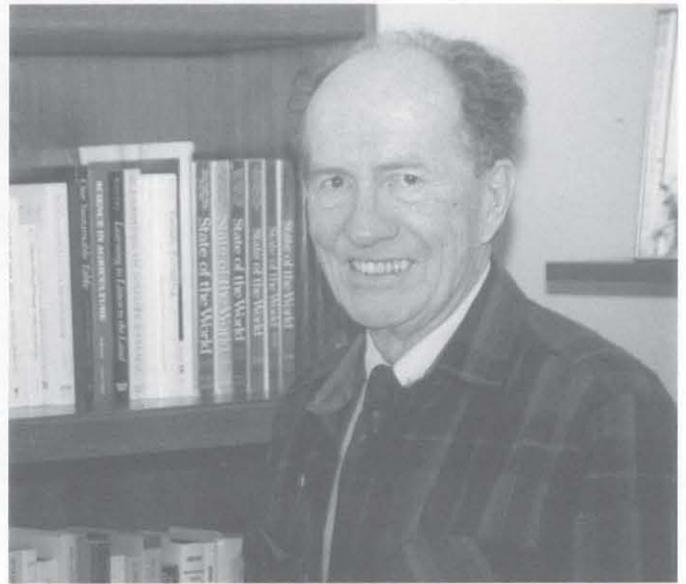
It was back in 1946 when Harold first encountered sustainable agriculture. He was fresh home from the service and working various jobs in and around Cedar Rapids. "I got acquainted with Russ Hughes, a farmer near Marion, and worked for him on Saturdays," Harold remembered. Russ was a big believer in contour farming and shared his views on soil conservation with the young Wright.

"He didn't have near the erosion his neighbors did," Harold said. "So I got the idea driving the tractor around the hill, why don't I do this on my farm? So I did."

The fact that Harold didn't yet have a farm of his own did nothing to dampen his newfound resolve.

The resolve lived on as he went to work in Ames for the Iowa Department of Transportation as a land appraiser and married Pat, a secretary at ISU and someone he knew from his days in Cedar Rapids. In 1963, the couple added 40 acres to the 80 Harold's late father had farmed...and Harold was all set. "My dad farmed with horses, straight up and down those highly erodible hills," he remembered. Harold soon introduced contour farming, nursing the land back to health. He added ridge-till planting after reading about the practice in an article about Dick Thompson in *Wallace's Farmer*.

"I called Dick and went out to his farm and we talked until after the sun went down," Harold recalled. These were the early heady days of sustainable agriculture and Harold later participated in the meetings that led to the formation of PFI.



"I believe in it. I believe in saving the soil."

—Harold Wright

"I believe in it," Harold said. "I believe in saving the soil." He described the 40-foot-wide alternating strips of corn, beans, oats and hay with fondness, adding, "I like the looks of it, all the different shades of green. I call it landscaping the farm."

Harold has observed the changes in Iowa farmland through the years on his drives from Ames to Tama County. "You hardly see any oats or hay," he said, shaking his head. "It's not right; something's wrong."

Remaining a tireless sustainable agriculture student and booster, Harold keeps up with all the latest sustainable ag-related books and publications. As PFI began in 1985, Harold began cultivating a library of sustainable agriculture publications, which over the years he offered for loan. His library now contains over 130 books and many other publications in addition to that.

In the end, Harold is confident about the land that he has sustained and that has sustained him: "I've taken care of this piece of land and I'm satisfied with what I've done. I'm not worried about what will happen to it." ☞



Scott Weinberg has raised lambs on pasture for the past eight years on his Northeast Iowa farm.

On the Lamb

Case study by Clara Muggli,
John Seymour-Anderson and Jim Ennis

Northeast Iowa lamb producer Scott Weinberg was one of several Iowa pasture-raised producers who participated in a Food Alliance/PFI project to examine and develop marketing strategies. Scott's work with the project included an examination of what marketing points he wanted to emphasize and the creation of a snazzy marketing brochure.

Last year, Northeast Iowa farmer Scott Weinberg was part of a PFI-sponsored project with Midwest Food Alliance to examine which messages and communication strategies are effective in communicating the benefits of pasture-raised systems to consumers. Other participants were PFI members Tom and Kristi German, and Nan Bonfils and Don Adams. Each utilizes pasture-raised production systems and markets products directly to consumers.

Consumer surveys and focus groups were first conducted to determine which messages about pasture-raised meats were most convincing and compelling to the average consumer. The focus groups overwhelmingly indicated that the most compelling messages focused on taste, health and nutrition; support for local farmers, and, to a lesser extent, environmental sustainability and humane treatment of animals.

A consultant then conducted farm visits and interviews with the participating producers. The consultant developed marketing materials, catering to each producer's desired consumer market and focusing on those messages that the consumer focus groups determined were most effective and compelling.

Following is a description of how the project worked for Scott Weinberg and a summary of the results.

From goats to lambs

Scott Weinberg has raised lambs on pasture for the past eight years. The 360-acre farm he grew up on is dedicated to corn and beans, while his 130-acre sheep farm is made up mostly of pasture. Scott's lambs are born, weaned and raised on a rotational grazing schedule that combines a planted mixture of perennial rye and white clover with naturally occurring grasses and legumes.

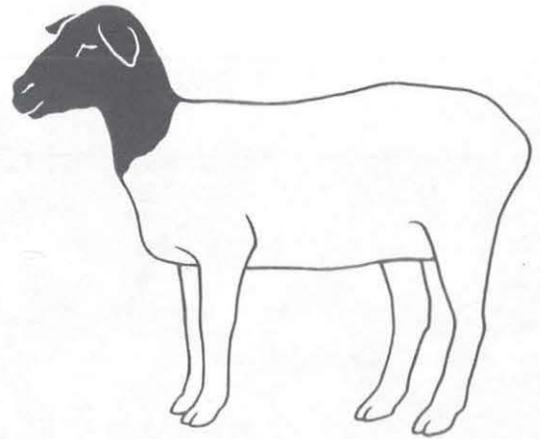
Before turning to lambs, Scott ran about 600 angora goats. When wool and mohair support programs were discontinued in the '90s, he switched to meat goats, but an unstable market provided the incentive to establish a 140-head flock of ewes, which he has now built up to 325 head.

"They come up with the highest gross per acre of livestock," he explains. "They are the most management rewarding. You do a good job, they do good; do a poor job, they do poorly. I can grow about 20 percent a year without hurting cash flow too much. They are self financed—no money borrowed, nor ever will be."

Scott raises only Dorper sheep, a South African breed known for its lean, tender meat. He maintains a winter-harvest schedule, which he says garners the highest-quality lamb. In his winter-harvest system, ewes get an optimum diet of high-quality spring pasture growth—providing them with much-needed nutrition and energy—before their spring lambing. This means that lambs are born healthier and stronger. Additionally, during the lambs' first months of life, they

have access to the spring pasture grasses, the best of the year. (Scott says he has "some of the best green grass salad bowl pastures around.")

Scott's wife, Teri, works a full-time town job and helps out with bottle lambs in spring. Daughters Sheena, 21, and Kendalle, 18, both attend the University of Northern Iowa. Sheena lives off the farm and Kendalle helps with bottle lambs and banding of all young lambs. In addition to farming, Scott runs Flying Iron, LLC, which specializes in iron design and signs.



The Dorper breed is marketed as the "Champagne of Lamb."

Markets and attributes

Before the start of the project, Scott primarily marketed his lamb to the Bosnian immigrant community in Waterloo. He relied primarily on word-of-mouth, occasionally advertising at venues in Bosnian neighborhoods. Customers usually purchased live lamb on the farm for \$1 per pound live weight. Scott's goal was to find a market more receptive to the pasture-raised message, one that would bring him a premium of \$3.50 to \$4 per pound. Before the project started, he was exploring the option of selling lambs to a Wisconsin farmer/marketer who would finish the lambs himself and then sell the meat to area grocery stores and restaurants. While Scott was hopeful this move would increase profits, he still had concerns that his Planned Lamb brand and its pasture-raised aspect wouldn't be promoted.

Scott's decision to participate in this project was therefore driven by his interest in promoting those attributes and reaping the subsequent premiums. After working with the consultant, Scott identified food service as his most promising market, spe-

Member Profile



“I would like it to be the taste aspect, but I don’t think [customers] really believe me until they actually try it.”

—**Scott Weinberg on which marketing message most appeals to customers**

cifically restaurants and grocery stores. The consultant then designed marketing materials to cater to these specific markets, focusing most heavily on meat quality, flavor and nutritional value (those messages that the consumer focus groups deemed most effective).

John Seymour Anderson, the consultant contracted to design the marketing materials for each project participant, visited Planned Lamb Farm in the summer of 2004. He compiled detailed field notes and ulti-

mately designed a tri-fold brochure for Scott’s use in marketing his pasture-raised lamb. Anderson used the results of the consumer focus groups in determining which aspects of the pasture-raised message to highlight.

Measuring success

Six months after the development of the marketing brochure, Scott had widely distributed the brochures, some by mail to existing customers, but most to potential customers who requested further information.

He also distributed brochures at the art shows where he exhibits his iron sign creations. These are a good venue for his pasture-raised message, providing access to exactly the sort of group he wants to target: an upscale clientele familiar with lamb and other gourmet products, which is also attuned to the flavor and nutritional benefits of pasture-raised meat.

Scott finds the brochure much more effective in drawing new or potential customers than in retaining existing

ones. He believes people will continue buying his product because of its superior quality and flavor, so he doesn’t require additional marketing messages to retain existing customers.

Scott had initially identified his target audience as an upscale clientele who would pay a premium for pasture-raised lamb. As already mentioned, after working on the development of the brochure, he determined that restaurant owners and chefs would be the most promising market in the future.

Six months later, Scott had not begun to target the restaurant market. Instead, he continued to focus on direct marketing to consumers, since he found the brochure to be very successful in appealing to an upscale clientele. Judging from the great customer response to the pasture-raised messages presented in the brochure, Scott believes there is “tremendous opportunity out there” for marketing his products.

Health and nutrition message most effective

When asked which messages presented in the brochure most appealed to customers, Scott said, “I would like it to be the taste aspect, but I don’t think [customers] really believe me until they actually try it. Probably the health and nutrition aspect is the most important to them. Then, if I can get them to try the lamb, the taste aspect comes on pretty strong.”

When asked which messages were least interesting or appealing to customers, Scott said that most customers were, in fact, “interested in pretty much the whole package. I haven’t seen any ‘I don’t care’ attitudes at all.”

Scott expressed positive feelings about the final brochure format and

content. “We rewrote that material a lot,” he said, “and each time it got a little bit better. Today, I don’t know if I would change anything.”

When asked about the “shelf-life” of the brochure, if it would lose its relevance in the near future, Scott said the brochure should be beneficial to his business for a long time to come. “It’ll hang right in there,” he said.

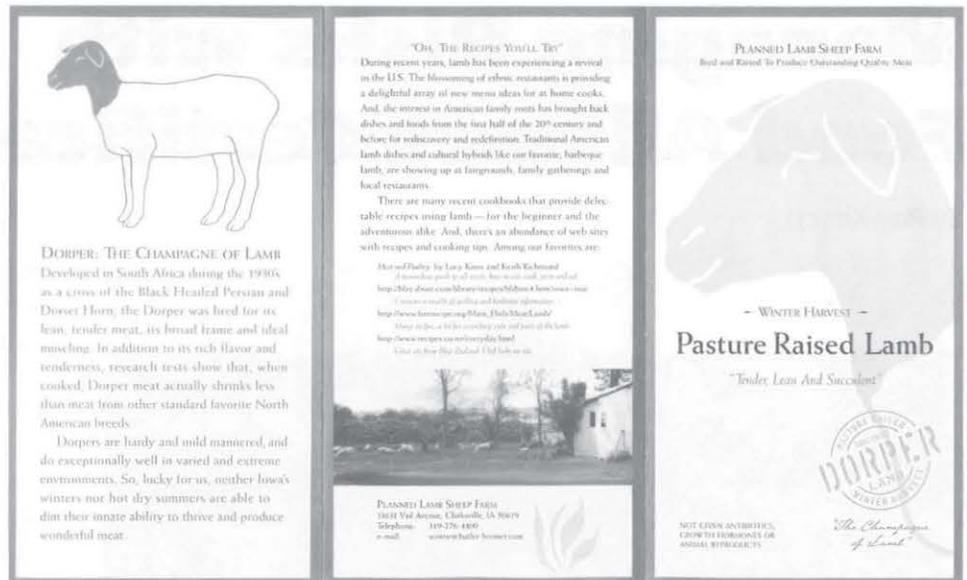
Since Scott’s brother owns the shop that printed the brochures, he can easily reprint them, and likely will.

Scott said his success with the project depended on the fact that when he began his meetings with the consultant, he already had a good sense of the marketing messages he wanted to get across to consumers. He believes that a consultant would be wasting his or her time by attempting to pursue a similar project with farmers who “didn’t have any idea how they wanted to sell their product” or were not able to tell their own “story.”

Having said that, however, Scott reiterated that the consultant did help him strengthen his own marketing concept and assisted him in telling his story. “He brought out a lot of points that I hadn’t thought of,” Scott said.

The consultant also helped Scott express his ideas in a way that appealed to customers. “I was really pushing for the grass-fed aspect of the product, but I just wasn’t wording it correctly,” said Scott. “John was able to word it much better than I could. It certainly worked out well.”

When asked if he would benefit from ongoing marketing consultation of the sort provided during the project, Scott answered that having a website that went along with the brochure would be “tremendously beneficial.” ☞



Scott sent the brochure mostly to potential customers who requested more information. Pictured above are three panels from the brochure.

Pasture-raised messages

The final brochure focused on these aspects of pasture-raised lamb:

- **Flavorful.** The Dorper breed—known for its lean, tender meat—is ideally suited to pasture life and a winter harvest cycle. The result is a high quality, flavorful product, which the brochure calls the “Champagne of Lamb.” The brochure also lists books and websites containing gourmet lamb recipes.

- **Seasonal.** The winter-harvest system results in the highest-quality lamb; the brochure markets the product as a “seasonal delicacy.”

- **Local.** The brochure highlights the fact that the lamb is produced and processed in Iowa: “The delicate, worldly flavor of lamb perfected on Iowa pasture.”

- **Nutritious.** The pasture-based system provides for optimum animal

health. Because a grass-based diet is natural to sheep, the pasture system results in a “lean, healthy, nutrient-dense and protein-rich meat.”

- **Healthy (absence of antibiotics and hormones).** Animals raised on pasture don’t require antibiotics or growth hormones because they have access to a diet to which they are naturally suited.

- **Environmentally Responsible.** The pasture-based system is environmentally sustainable because pasture cover enriches the soil and prevents erosion.

- **Humane.** Both production and processing of the lamb are humane. The animals live a healthy life of open grazing. They are processed by a family-owned processor that, “without the hurry typical of large, industrial plants, is better for the livestock.”

Managing Risks with Food Alliance Certification

By Ray Kirsch



Florence and Dave Minar manage risks on their Minnesota grass-based dairy with Food Alliance certification.

The author

Ray Kirsch is the Midwest certification coordinator for Food Alliance.

Learn more

For an application or more information about Food Alliance, contact Ray at 651-653-0618, ray@foodalliance.org. You can also learn more (and download an application) at the Food Alliance website: www.foodalliance.org.

The warmth of summer is here and new opportunities abound. For everyone who farms, this is also a time when plans are revisited and risks assessed. Although we're still infused with the promises of spring, we know that it takes a lot of work and substantial cooperation from Mother Nature to bring home a crop. Maybe that's why we plant several crops, or take other measures to spread the risks of the season.

From squash bugs to hail, there are lots of risks associated with farming. Added to these are the risks of marketing—of not being able to get your products to the right customers at the right price. And then there are the risks of financing and cash flowing throughout the year. If we talked with our parents and grandparents, it's likely they would confirm all these worries. They don't seem to go away.

So if there's little new under the sun with respect to these worries, is there anything new to better deal with them? The answer is yes.

One new way of dealing with farming risks is third-party certification. The basic strategy is to certify what you do on your farm in order to distinguish your products in the marketplace and add value to them. When consumers connect with your certification, you improve your marketing and reduce your risk. Some farms—organically certified farms, for example—have been using this successful strategy for years.

One of the newer and more inclusive certifications available to help farms reduce risk is Food Alliance certification. Food Alliance certification tells consumers that your farm is environmentally and socially responsible and that it's local. And it does this for a wide range of farms.

Here are some of the unique features of Food Alliance certification:

Reducing market risk

Food Alliance certification opens the door to new and growing markets for your products. Farmers have traditionally marketed commodity products through conventional channels. Reliance on a few, limited markets can be a risky proposition. Food Alliance certification provides you access to important food buyers who understand the integrity of your products. And your products can be differentiated from others in the marketplace—differentiated at a premium price.

Reducing environmental risk

Food Alliance certification leads to a greener environment. As regulators and the public further scrutinize agriculture, farmers may have to modify their operations to meet

these new expectations. Food Alliance certification pro-actively addresses environmental expectations and provides third-party verification that standards are met. Food Alliance farmers report that certification positions them favorably before a public that is increasingly concerned about where their food comes from and how it was grown.

Reducing production risk

Food Alliance producers make use of sound production practices that buffer farms from some of Mother Nature's tricks. For example, Food Alliance-certified farms that use water-conserving crop rotations are less likely to suffer from drought. Likewise, if you're using traps and degree-day models in your IPM program, you're not only a good fit for Food Alliance certification, you'll likely avoid pest damage to your crops.

Reducing financial risk

Food Alliance certification is an integral component of your business plan. If your business is growing or transitioning, access to credit is essential. Lenders place great importance on a thorough business plan that addresses marketing goals and commitments. Food Alliance certification—and your ability to work with Food Alliance market partners—may be the final piece of the puzzle that moves your business plan forward. Your marketing plan, coupled with a strong Food Alliance environmental scorecard, forges a compelling story for any lender or investor.

So when you certify with Food Alliance, you get risk management on all sides of the farm fence—certification helps you manage production and environmental risks and helps you manage marketing and financial risks as well. Food Alliance works for you whether you direct market, sell to the natural food co-op in town or you want your kids at the local college to have better dinners.

I encourage you to consider Food Alliance certification for your farm or business. A national certification program that works locally to help you reduce production, environmental, marketing and financial risks... Now that's something new under the sun. ☺

Food Alliance Is...



Food Alliance is one of the nation's leading certifiers of environmentally friendly and socially responsible farms and foods. Food Alliance Midwest is the regional affiliate of Food Alliance, serving Iowa and the Upper Midwest. We're located in St. Paul, Minn.

Food Alliance certification distinguishes and adds value to regional farm products with the goal of rewarding farms

for their stewardship. Shoppers want to know where their food comes from and how it's grown. But they don't want to search for this information; they want it to be easy. The Food Alliance certification seal makes it easy for consumers to identify local, environmentally friendly and socially responsible foods. And from there, it's a short step to rewarding certified producers with those shopping dollars.

Food Alliance certification is designed to be accessible to a wide range of farms exhibiting good stewardship—e.g. soil and water conservation, integrated pest management and healthy and humane care for livestock. Conservation-minded farmers of all types (including PFI members!) are candidates for certification.

In addition to providing third-party certification, Food Alliance also offers market development and public relations support for Food Alliance-certified farms and foods. We do this by opening doors that farms normally, acting individually, would have trouble opening. Food Alliance works with market partners—food purveyors who are committed to sourcing and selling Food Alliance-certified products. Our market partners run the gamut, from retail and natural foods grocers to food service companies that supply colleges and hospitals.

Food Alliance supports certified farms with public relations through events and publications. Individual farms might find it difficult to be featured on National Public Radio or in the *Wall Street Journal*, but Food Alliance can reach these outlets with the stories of our farms.

For more information about Food Alliance certification, our market partners and our public relations work, visit www.foodalliance.org.

An Ecological Approach to Oat Rust

By Rick Exner

No, this isn't the brown stuff on the underside of your car. It isn't even the dreaded Asian Soybean Rust that has given farmers a fright this year. This is crown rust of oats, a plague that has been around as long as oat has been raised in the Midwest.

Crown rust sometimes devastates the crop, contributing to the variability that discourages farmers from including oat in their rotation. PFI is partnering with ISU small grains breeder Jean-Luc Jannink and farmers and scientists in Minnesota to try a different approach to this disease. A grant of more than \$111,000 from the North Central Region SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) will allow this work to go forward in 2006.

For the better part of a century, plant breeding has developed varieties resistant to crown rust of oat (*Puccinia coronata*). But crown rust is a sneaky fungus. It keeps changing, bypassing the resistance bred into the

crop. Scientists responded by breeding in a new resistance gene from wild oat and its relatives. Then rust developed resistance to that new gene as well. Now breeders are running out of resistance genes in the wild. Is this the end of the road for oat on Midwest farms? We hope not. Oat is too useful as a nurse crop for forages, a clean-up crop for nutrients and weeds and a high-fiber feed for baby pigs.

Back in the 1950s, Iowa scientists such as Dr. Artie Browning tried a different approach to managing oat rust. They created varieties that were biodiverse. In this "multi-line" approach, some oat plants in the field were resistant to one strain of rust, while other plants were resistant to other strains. The crop could compensate for losses to any particular strain of rust that might be prevalent in a given year, much as wild plants do in natural systems. In addition, the oat diversity reduced the pressure on the rust to develop new infective strains. The multi-line approach definitely

worked. However, it took more time and resources to develop oat varieties that were a mix of different genetics.

Small grains breeding has even less resources today than half a century ago when multi-lines were popular. But there may still be a way farmers can use biodiversity on their own to manage crown rust. If producers knew how to combine different commercially available oat varieties, they might be able to create their own biodiverse, multi-variety seeding.

The key piece of information would be how to combine those commercial varieties. And to do that, farmers and scientists would have to know what kinds of rust resistance are contained in each variety. Our project will generate just this information by inoculating varieties with different rust strains and by evaluating the performance of different varietal mixtures with producers in Iowa and Minnesota. If you raise oat and might be interested in participating, contact the PFI Farming Systems Program at 515-294-5486.

PNMWG Efforts Lead to New Grant

USDA recently approved a \$400,000 grant to Iowa State University (ISU) for a niche pork production project designed to enhance the prosperity of small farms in the upper Midwest and elsewhere. The two-year project will involve a wide variety of people, including swine producers, veterinarians, and ISU state and field specialists.

The project will focus on three main areas of work: 1) developing optimal herd health intervention and prevention strategies for certified organic

and antibiotic-free hogs; 2) identifying key production issues affecting profitability and developing strategies to improve performance; 3) employing outreach strategies to enhance the long-term viability of niche pork farmers and farmer-led niche pork companies.

The project grew out of the efforts of the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG), a collaborative effort led by Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) and coordinated by PFI staff person Gary Huber.

In addition to PFI, project partners are the Iowa Pork Industry Center, the Iowa State University (ISU) Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, ISU Extension, the ISU Hoop Structures Research Group, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the University of Nebraska Department of Animal Science, the Iowa Farm Business Association, Niman Ranch, Eden Natural, and Organic Valley.

For more info, contact Gary at gary@practicalfarmers.org or 515-232-5661 (x103).

Edward Peak passes away at 67

PFI member Edward L. Peak, 67, of Newburg, Iowa, died of lung cancer on June 3. A strong supporter of family farms, he had been a PFI member since 1987 and was also a member of the Farm Unity Coalition and the Iowa Farmers Union.

The son of Edward Bennett and Sarah Evelyn Miller Peak, he is survived by his wife, Janis Peak, and two daughters, Sara Convery and Cyd Peak. Edward was born on Oct. 14, 1937 and grew up on a farm near Gilman. He received a B.S. in Agriculture Economics at Iowa State University in 1960. He returned to the family farm afterwards, but was involved in a tractor-car collision and his leg had to be partially amputated. Edward worked for DeKalb for 15 years before returning to full-time farm management.

He attended PFI field days and always practiced crop rotation to keep healthy soil on his land. Edward was a member of the Grinnell UCC - Congregational Church. His service was held June 18 at the Grinnell United Church of Christ-Congregational.

Robert Wolf news

Lansing PFI member Robert Wolf conducted a writing workshop at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music in Memphis in August. The goal was to document the neighborhood in which Stax Records emerged.

In July, Wolf ran a writing workshop for four old-time cowboys in Channing, Texas, who once worked on the famous Matador Ranch.

Finally, Wolf conducted a three-day workshop in Marshfield, Wis., bringing together 20 residents to envision their community's future.

Wilsons

(continued from pg 4)

this model. "Starting with individual families," Colin said, "we want to help people realize that greater knowledge of their Creator's love for them and the rest of his creation can help them discover His principles for creating a balanced farm and family system that meets their unique needs."

As parents and PFI members, the Wilsons know the value of listening to people talk through their problems. This encourages self-respect and respect for the importance of their work. It gives them hope that they will be able to find answers.

The Wilsons also know the value of farmers teaching farmers. "Through our experience looking at a variety of systems, our American education in problem-solving, our ability to travel

to meet various pioneer farmers, and the technology of videotaping, we want to simulate the PFI on-farm field days that encouraged us so much," Colin said. "Haitian farmers need to see other Haitian farmers succeeding. They need to decrease their dependency on foreign answers that don't fit here."

The Wilsons and their two daughters, Becky (25) and Rachel (10) hope to return to Haiti as full-time missionaries next February. Of course, it takes a lot of time and money to do this. The Wilsons receive a lot of their funding through churches, farm groups and individuals who believe what they're doing is important.

Contact the Wilsons at c.c.wilson@juno.com or 712-448-2708. ☺

The Farmer Funny

Art by Kevin de Laplante



The fast food industry recently launched a new promotion to compete with the wildly successful Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign.

Taste of Place

Capitalizing on Iowa's food culture and heritage

By Rachele H. Saltzman

The author

Rachele H. Saltzman is Iowa Arts Council folklife coordinator and grants coordinator.

Interested?

If you're interested in participating in this project, please go to www.iowaartscouncil.org to complete the Place-Based Food Survey (just type Place-Based Foods Survey into the browser window). There is also a recipe section for those of you with heritage recipes from your families, communities and friends. Or feel free to contact Rachele at riki.saltzman@iowa.gov, 515-242-6195.

An unedited version of this story is on the PFI website, www.practicalfarmers.org.

Oregon Pinots, Wisconsin cheese curds, Chesapeake Bay blue crabs—these are all foods that evoke a “taste of place.” Whether you feel the actual squeak of the cheese against your teeth or suck the sweet, spicy crab from its claw, these foods transport you to Wisconsin’s bucolic farms or Maryland’s small-town coastal crab shacks.

What Iowa foods can create comparable taste memories and place associations? A quick survey of the forums at Roadfood.com reveals the majority of “foodies” identify Iowa with pork tenderloins (www.allenbukoff.com/wildBPTiowa03/), MaidRites (or loose meat sandwiches) and quality pork and beef. Yet relatively little notice is paid to foods my colleagues at the Department of Cultural Affairs say provide an Iowa “taste of place,” such as popcorn, pie plant (rhubarb), Muscatine melons, Red Delicious apples, beef and sweet corn—or morel mushrooms and wild asparagus, which evoke childhood memories of family Sunday drives.

When I first started working here in 1995 as the state folklorist for the Iowa Arts Council, I came to realize that Iowa is about community, and therefore about food—but not just corn, beans and pork.

At the 1996 Smithsonian’s Festival of American Folklife and the subsequent Sesquicentennial Festival of Iowa Folklife, vendors sold, and traditional cooks demonstrated, dishes representative of Iowa’s largely Northern and Central European heritage. Czech red cabbage, Swedish potato sausage and Dutch pancakes were all there, as were Jewish challah, Mexican tamales and Meskwakie fry bread. Since then, I’ve

found that Bosnian pita (meat or cheese strudel), Vietnamese pho and Lebanese flatbread also evoke “tastes” found in Iowa today.

Yet Iowa remains better known for its agricultural commodities of corn, soybeans, hogs and cattle than for its table food. However, according to Rich Pirog’s *A Geography of Taste* (2004) (www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2004/taste_101304.htm), from before World War II until the 1950s, Iowa farms were highly diversified and relatively small. Since 1920, commodity production in Iowa has plummeted from 34 items to 10.

Although such products as Maytag Blue Cheese, Amana meats and wines, sweet corn and Muscatine melons (www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2004/muscatine_111804.htm) are recognized beyond our state’s borders, they are not necessarily linked to Iowa. The challenge then is to let people living in Iowa and away know about, taste, and continue to consume these Iowa foods—as well as visit the communities that produce them.

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University (www.leopold.iastate.edu/) recently launched a project exploring the notion of documenting and finding niche and specialty markets for “place-based foods” (www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2005/food_030205.htm), a place-based food being one that is tied to the climate and soil of a region as well as to the culture and traditions of its inhabitants. The goal is to identify those foods that can be distinguished as uniquely Iowan—and then tell their stories. The resulting report will include a selection of narratives from the state’s major

ecological regions regarding place-based Iowa foods with the potential to be used for marketing those foods, encouraging their production and attracting visitors to the communities and cultures that nurture them.

This project is looking for Iowans to tell their stories about the fruits, vegetables and meats grown, processed or prepared in Iowa. The place-based food should have some heritage basis, whether historical, ethnic, ecological or geographic, and a related story that makes its Iowa connection clear. If that connection entices visitors to a town or region to taste the food as well as the culture, so much the better.

Culinary tourism is an increasingly popular way people “visit” different cultures. We go to restaurants, food markets, read food magazines and cookbooks, and watch food-oriented films and the Food Network. Eating, like listening to music or going to museums, provides a window into other cultures. But with food, we aren’t restricted to just listening or seeing. We can use all of our senses—and even bring home a souvenir such as a special jam, a bag of pastries or a cookbook to recreate our travels.

But, as already mentioned, culinary tourism is not just about eating; it’s about exploring the places where food is grown, made and processed, about experiencing a taste of local life. Designated food heritage areas are attractive to destination travelers, stimulating business and government investments in locally grown and produced foods.

Iowans are increasingly interested in the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” movement, heralding a return to our rural past. We go to three-season farmers markets or rely on CSAs to get fresh and natural Iowa rhubarb, berries, meats

Culinary tourism is an increasingly popular way people “visit” different cultures.

and eggs—as well as get to know the people who produce our food. Tours of Iowa’s wineries near Dubuque, Des Moines and Council Bluffs are already in the works. According to Golden Hills RC&D viticulture technician Eli Bergmeier, promising wines include St. Croix (a syrah-like red dinner wine) and Edelweiss (a fruity, semi-sweet to off-dry white similar to a Riesling).

The flavors of Iowa come from the rich variety of regional and ethnic traditions of groups that have made Iowa their home over the years. Each has added its own distinct contribution to Iowa’s cultural heritage—from Native Americans to Europeans, from Asians to Africans, from South and Central Americans to Middle Easterners. No matter the group, its culture and food are inextricably intertwined.

Visitors and residents travel to the Amana Colonies to experience the past via the home-cooked German-style meals and fresh-baked breads and pies. Those who gain entrée into the Amana Church Society community can further experience rhubarb wine, potato dumplings and what I suspect may be the prototype for that all-American green bean casserole—but the cream is not from canned soup, and the string beans and the onions don’t come out of a can.

Throughout the spring, fall and summer, there are many food, ethnic and regional festivals in Iowa. You can visit Adel, West Point and Gladbrook for sweet corn festivals or drive over to Donnellson for Apple Daze or to Long Grove and Farmington to celebrate the



Tame Keongam prepares Tai Dam egg rolls, Des Moines (RH Saltzman, 2005)

strawberry crop. And make sure to stop in Cedar Rapids for the Czech and Slovak Museum and Library’s Houby Days—in honor of those wonderful morel mushrooms that grow wild in Iowa in the late spring.

And each year for Tai Dam New Year (celebrated the same time as Chinese and Vietnamese New Year in January or February), as well as for Lao New Year in mid-April, community members gather to eat huge quantities of traditional homemade dishes made from a combination of imported and Iowa-grown ingredients.

It’s impossible to think of any regionally or ethnically based event that does not include food processed if not always grown locally. Food is the focus or at least a significant part of the reason tourists want to visit and learn about different cultures.

Although there are many more
(continued on pg 21, recipes pg 16)

Recipes

Asian Indian-American Corn Patties

This recipe was adapted from a traditional one to use American ingredients.

Ingredients:

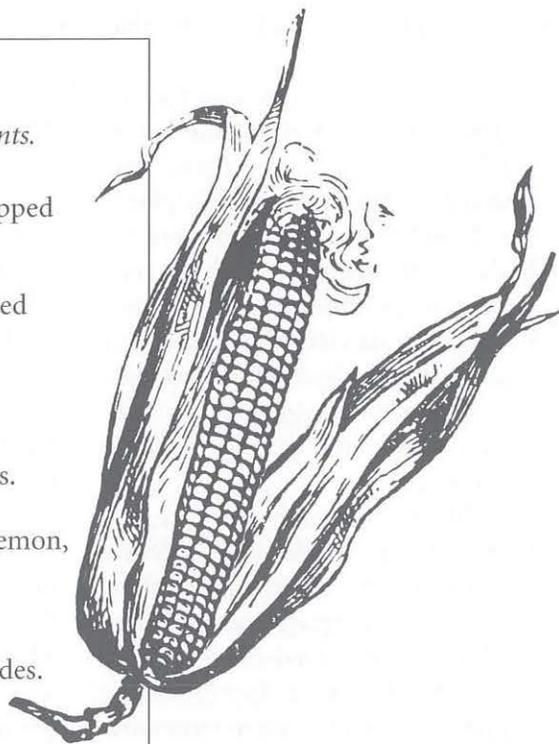
2 lbs. potatoes, boiled, peeled, mashed ½ c. fresh cilantro, finely chopped
2 c. frozen corn kernels 1 t. cumin seed
1 med. size carrot, grated 1 t. ground red pepper
5-6 string beans, finely chopped ½ inch fresh ginger root, grated
½ c. peas (frozen or fresh) 1 t. lemon juice
1 c. corn starch Salt to taste
Cream of wheat or bread crumbs (as needed)

Directions:

1. Mix corn kernels, carrot, beans, peas and microwave for 3-4 minutes.
2. Mash lightly while mixing.
3. Add cumin seeds, ground red pepper, corn starch, ginger, cilantro, lemon, mashed potatoes and mix well.
4. Make about 30 (medium) to 50 (small) patties.
5. Roll patties in cream of wheat or bread crumbs.
6. Fry in small amount of oil in a pan or skillet until brown on both sides.

Serve hot or cold with ketchup

– Prachi Mahajan, Des Moines



Banket (Dutch Letters)

Ingredients for dough:

4 c. all-purpose flour
¼ t. salt
2 t. sugar
1 lb. margarine (2 sticks)
¾-1 c. cold water

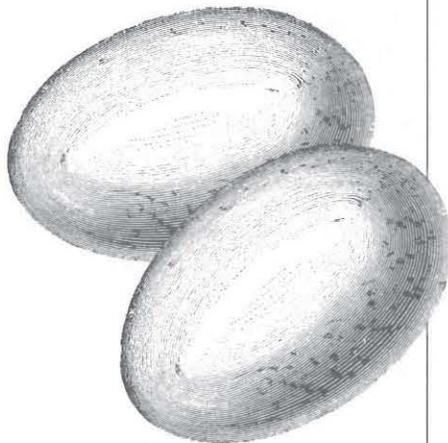
Filling:

1. Mix together filling ingredients and chill while preparing dough.
2. Roll filling into "ropes" to place on the dough.

Dough:

1. Cut margarine into dry ingredients.
2. Gradually add cold water.
3. Form dough into 5 equal balls and cover and chill for 2 hours.
4. Roll out each ball into about a 6"x12" rectangle. Place "rope" of almond filling onto edge of dough. Roll dough around filling, sealing ends. Place almond log onto cookie sheet. Brush beaten egg whites on dough and cut vent slits into top of dough before baking. Bake at 400 degrees for approximately 15 minutes or until lightly browned. The dough can also be formed into letters before baking. When cool, cut into 2-inch pieces for easy serving.

– Loretta Hegeman, Orange City, and Elaine Kane, Hawarden



AUGUST

- ❖ Celebrating a Decade of Teaching Lessons in a Land Ethic, Aug. 19-21, Upham Wood 4H EE Center, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Hands-on sessions, a trip to the Leopold family Shack and presentations by Leopold family members and scholars. Contact: 877-773-2070, efp@pheasantsforever.org, www.lep.org/calendar.php.
- ❖ Field School for Weed Ecology & Management, Aug. 22, 1:30-3:45pm, Southwest of ISU Agronomy Farm, Matt Liebman, ISU Agronomy, 515-294-7486; 4-5:30pm, Richard and Sharon Thompson farm, 2035 190th St., Boone, 515-432-1560.
- ❖ Sustainable Row Crops, Livestock and Home Gardens, Aug. 24, 4-8pm, Neely-Kinyon Research Farm, 2557 Norfolk Ave., Greenfield. Flax rotational study, breeding corn for quality, tillage intensity study, populations for organic azuki beans and more. Contact: 515-743-8412 (Adair County Extension office), krohrig@iastate.edu.
- ❖ Organic Flax Production and Marketing, Aug. 27, 1-4pm, Paul and Karen Mugge farm, 6190 470th St., Sutherland, 712-446-2414, pmugge@midlands.net.
- ❖ Low-Lin vs. Tofu Beans, Hybrids, Forage Tools, Finishing Beef, Aug. 29, Ron and Dottie Dunphy farm, 1758 Iris Ave., Creston, 641-782-4327, dunphyron@ll.net.

SEPTEMBER

- ❖ The Conservation Security Program at Work, Sept. 8, 2-7:30pm, Vic and Cindy Madsen farm, 2186 Goldfinch Ave., Audubon, 712-563-3044, vcmadson@metc.net.
- ❖ Field to Family, Sept. 8-11, Iowa City area. Celebration of local food and culinary arts. Contact: Laura Dowd, 319-338-2010, www.fieldtofamily.org.
- ❖ ZJ Farm Tour and Celebration, Sept. 10, 3-7:30pm, ZJ Farm, 5025 120th St. NE, Solon. Contact: Susan Jutz, 319-624-3052, zjfarm@ia.net.
- ❖ I-RENEW Energy Expo, Sept. 10-11, Prairiewoods, 120 E. Boyson Rd., Hiawatha. Workshops on wind, solar and other renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, sustainable living, green building, utility issues and perspectives. Contact: Michelle Kenyon Brown, 319-325-2701, echofarm@netins.net, www.irenew.org.
- ❖ Quality Corn, Crop Breeding for Farmers, Sept. 11, 2-5pm, Full Circle Farm, 1579 P Ave., Madrid. Contact: Don Adams and Nan Bonfils, 515-795-3288.
- ❖ Seeds and Breeds, Sept. 11-14, Ames. Covering the availability of genetics adapted to sustainable systems and relates directly to the corn work PFI is doing, as well as the upcoming oat project. Contact: www.agron.iastate.edu/seedsandbreeds.
- ❖ "Beyond Sweaters and Fluorescent Light Bulbs: Global Climate Change, Our Moral Responsibility of Earth Stewardship," Iowa Environmental Council annual meeting, Sept. 17, 8am-4pm, Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines. Guest speaker, Nina Utne of the *Utne Reader*. Contact: 515-244-1194, iecmal@earthweshare.org.
- ❖ Grazing as Cost-Effective Conservation, Sept. 24, 1-4pm. Linda and Ron Grice farm, rural South English. Contact: Linda and Ron, 319-667-2350, agricol@netins.net.
- ❖ Breeding and Selecting Corn for Quality, Sept. 27, 1pm, Mike Natvig and Amy Miller farm, 20074 Timber Ave., Cresco. Breeding crosses between elite inbred lines and high-yielding exotic populations. Contact: Mike Natvig and Amy Miller, 563-569-8358, northriver@iowatelecom.net.
- ❖ Small Towns and Economic Shocks: Business Networks and Entrepreneurial Communities, Sept. 28, Scheman Conference Center, Ames. Sociology research symposium, topics include community change, community capital, farmer entrepreneurship. Contact: www.soc.iastate.edu/researchsymposium.
- ❖ Management-Intensive Grazing for Economic & Environmental Sustainability, Sept. 27-29, University of Missouri Forage Systems Research Center, Brookfield, Mo. Contact: Joetta Roberts, 573-499-0886 (mornings only), mfgc@mchsi.com.

Background

If pork prices are good—either because of market cycles or due to specialty markets—producers may not give much thought to efficiency. Besides, on sustainable farms, pigs serve many functions in terms of utilizing and adding value to crop production, so the enterprise itself may escape examination. But markets change, and price premiums bring additional overhead costs. Many swine farmers eventually wonder, “Am I really making any money?”

Objective

There are tools available to help producers answer this question. Some are very simple and accessible, others are more sophisticated. PFI is working with ISU Extension and several alternative pork marketing groups to help producers gain a better understanding of their true cost of production. In 2004, a workshop on the farm of Wayne and Ruth Fredericks brought together experts who know how records make money for swine farmers.

Results

Producers in high-labor, low-capital, alternative systems need to judge their operations by different standards than other producers. Records are indispensable for this. The workshop presented three approaches to swine records. Extension swine specialist Dave Stender laid out a basic “triage” approach farmers can use for a quick first approximation. Extension swine specialist Mark Storlie described Group Trakker, which monitors production costs group by group. Producer Wayne Fredericks described his “standards-based” enterprise records, which ensure that all costs on the farm “find a home.” From “low-hanging fruit” to more complex decisions, there are many opportunities to improve the bottom line.

‘Am I Really Making Any Money?’

Record-keeping for producers

By Rick Exner and Fred Iutzi

Independent pork producers need all the help they can get, and the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG) is nurturing several efforts that have the potential to improve the livelihoods of farmers. One thing we are discovering is that many pig producers really don’t know where their enterprise stands financially. They don’t know their breakeven cost, and they don’t know how productive or efficient the operation needs to be to meet farm and family goals. Because the financial picture is hazy, these producers aren’t able to “benchmark” or compare their strong and weak points to those of other farmers.

New Projects

PFI, PNMWG and ISU Extension are concentrating as never before on records for the independent swine producer. The dual focus is on bringing the already accumulated knowledge and experience of farmers and other hog professionals to bear on the issue, while at the same time going forward with a strategy to fill in the blanks.

ISU Extension swine specialist Dave Stender has been looking closely at record-keeping and cost of production issues in alternative systems for years now, and PFI and PNMWG are working closely with him to survey

the landscape for options hog farmers can use. Results from a preliminary cost of production study are feeding into work that is currently underway, and a new project has just been funded.

Niman Ranch, Organic Valley and Eden Farms producers, representing a cross-section of the alternative swine industry, were asked to contribute 2002 production records to a study led by Dave Stender and funded by PNMWG and the Leopold Center. The information requested was geared toward providing key benchmarking data to existing farmers, helping supply prospective hog farmers with a good picture of alternative pork opportunities, and developing baseline information for farmer use in acquiring operating loans. A very low response rate to the survey made the results preliminary only, but they are providing direction for follow-up work.

Several tentative themes emerged from the 2002 records study, but first among them was variability: Feed costs for non-organic respondents in the low commodity-price year of 2002 ranged from \$15/cwt to \$27/cwt (average \$21/cwt), while non-feed costs displayed an even wider range, from \$9/cwt to \$24/cwt (average \$17/cwt). Combined with a death-loss range of 3 percent to 38 percent, these variations meant that the \$38/cwt

breakeven point Stender calculated needed to be unpacked too. Variation often contains opportunity, and the sample in this study was no exception: While the higher-cost third of the producers surveyed had an estimated \$43/cwt breakeven point, the lower-cost producers could get by with \$31/cwt. The next question is obvious: What are those farmers doing and how can others do it too? Work underway now will shore up these preliminary impressions and allow us to move forward.

Working closely with niche pork company personnel, Dave Stender and PFI staff have identified about 30 pork producers who are willing to anonymously contribute 2005 (and in some cases 2004) records, and over 30 more who lack full record-keeping systems but are interested in participating. Taking advantage of Leopold Center funding, project participants are working to help each other improve record-keeping practices and generate reliable, useful averages for benchmarking purposes. Data being collected is wide ranging, encompassing feed records, such as bushels of corn fed and value/weight of feed purchased during the year; operating cost records, such as vet bills, fuel, repairs, supplies and bedding; and sales information.

As analysis of 2005 records is completed in early 2006, individual producer participants will take advantage of a detailed analysis of their own production and cost numbers, while overall averages will be made available across the state in a series of meetings. For news of opportunities to obtain potentially cost-saving, profit-increasing information, watch for announcements in *The Practical Farmer*.

2004 workshop now online: “Am I Really Making Any Money”

In August, 2004, an all-star team came together on the farm of Wayne and Ruth Fredericks to lay out three record-keeping options and demonstrate why a hog farmer cannot long survive without good records. In addition to Wayne, participants for the day included ISU Extension swine field specialists Dave Stender and Mark Storlie, and feed specialist for St. Ansgar Mills, Inc., Ryan Ubben. A few quotes from the day are below. If they catch your interest, you can listen to those talks while viewing the accompanying slides by browsing to the Farming Systems Program section of the PFI website.

Dave Stender—Squeeze a Little More (money out of an already-squeezed pork enterprise)

“What do we worry about? We worry about the mar-



The Feeds and Feeders panel included (l-r) Wayne Fredericks, Extension swine specialist Mark Storlie and Ryan Ubben of St. Ansgar Mills, Inc.

ket, the market, the market. But it's the production costs that really make the difference on whether we're profitable or not.”

“The industry (based on the past three decades) is trying to shave \$7.50/cwt off the cost of production to remain competitive... We need to find another \$7.50 to stay in the ballgame... How many pigs does it take to make a living? In the early '70s, it was 320... In the early '90s it was 750... In a high labor system... if it takes more than about 750 pigs to make a living, what are you going to do? Most people are going to quit. And in the early to late '90s, that's what happened. And as you start pushing up toward 1,000 pigs just to make a living on a system, that's a lot of work, people start bailing out. Guess where it is today? With \$40 hogs and \$39 hogs and a 35-cent breakeven. It's about 3,000 pigs... And when you're talking about these [alternative] systems, there's more variation, which means it's more critical for people to have records, not less.”

Mark Storlie—Making the Most of Feed and Water

“A feeding budget is a management tool so that we don't overfeed, especially in the earlier rations.” “Provide the right feed to the right pig, for the right amount of time.”

“If we look at it as simply feed cost per pig, if we just feed two phases, from basically 50 pounds up to 260, we can look at a feed cost of \$42.50 per pig, versus if we just start adding some phases, thereby keeping our ration on target for that pig, we can reduce that feed cost... We can save about 80 cents by feeding four phases rather than three.”

On-farm Research

“The particle size of that ration can make a big difference on how well that pig can utilize. And so if we’ve just got cracked corn going in to the ration versus ground corn, that ground corn can be better utilized by the pig. If we look at micron sizes, when we get about 700 microns, for every 100 microns above that, we start losing about 1.2 percent of our feed efficiency... We can run into problems grinding too fine. If we get it too fine, we can have a higher incidence of gastric ulcers.”

“Sows can use a coarser ground than young pigs (like 900 microns). Deep bedding also takes care of the fiber need.” (Ryan Ubben, St. Ansgar Mills, from the Feeds and Feeders panel)

“Water [tracking] will lead feed [tracking]... Would anybody like a nice, bright, flashing amber light going off a couple of days before strep was going to break in the barn? Or a couple of days before ileitis was going to break? This [water use] chart is providing that role as a flashing light.”

Dave Stender—Start Simple, But Start!

“There’s a disconnect in the industry between accountants and production people. The accountants say, ‘We gotta screw down and save every dime!’ and the production people are, like, ‘We gotta produce the fastest growth rate, the most pigs per sow per year, we gotta get throughput out the barn!’ They assume maximum production equals maximum profit, while the accounting people don’t want to spend any money to get maximum profit. So the two are always competing. And I see somebody like myself or Mark [Storlie] as somebody that knows the market, somebody that knows production and can say, ‘OK, what about, for example, Wayne’s rations? Can we get decent performance with less cost?’”

“To try to apply high-cost system management strategies to a low-overhead cost [alternative] system, you get yourself in trouble in a hurry, and that’s why we need the records and the benchmarks with your own types of operations; you need somebody from the outside to come in to say, ‘Look, is it making sense here? Are we really attaching our facilities to our resources correctly?’”

“Everybody’s gotta have numbers—some numbers. But if you don’t have numbers, you have to start somewhere. And you may as well start simple and get some ‘triage’ numbers so that you can start making these management decisions (like Wayne). You can find \$5 that quick if you know where to look... That’s why you need a production-numbers specialist to look at your operation. Not just numbers, not just production. It’s gotta be the



Wayne Fredericks of Osage (center) welcomed producers and others to the on-farm workshop on swine records.

combination, really, to find these things quickly.”

On getting started with records: “It’s pretty easy. The formula is you take [closing weight plus sale weight] minus [opening weight plus purchase weight]... That’s the formula for the denominator. That tells me how many pounds you produced on your farm. In farrow-to-finish, most of that’s going to be on five scale weights and one estimated weight, on the year. And so there we have the denominator, that’s the hundredweights produced. All we need to do on our record system then is pull off the expense side, that’s the numerator. How much did you spend for your feed? How much did you spend for your vet bill? How much did the buildings cost to sit out there? How much do you need to pay for family living and labor costs? And those are the numerator. And in a nutshell, that’s our record system. We’d love to have the numbers pulled out of an accounting program, but they can come off of tax records. You need to start with something! Because once you see these numbers, you’re going to graduate yourself to a system.”

Group Trakker, Mark Storlie

“When you change the way you look at things, things can change.”

“Group Trakker is [based on] an Excel spreadsheet that I put together to do group closeouts. So now we go back to what I view is the real management basis that you work with on a daily basis, that is a group of hogs. Group Trakker is a closeout program that will work for nurseries, grow-finish, wean-finish, those types of applications where we

know the starting weight and we've got an ending weight."

"Why group records? Certainly to monitor change in your operation. To compare. Different building types, different producers, different equipment within those systems can be looked at for management decisions. Good records are a communication tool with suppliers or your co-workers, with your lenders, with your veterinary, and certainly with your neighbor as well."

Wayne Fredericks—Standards-Based Accounting

"Traits of standards records are different [than other enterprise records.] All costs are allocated. No longer are you trying to determine which costs you have to put in the blank. All costs you have must go somewhere... All costs and profits get allocated back into those [profit and cost] centers... And family living costs become part of the equation. And this is one cost most of us leave out... What costs get lost in the cracks? The main one is G&A, or most people

call it General and Administrative costs. These costs are our business insurance, property, liability insurance, professional fees, dues, office expenses, accounting expenses, human resources in some of the larger operations, computer costs, farm share of auto, farm truck, and then family living costs. You go back to the enterprise system and it doesn't necessarily capture that, and if you don't pick it up under 'other,' it gets lost."

"I think we envisioned, especially for producers in the niche groups, to work with Dave or Mark, hopefully that those people can work a similar type of program, and where they can benchmark among themselves. 'Cause I think there's real value to small group benchmarking. If you've got a guy way up here on costs, and another one that's way down here, 'What's this guy doing right?' Is he willing to share that and help others in the group? And I think that's some of the power that can come out of a benchmarking session." ❧

Iowa Food

(continued from pg 15)

foods rooted in Iowa's heritage and soils, there are challenges to overcome in transforming them from eclectic bits of travel trivia to specialty products. Some Iowans are already beginning this process, starting with marketing approaches and accessibility options.

For example, Uncle Jack's popcorn comes from North-central Iowa and involves at least a fourth-generation, possibly heirloom, three-color corn variety. Steve McLaughlin relates that his father and his grandfather before him would gift newly married children with one ear each of brown, white and red popcorn. Steve continues the tradition, supplying his own children with family popcorn in locally packaged microwavable bags, which are occasionally available for local sale. According to Steve, Uncle Jack's popcorn is smaller and less fluffy than the leading national brand but reputed to be much tastier!

Nut tree farmer and Southeast Iowa Nut Growers (S.I.N.G) contact, Tom Wahl of Red Fern Farm in Wapello (www.redfernfarm.com), is working to create growers for naturally certified chestnuts and pawpaws as well as heart nuts, a fast growing tree that produces a mild, sweet-flavored, easily extracted nut in a very appealing heart-shaped shell.

Native Iowa pawpaw trees produce a rich, soft fall fruit that does not ship well and is loaded with seeds. The fruit can be frozen for use in baked goods and ice cream; however, Tom reports that an upscale restaurant in Tennessee sells pawpaw ice cream for \$10 a gallon.

The most viable tree crop for Iowa may be Chinese chestnuts: They grow well and quickly here, require no investment in expensive agricultural machinery, do not cause soil erosion and have a proven demand as a specialty crop. According to Wahl, chestnuts are the third most popular nut worldwide, after peanuts and coconuts. Italy currently dominates the marketplace with a nut

that brings an average wholesale price of \$4 per pound. USDA records show the United States imports 41 million pounds of chestnuts and produces only half a million.

While chestnuts, heart nuts and pawpaws may become full-scale specialty crops, local dairy products are at the other end of the spectrum and fill more of a niche market. Francis and Susan Thicke's organic dairy farm in Fairfield produces rich milk, yoghurt, ice cream mix, cream, cheese and butter from its herd of 65 pasture-fed Jerseys for sale to local food markets and restaurants.

While aggressively marketing local foods can sometimes create demand that outstrips supply (as was the case with Amana meats, whose labels ceased to refer to pork and beef actually raised in the Amana Colonies), the challenge remains: encouraging geographical identification or ecolabels for Iowa heritage foods and encouraging Iowans and non-Iowans alike to appreciate the places where these foods are produced. ❧

In each issue we focus on a selection of resource organizations and highlight some of the reports, books, newsletters, etc. each offers. This issue, we look at resources offering info on grapegrowing and winemaking.

Iowa State University

<http://viticulture.hort.iastate.edu/>

The good people at ISU Extension preside over a veritable clearing house of viticulture info. Extension and the university's Department of Horticulture jointly host a viticulture website. Some highlights:

ISU research

- Weed Management and Soil Quality in Vineyard Agroecosystems
- Cynthiana Grape Cultivar Propagation Study
- *Establishing the Vineyard*, PDF presentation

Books/publications

- *A Midwesterner's Handbook to Grapevine Varieties*
- *Cost Estimate for Establishment of a Five Thousand Gallon Winery*
- *Conservation Practices for*

Grape Expectations

www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/grapes/grape.htm

Grape Expectations: A Food System Perspective on Redeveloping the Iowa Grape Industry was developed by the Leopold Center's Rich Pirog. The publication reviews the historical and present-day production of Iowa grapes; examines sources of table grapes, wines, grape juices and raisins for sale in Iowa food stores; and provides some suggestions for redevelopment of Iowa's grape industry.

Phone contact: (515) 294-1854.

Wine Country Classifieds

www.winersite.com

Selling everything from used barrels to bulk juice, 800-995-9463

Vineyards, video

- *How to Build Orchard and Vineyard Trellises*
- *Wine & Juice Grape Varieties for Cold Climates*

ISU Extension publications

- *Growing Grapes in the Home Garden*
- *Growing Fruit in Iowa*
- *Integrated Pest Management for Iowa Commercial Fruit & Vegetable Growers*

Other resources

- "Grapevine Training and Sunlight," article from *The Iowa Horticulturist*
- PDF map of Iowa vineyard and native wineries

AgMRC

www.agmrc.org/agmrc/commodity/fruits/wine/midwesternwine.htm

The cyber-based Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) features a comprehensive resource listing on Midwestern Wines. Highlights:

The Total Wine Package

You can view this AgMRC/Leopold Center-funded video series right online. The presentation includes everything from first steps to growing the business. Also available in DVD format by sending a check payable to Iowa State University in the amount of \$10 to: Wine Video, Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, 1111 NSRIC Bldg., Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Reports

A General Wine Background information sheet created by Iowa State Extension in 2004. Includes Iowa wine industry history and consumption information.

Links

- To both state and federal regulation and license/permit information.
- To Iowa State University publications, WineAmerica, Wine Business Online and resource lists for other Midwestern states.

UM Extension

<http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/hort/g06085.htm>

The University of Missouri Extension offers tips on choosing cultivars, when to plant, cultivation, fertilizer, insects and diseases and harvesting.

Features an excellent table of grape cultivars and highlights the many uses of different varieties. Printed copies 50 cents each, ask for G6085, Home Fruit Production: Grape Culture, 800-292-0969.

University of Nebraska

<http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/horticulture/g618.htm>

A web-guide titled "Grapes: Cultivars, Training and Pruning" offers especially detailed and useful info on training and pruning (even a pruning formula!). Available on Web and in print. To order hard copy, email tmcgill@unl.edu or call 402-472-9713 and ask for Gary.

Beverage Online

www.beverageonline.com/content/homepage/

Good resource for info on bottling.

Books

Production, Management and Marketing. Most complete publication of grape growing in the Midwest—and adaptable to Iowa conditions. Pruning and training systems are well illustrated. 614-292-1607.

From Vines to Wines: The Complete Guide to Growing Grapes and Making Your Own Wine, by Jeff Cox

The Grape Grower: A Guide to Organic Viticulture, by Lon Rombough

Iowa Wine Growers Association

www.iowawinegrowers.org

This statewide organization was founded in 2000 to provide assistance, information and support to those growing vineyards in Iowa.

Phone contact: 515-262-8323, 800-383-1682.

Iowa Winegrowers Information Exchange

Bulletin board with discussions ranging from growing information to supplies for sale.

Results of the Iowa Wine Growers Survey

Find out what your fellow Iowans are up to.

Resources

- ISU Extension contact info
- Grape Disease Control Guidelines
- Grape Pictures website
- Wine Institute

What is a Grape?

Find out the fascinating basics, for instance: Successful grape varieties of the eastern United States, such as Concord and Delaware, are strains developed from hybrids between the European grape and several native species, particularly the northern fox grape, the summer grape, the riverbank grape and the muscadine grape.

Magazines

Wine Maker magazine

<http://winemakermag.com>

WineMaker is the largest circulation magazine for the home winemaking hobbyist. Recent features include "Pinot Noir: Growing the Grape" and "Hydroponic Grape Growing." Regular columns include troubleshooting common problems with the "Wine Wizard," learning special techniques and tips on making a specific style of wine in a section called "Varietal Focus," refining your winemaking with "Techniques," building gadgets in "Projects," growing your own grapes in "Backyard Vines" and hearing tips, stories and recipes from fellow home winemakers in "Cellar Dwellers." Available online and by subscription: 800-900-7594, winemaker@pcspublink.com.

Practical Winery and Vineyard

www.practicalwinery.com

Peer reviewed for accuracy and importance, *PWV* offers a blend of relevant, immediately applicable information on winegrowing, winemaking and winemarketing with six issues a year. Article topics range from canopy management to employee compensation, soil fertility to fermentation, wine distribution to waste management. 415-492-9325.



Sustainable agriculture... We throw those words around a lot, but are we really sure what they mean, or what we want them to mean? We wondered what the phrase means to you, our readers and members.

Send your 150-words-or-less definitions of sustainable agriculture to Practical Farmers of Iowa, Attn. Todd, PO Box 349, Ames, IA 50010, or email them to todd@practicalfarmers.org. Feel free to be as poetic or technical as you'd like. A free PFI hat to anyone who sends in a thoughtful response.

PFI member Gina Lloyd is County Extension Education Director for Guthrie County. She works with value-added agriculture, Growing Food and Profit (producer entrepreneurs) and operates a pit greenhouse in Guthrie County.

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

The term “sustainable agriculture” means a lot of different things to people, depending on their point of view. To the person with the products, it means, “Can this make me a living wage?” To the consumer, it means solidarity in ways things have always been done or improved upon, and to the economist it means, “How many times can I get the same dollar to turn over in my community?”

I see many people looking for ways to

improve, enhance, invent and dream whose use of the term “sustainable agriculture” comes from a lack of understanding of what it really is. Sustainable agriculture is a way of life that creates a partnership with a network of people that help one another achieve a bigger part of the whole. It is the glue to our local food chain, our manufacturing and most importantly, our quality of life. ☞

—Gina Lloyd, Guthrie Center

Politics Is Not a Four-Letter Word

By Denise O'Brien

As this country approaches the next Farm Bill in 2007, I have come to reflect about how I became involved in policy work as a farmer. My first Farm Bill was in 1985 when a group of progressive farmers from all over the United States banded together to create the Family Farm Reform Act or, as many may remember, the Harkins / Gephardt Farm Bill.



That exciting time during the farm crisis was my baptism in farm policy work. Now, I am no policy wonk, mind you, but I have come to believe that in order to change things people must be involved in work that goes on at the state capitol or in Washington, D.C.

My interest in being a politically active citizen may have come from my parents' commitment to voting and holding politicians accountable for their actions. I have found my involvement frustrating many times, but also exhilarating when something good happens. In 1985 for instance, we were very, very close to getting supply management with some of the crops produced across this broad land. That piece of legislation would have had an

impact on family farms and maybe could have stopped the takeover by agribusiness corporations during the ensuing years.

Over the years as I have practiced my citizen responsibilities I have been amazed by people's attitudes toward political work. Most people regard politicians and government with disdain. This is puzzling to me because we citizens are the government and the politicians are our employees. I believe that when we do not hold our elected officials accountable, those officials feel no obligation to us, their constituency. No wonder special interests thrive when we as citizens do not participate in the very nature of democracy.

Every day I am thankful that I live in a democracy and that I live in Iowa. And every day I become more concerned as voices from the extremes of both political parties engage in polarizing and confusing the public. That's why I think it is important for organizations such as PFI to help keep their members informed about what is going on in the farm policy arena.

Already the farm community across the United States is beginning to engage in a discussion about the 2007 Farm Bill. You can be sure that the agribusiness community has a good share of its strategy worked out for their special interests. And from what I understand it is not too soon to become involved. During the next 12 months, decisions will be made that will set the agenda for the 2007 Farm Bill.

It is time for us to be involved in conversations and public debate about how we as a rural/farm state think farm policy should be formed. In July, Iowa State University provided an opportunity to do so with the "New Directions in Federal Farm Policy: Issues for the 2007 Farm Bill" conference. Although the cost of the conference and the time of the year it was held were prohibitive to the very audience the organizers want to participate, it is important that we engage in this national discussion.

If we just sit back and let others decide what they feel is good for agriculture, we will continue to see the downward spiral of our rural communities. We will continue to see our children leave the state. We will continue to witness the destruction of our soil, air and water.

I assure you that becoming involved in policy work will not make you weird or compromise your career as a farmer or a rural resident. It will, in my eyes, help you become a more informed citizen, ready to make decisions with information gathered through discussions with our employees, our Congresspersons. It is important that we dialog with our public servants in order to keep them on the track of creating a prosperous rural America. ☞

Among many other things, PFI member Denise O'Brien is coordinator of Women, Food and Agriculture Network and recipient of the most recent PFI Sustainable Ag. Achievement Award.

PFI Merchandise

Be a proud PFI member!
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shop with a PFI tote bag...



Wear your love of local foods with PFI's
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Beautiful design, dazzling colors!

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Diverse Farms, Vibrant Communities"
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Made in the USA.

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Farmer Cap—\$8

Summer style farmer cap with light
denim cotton front and mesh back.

Made in the USA.

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Heavyweight, 6.1 oz
100% cotton jersey in S, L-2XL.
White with full-color Buy Fresh,
Buy Local logo on front.

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Grocery Tote—\$10

Natural color 100% cotton canvas
tote with full color Buy Fresh,
Buy Local logo. Perfect for grocery
shopping, or taking to the
farmers market.

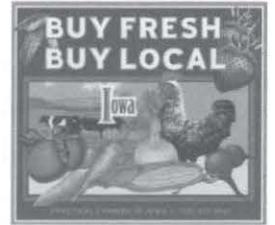
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11 1/2" x 13"

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This annual membership is a:

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I am joining at the level of:

- Student—\$15
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- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups)—\$50

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

- farmer/grower
- non-farmer (You will have the opportunity to expand upon this when you receive your membership information form.)

Each membership includes one vote and one subscription to *The Practical Farmer*.

Sustain PFI

For the sake of the long term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. Donation without membership is also welcome. Donors who give \$100 and above will receive a special gift and will receive an invitation to our annual Cooperators and Partners Banquet.

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and connection
to local farmers
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and good stewardship

Farms that are prized
for their diversity
of crops and livestock
their wildlife and healthy soils
their innovations, beauty and productivity
their connection to a rich past
and a fulfilling present
where individuals and families
are earning a good living

Communities that are alive
with diverse connections
between farmers and non-farmers;
places where commerce, cooperation, creativity
and spirituality are thriving;
places where the working landscape, the fresh air
and the clear water remind us of all that is good about Iowa

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