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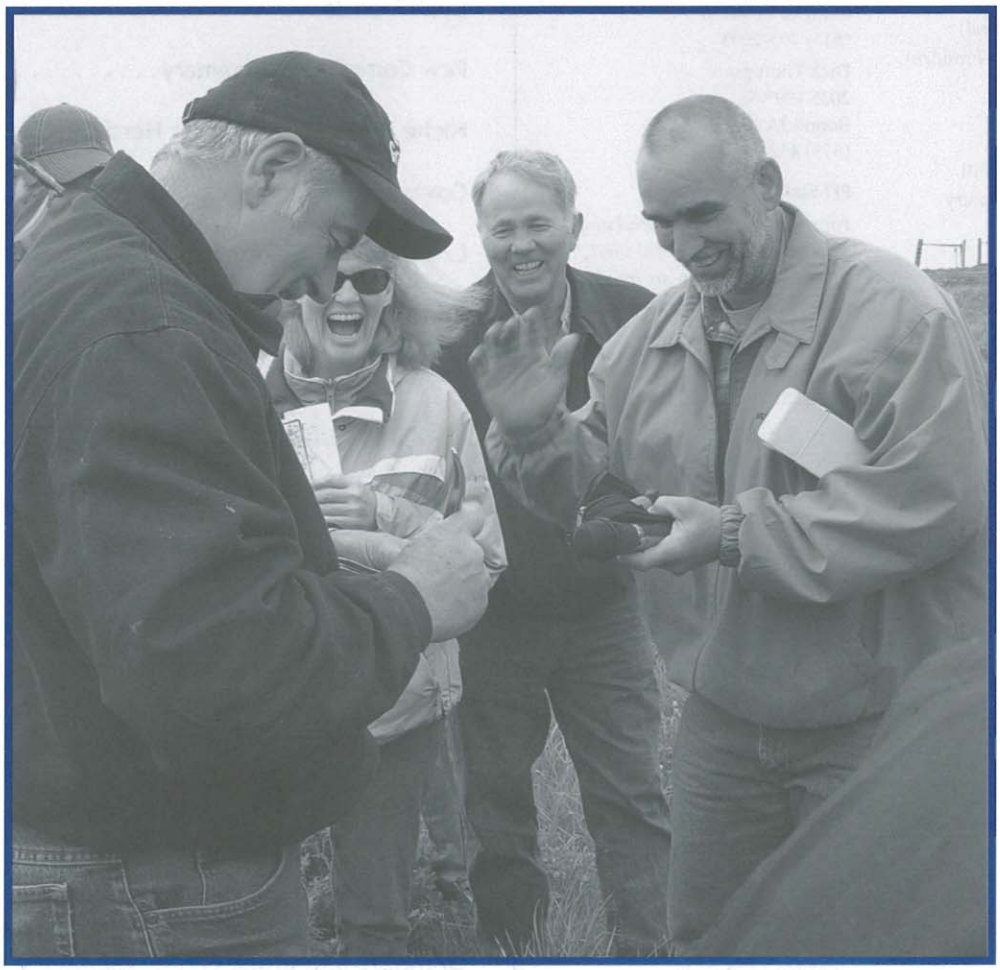
Practical Farmer

A Newsletter of Practical Farmers of Iowa • Vol. 23, #3 • Summer 2008



The Practical Farmer is published four times a year by Practical Farmers of Iowa at 137 Lynn Avenue, Suite 200, Ames, Iowa 50014; (515) 232-5661. A free subscription is provided to PFI supporters (see page 23). Sample copies and back issues are available.

Newsletter Editor: Sally Worley
Original Template: Michael Nash

Contents

Cover: Doug Gunnink shares a laugh with LaVon and Craig Griffieon, and Bruce Carney during the grazing bus tour. Read more about the grazing clusters on page 23.

Visit our website at www.practicalfarmers.org

PFI reports on its sustainability

Practical Farmers of Iowa was founded to help build vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy foods for generations to come. Our annual conference, field days, Cooperators' Program – everything we do – is designed to help our members on their path toward sustainability.

But how sustainable is PFI *as an organization?* As PFI goes about its business, do we do so in a sustainable manner? Do we "practice what we preach?"

Using a variety of environmental, social and economic factors, PFI staffer Jim Clark has just completed an assessment of PFI's operational sustainability. For example:

- Do PFI staff members conserve resources? If our members use as few resources as possible in their farming operations, shouldn't staff do so as well?
- Is PFI sustainable economically? Do we have the financial resources we need to serve our members into the future?
- Is PFI accountable to its members? Have we documented that this organization tries to fulfill its mission and serve the public interest, which is the role of the nonprofit organization?

For Jim's full report on PFI's environmental, economic and social performance, visit www.practicalfarmers.org. I'll offer a few of his findings here.

Is PFI a good environmental steward?

There are a variety of ways to examine whether PFI is sustainable environmentally. For example, how much energy do we use? How much water do we use? How much do we throw away?

One of the indicators Jim investigated was the amount of carbon dioxide, a damaging greenhouse gas, PFI uses to conduct its activities. Our "carbon footprint" weighs in at 139.9 tons. Below is a pie chart breaking down that 139.9 tons by activities. As you can see, a whopping 51 percent of our "carbon footprint" results from people traveling to and from our many field days.

What will we do about this? *By no means will we stop holding field days!* Field days are a major part of what we do – networking is the number one response when we ask members why they belong.

> PFI is important to its members, and they deserve to have the organization around as long as they want it.
>
> ~Teresa Opheim

However, are there steps we could take to reduce this energy use, both at field days and otherwise? Jim says yes: encourage more car-pooling to field days and other events (more carpooling means less fuel used and more time to talk with other members—a double win!). PFI also could host more regional meetings to minimize per-person travel distances. Also, explore new technologies (such as meeting over the web in what's evidently called "webinars") as an alternative.

Is PFI sustainable economically?

Does PFI have enough resources to conduct the activities we are trying to do? If so, is that money from diverse sources? A business with only one customer (even if it's a large customer) is vulnerable.

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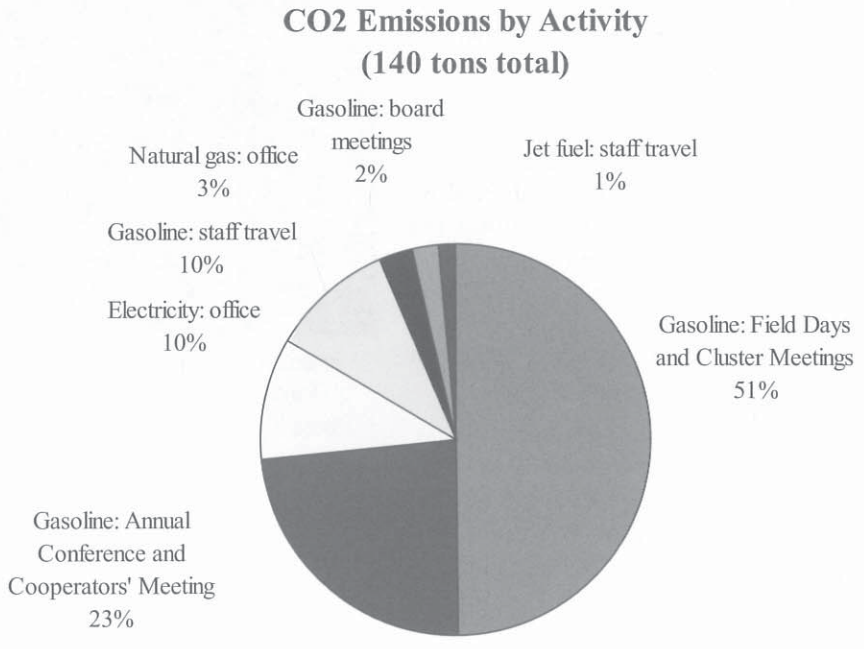


Sustain the PFI Legacy

Remember Practical Farmers of Iowa in your will.

Practical Farmers of Iowa has flourished since its initial leaders came together in 1985. With your help, PFI will be around for generations to come.

A planned gift (such as a bequest or gift of stocks, bonds, cash, life insurance, or IRA) will:

- **Direct your dollars to sustainable farmers, not taxes**
- **Simplify your estate plans**
- **Perhaps even increase your income.**

Call Teresa Opheim at (515)232-5661 for more information.

Board Update

PFI Board Meeting
June 30, 2008

We had a very busy meeting with many things to discuss since our last meeting in March. Several items of interest to the membership included: discussion of policy issues and how to react to various requests by other organizations, analysis of the PFI membership conducted by Cedar and discussion on helping the staff weigh their priorities as they think about programming needs for the future. Currently, the organization is on firm ground financially and we hope to maintain this through the remainder of 2008.

Respectfully,

Eric Franzenburg
Board President

Board member Tim Landgraf and his children Andrew and Jessica listen to Laura Krouse at Susan Jutz's field day

Board member Ann Cromwell observes the pasture at Francis Thicke's field day

The 2008 Farm Bill: What's In It?

Some highlights in the conservation, beginning farmer, and other areas, courtesy of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. See www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org for a more complete analysis.

More for Conservation

Conservation Security/Stewardship Program: $1.1 billion in increased funding for a total of over $12 billion in mandatory funding for the program over 10 years, which will be sufficient to enroll approximately 115 million acres in CSP by 2017. Program revised to be nationwide (not limited to particular watersheds), with streamlined provisions and payments structure, higher environmental standards, special outreach for organic producers, special supplemental payments for resource-conserving crop rotations, and a continuous sign-up process.

Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives: $25 million over 10 years, new program with mandatory funding that encourages owners of CRP land that is returning to production to rent or sell to beginning and minority farmers and to ranchers who implement comprehensive conservation plans, including producers adopting rotational grazing or organic production.

Conservation Loans: Revised conservation loan program that includes priorities for beginning and minority farmers and for conversion to sustainable and organic farming.

Wetlands Reserve Program: $1.3 billion in new, restored mandatory funding over 5 years – substantially reduced from the $1.9 billion included in both the House and Senate-passed bills, reducing annual enrollment goal from 250,000 acres to 185,000 acres.

Beginning Farmers

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: $75 million over 4 years, first-time mandatory funding for competitive grants (with an additional $30 million a year authorized for appropriations) to fund education, extension, outreach, and assistance to foster new farming opportunities.

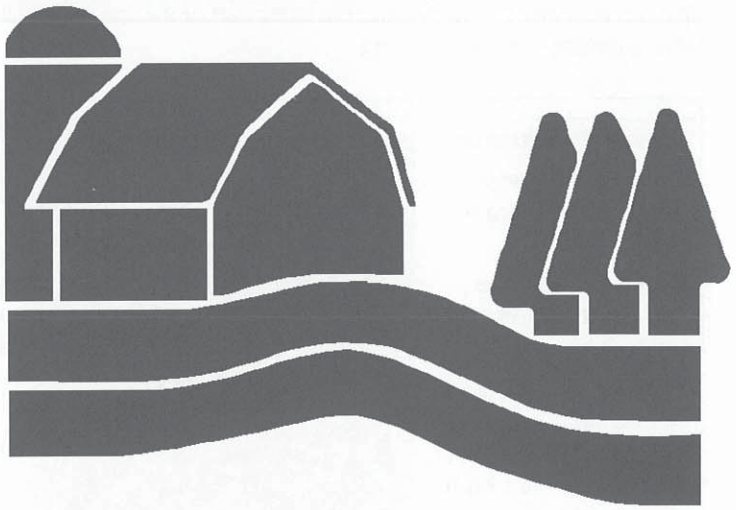
Beginning Farmer and Rancher Down Payment Loans: Lower interest rates, better lending terms, and higher maximum purchase prices on first-time land purchases for new farmers, plus program expansion to also cover minority farmers.

Farmers' Markets

$33 million over 5 years, first-time mandatory funding, a nearly seven-fold increase above current discretionary funding levels, to support farmer-to-consumer direct marketing, including farmers' markets, community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), and on-farm sales.

Value-Added Agriculture

Only $15 million in mandatory funding over four years (but with an additional $40 million a year in authorization for appropriations) for competitive grants to help farmers develop value-added businesses, including a new directive to support "mid-tier value chains" and local and regional food systems; also includes a new priority for small- and mid-sized family farms and beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers.



Interstate Shipment of State-Inspected Meat

Very small meat processing plants with state rather than federal inspection that meet strong food safety standards will be allowed for the first time to sell across state lines, increasing marketing options for sustainable livestock producers and improving regional food systems.

More for Organics

National Organic Certification Cost Share Assistance: $22 million over 5 years in mandatory funding, a nearly five-fold increase compared to the previous farm bill, to help cover the costs of organic certification for farmers and handlers.

Organic Conversion Assistance: A new technical and financial assistance option within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for producers transitioning to organic production.

Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative: $78 million over 4 years in mandatory funding, a five-fold increase compared to the previous farm bill (with an additional $25 million a year authorized for appropriations) to fund competitive grants for organic farming research and extension.

Assistance for Rural Microenterprises

$15 million over 4 years, new program with mandatory funding to assist rural entrepreneurs in establishing new small businesses in rural sectors

Antibiotic Resistance Research

Creates a new competitive grant program to study the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in livestock and ensure judicious use of antibiotics in livestock; will require appropriations.

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Grading the Farm Bill

What do you think about the final version of the Farm Bill? Send **your reactions** to Sally Worley.

PFI's **policy listserv** is a great place for members to share farm policy updates and views. If you would like to be part of the listserv, email Sally: sally@practicalfarmers.org

Jerry Peckumn

What grade would you give this Farm Bill? D

What do you like about the Farm Bill?

Funding for sustainable ag and organic ag was improved. The Conservation Stewardship Program is now open to all farmers and has the potential to be funded at higher levels. This is the most important achievement and has the potential to help in shifting ag to a more sustainable system by providing an incentive to learn about sustainability to all farm program participants.

What do you dislike about the Farm Bill?

The continued high subsidies for unsustainable ag production.

Will this Farm Bill impact your farming operation?

I will continue to look at CSP and hope it may be implemented much better than in the past. Also am thinking about programs that I may use to make my farm more sustainable. The high subsidies for corn and soybeans will mean a continuation of commodity farming for most of my operation-I have to go where the profits are.

What should have been included in this bill that wasn't?

The beginning of the dismantling of the commodity crop subsidy program. Not sure if the crop insurance needs of organic producers and all crops such as vegetables, fruit, and forage will now be met, if not we really need to address that impediment to alternative crops.

Other comments?

Not sure where the non-renewable fuels subsidies are but corn ethanol and converting edible oils to internal combustion engine fuel should face greater scientific scrutiny concerning sustainability and efficiency before any additional infrastructure is built. Building infrastructure for a system that is not really efficient or not really displacing fossil fuels in our energy needs would create a great burden on our economy and continue the degradation of our environment.

Francis Thicke

What grade would you give this Farm Bill? B-

In spite of some major shortcomings, the 2008 Farm Bill provides a big improvement over the 2002 Farm Bill.

What do you like about the Farm Bill?

The new CSP has been strengthened.

Organic research and extension funding is increased five-fold. As the organic market grows, it is good to see USDA research funding priorities shifted accordingly.

The new Farm Bill also provides increased support for beginning and minority farmers and ranchers, and for local and regional food systems.

What do you dislike about the Farm Bill?

It is frustrating that Congress again failed to pass commodity payment limitation reform in this Farm Bill. It also failed to prohibit packer ownership of livestock, which allows packers to manipulate prices to the detriment of producers. The new Farm Bill also still allows large subsidies for Confinement Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

Will this Farm Bill impact your farming operation?

As organic research gears up at land grant universities, we all should expect to benefit, whether farming organically or not.

On my own farm, I might be eligible for enrollment in the CSP, or for assistance through the Value-Added Producers Grants program.

What should have been included in this bill that wasn't?

I would like to have seen the CSP require use of resource-conserving crops (cover crops and sod-based crops) for enrollment eligibility. I do not think that continuous row cropping should be eligible for CSP because it leaves the soil bare and unprotected from erosion and nitrate leaching for over half of the year.

Other comments?

At some point U.S. agricultural policy is going to have to stop subsidizing continuous row cropping. We are still using tax dollars to provide incentives to farmers to farm in ways that are environmentally damaging.

Jeff Klinge

What grade would you give this Farm Bill?
C-

What do you like about the Farm Bill?

There's funding for local foods, beginning farmer programs, and more funding for CSP. There's also more money for more fruits and vegetables in the school lunch program.

What do you dislike about the Farm Bill?

As far as commodity programs, they failed to put limits on payments. Freedom to Farm (Farm Bill 1996) was set up so you could get commodity payments without planting 100% of historical base in row crops. Several farmers have used this to incorporate resource-conserving crop rotations. This is a good thing. The negative thing about Freedom to Farm is that there are too many payments to row crop farmers.

If they would have left deficiency payments, it would have worked. People who grow alfalfa, pasture, and small grains do not get near as much deficiency payments. At one time the limit was $50,000, and that made sense. No limits have made it able for row crop farmers to get larger with a safety net.

The opportunity for a beginning farmer is contingent on access to land. Without access to land, it is hard to utilize the good things in the farm bill.

Will this Farm Bill impact your farming operation?

If the government actually comes up with the funding for CSP, I will be able to use the program to my advantage.

What should have been included in this bill that wasn't?

Payment limitations.

Daniel Rosmann

What grade would you give this Farm Bill? B-

What do you like about the Farm Bill?

I was happy to see so many provisions directed towards beginning farmers. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program addition was a big win, and hopefully the ideas submitted to this grants program can be effective in getting many new farmers into agriculture. The organic provisions included were also encouraging, and it was good to see the organic sector receiving more of a fair share of the farm bill budget.

What do you dislike about the Farm Bill?

The lack of reform in the commodity subsidy program was discouraging. The lack of a packer ban of livestock ownership was unfortunate as well.

Will this Farm Bill impact your farming operation?

Yes, as a young farmer it can be difficult to secure more land with limited assets. With my brother also considering returning to the family farm, expansion might be necessary. This makes the various beginning farmer provisions in the farm bill very important to my family and me.

Other comments?

Despite the many beneficial provisions included in this farm bill, real positive change in agriculture will continue to be hampered until changes are made in the subsidy program. Until then it will be difficult to get the megafarms and large agribusiness to relinquish any sort of control over agriculture.

The 2008 Farm Bill: What's in it? -continued from page 5-

Assisting Biomass Crops

$70 million over 5 years in mandatory funding for new program that provides assistance to farmers producing bio-energy crops, including perennial crops.

Fair and Competitive Markets

Newly created Livestock Title within the Farm Bill to begin to provide fairness and contract reform for farmers in livestock and poultry markets; marks first time a Farm Bill has included any provisions to tackle this critical area of policy.

No Payment Limitation Reform

Comprehensive payment limitation reform was not included in the bill. The "three-entity rule" was repealed and "direct attribution of payments" was enacted, two necessary but not sufficient conditions to achieving real reform. With other loopholes left open, the net result is virtually no change in the highly-skewed status quo on payment limits for direct and countercyclical payments. Moreover, existing per farm limits on loan deficiency payments were removed, so that those payments are now completely unlimited.

Planting Flexibility

No change was made to the prohibition on growing fruits and vegetables on commodity base acres other than a 75,000 acre pilot project for several Midwestern states for canned fruits and vegetables only.

A Vision for "Good Food" for Iowa

Linking Community-Based Food Systems to Healthy Iowans and Healthy Communities

Angie Tagtow

This is an excerpt from Angie's article. To read the article in its entirety, along with a list of sources cited, visit www.practicalfarmers.org.

An Ecological Approach to Food & Health

How will the current food system determine the viability and stability of the food supply for future Iowa eaters?

Author and farmer Wendell Berry said "eating is an agricultural act" and agriculture is central to Iowa's economy, culture and communities. Yet, eaters are often disengaged with who produces food and how the current industrial food system impacts health.

This disconnection to food production correlates with rising chronic disease trends and public health disparities. The health of Iowans is reflective of the health of the food system. Changes within our food system are needed to assure all Iowans have access to good food - food that is healthy, green, fair, affordable, and accessible.

A good food system is a community-based food system that focuses on the relationships between farmers, processors, distributors, retailers and eaters. There is an emphasis on locally-grown food, economic development, sustainability, resource conservation, health and social equity.

The foundation of a community-based food system is built on healthy and diverse natural resources. Science proves that healthy soil grows healthy food. Science also proves that eating healthy food nourishes healthy people and healthy people form healthy communities. Therefore, when the soil is unhealthy it becomes the source of disease in plants, animals and people.

> When the soil is unhealthy it becomes the source of disease in plants, animals, and people.

In 1929, Iowa produced vegetables on 52,915 acres. Today, less than 12,000 acres are devoted to vegetable production. In 1929, Iowa had 63,185 acres of fruit orchards. Today, less than 3,000 acres are devoted to fruit orchards.

The time is ripe to commit to a vision of good food and support a community-based food system by cultivating a food landscape that supports the health, social and economic well-being of individuals, families, farms and communities.

Snapshot of the Iowa Food System

Eaters who have limited access to fresh, healthy food are at greater risk of developing diet-related chronic diseases. As the price of healthy foods increases, it will be more challenging for all eaters, especially those with income restraints, to maintain a diet consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

To gain a broader understanding of how an industrialized food system impacts public health in Iowa, each sector of the food system must be evaluated.

Agriculture

In 1950, there were approximately 206,000 farms on 34.8 million acres in Iowa. Today, there are less than 90,000 farms covering less than 32 million acres.

The diversity of Iowa agriculture products has decreased from 34 different commodities produced in 1920 to less than ten commodities produced for sale today. The top five agriculture commodities are corn, hogs, soybeans, cattle and dairy.

Iowa is a leader in corn and soybean production. The primary uses of these crops are to feed livestock and produce high fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated vegetable oil.

Rapid advances in genetic engineering have increased the number of crops that produce drugs, hormones and industrial chemicals. These non-food crops run the risk of cross-pollinating or co-mingling with food crops.

Current Iowa agriculture does not meet the food and nutrition needs of Iowans. If Iowans were to eat according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, significant acres of land would need to be converted from corn and soybean production to fruit, vegetable and dairy production.

The US has developed a greater reliance on other countries to produce food. In the last ten years, imports of fresh produce have doubled with most of the fresh produce imported from Central and South America.

The commoditization of agriculture has reduced the biodiversity of foods. The loss of biodiversity negatively affects the ecosystem and narrows the variety of food consumed by animals and humans. With more than 7,000 species of plants available for food, wheat, rice and corn account for 60% of the total caloric intake in the human diet. As the diversity of food crops decreases, rates of poor health increase.

Industrial agricultural crops do not develop to their full nutrient potential due to hybridization, depleted soil nutrients, plant spacing, and harvesting prior to peak ripeness.

Each year in the US, about 25 million pounds of antibiotics are given to livestock for non-therapeutic purposes. This is eight times more than prescribed to humans to treat disease. The FDA states the use of antibiotics in livestock causes microbes to become resistant to drugs used to treat human illness, making some human illnesses harder to treat.

Poor fisheries management has depleted 75% of the world's fish stocks and it is projected that all fisheries will be 90%

depleted by 2050. Commercial aquaculture poses environmental concerns such as non-therapeutic use of antibiotics, waste discharge, and high stocking densities.

Environmental Health & Natural Resources

More than 675 million pounds of pesticides were applied to crops in the US in 2002. Human exposure to pesticides can come through direct exposure by farmers and farm workers, residue in food (on or in fruits and vegetables or in meat such as fish and livestock), contaminated drinking water or in the air. The public health costs of pesticides are estimated to be over $1 billion per year.

Much of Iowa's soil has been lost to erosion. On average, seven tons of soil per acre is lost per year due to erosion. In some areas in Iowa as much as 30 tons of soil per acre is lost per year. When soil is lost, vital nutrients and microorganisms are lost resulting in plants with depressed nutrient profiles.

Iowa's agricultural runoff includes chemicals, pharmaceuticals and animal waste. The runoff contaminates streams and rivers and is linked to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico destroying fisheries, ecosystems and economies. Animal wastes may contain antibiotic-resistance bacteria, arsenic, dioxin, antibiotics and other volatile organic compounds.

More than 320 manure spills at livestock operations (confined animal feeding operations) were reported between 1992 and 2002 making Iowans greatly concerned about the quality of their drinking water.

Approximately 18% of all greenhouse gas emissions come from industrial livestock production.

Glacial aquifers are being quickly depleted as a result of extensive agriculture irrigation of feed crops for livestock. It is estimated that each kilogram of grain-fed beef requires more than 100,000 liters of water.

A diet rich in fruits and vegetables maximizes good health.

With the increased demand for biofuels and ethanol production, Iowa has witnessed a competition between crops for food and crops for industrial energy production. The competition over cropland may have a multiplier effect and increase food prices and further perpetuate hunger and food insecurity among Iowans.

Processing and Transportation

Production, processing and retail markets are very concentrated. Four companies provide the majority of the commercially available seed in the world; three companies trade most of the grain that moves between countries; four companies control almost 85% of the beef packing industry; four companies control more than 66% of the pork packing market; and four companies control 80% of the soybean crushing business.

Few food processing facilities exist in Iowa. In 1940, there were 488 creameries in Iowa. In 1995, one creamery remained in operation. In 1965, there were more than 550 small meat processors in Iowa. Today, there are less than 200.

In 1975, there were seven grocery store distribution warehouses in Iowa. In 2008, there are three.

Iowa's food system is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. Fresh produce purchased in Iowa has traveled an average of 1,500 miles, whereas locally-produced food travels an average of 56 miles.

Retailing and Consumption

In 2006, more than $947 billion was spent on food in the US. On average, households spend 10% of their income on food. This is compared to 20% of household income spent on food in 1950.

Iowans spend more than $8 billion in food each year, of which 90% is imported into Iowa.

In 2006, more than 20,000 new food products were introduced in supermarkets with 54% being candy, gum, snacks and beverages.

Five supermarket chains reported almost $250 billion in grocery sales which accounted for 48% of all supermarket sales in the US. Wal-Mart is the largest food retailer in the world with $312 billion in revenue in 2006.

Four companies provide the majority of the commercially available seed in the world.

In 2005, Iowans consumed an average of 3.5 servings of fruits or vegetables per day, 1.5 servings less than the recommended minimum. Only 19.5% of Iowans ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Iowans eat 25.9 million pounds of carrots each year and only 5% of these are grown in Iowa. Only 30% of the 5.8 million pounds of green beans eaten every year by Iowans come from Iowa.

Americans are eating 523 more calories per day and are consuming 1000% more refined sugars such as high fructose corn syrup since 1970.

Refined sugars (e.g., high fructose corn syrup), grains and added fats are subsidized agricultural products which enable food manufacturers to produce inexpensive food. Cheaper foods are often highly processed, calorie dense and nutrient deficient and

The diversity of Iowa agriculture products has decreased from 34 different commodities produced in 1920 to less than ten commodities produced for sale today.

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Wisdom from the Waterlogged Countryside

Teresa Opheim

"An early morning walk of the gardens revealed lettuce wind-torn and dirty, topsoil washed away from plant roots."

"I'm looking down on our pasture right now and watching tree trunks float across where our fences should be."

"We're constantly on edge—always looking to the west to see what else is coming, cringing when the sky turns grey."

Iowa's farmers, such as the ones quoted above, have had a deeply discouraging spring and summer. Even many of us who don't rely on the vagaries of weather for our livelihoods still wince at all the water when we drive through the countryside.

Yet despite the toll the floods, hail, high winds, even tornadoes have taken on our farms this year, messages of solidarity and compassion for farmers – from other farmers and from consumers – are common. Tucked within the farmers' stories is the wisdom that will help us become better prepared when the volatile weather returns. Within the consumers' comments, there is an undercurrent of fierce loyalty to those Iowa farmers growing food.

The loss of our precious soil is a tragedy—and one we could have done much to prevent. Farmers who have kept their "black gold" under wraps—through grass-based livestock systems, for example—have largely kept their soil in place. "I've had three different four-inch rain events, and I've lost no soil," says grazier Steve Reinart, near Glidden. "I kept the water here, where it can be used."

Other farmers report that using crop rotations that go beyond corn and soybeans have built drought- and flood-resistant soils that have an increased capacity to hold water. "Twenty-five years of organic farming helps a lot with water-holding capacity," Ron Rosmann reported. "A diversified crop and livestock system with hay, pasture, oats and barley and corn and beans is still the best system. We have to have diversity and the will to never give up."

Another lesson comes from Jerry Peckumn, near Jefferson: Farming near the river's edge and in the wetlands doesn't pay. Jerry was kept from the fields for several weeks due to wet conditions. "Many of us have prairie potholes that have drowned out. Once again, we find that many of the prairie potholes could be put to a better use as they evolved—purifying our water, providing an ecosystem that produces an abundance of life. With yield monitors on the combine, I find that many of the potholes often do not provide a return on investment to the farmer when growing corn or soybeans in them. What would it take to convince more farmers to restore wetlands?"

The flood waters have been fierce, but the loyalty Iowa consumers are showing for the farmers who grow their food is even fiercer. Consumers are eager for Iowa-grown food and for a connection to farmers—so eager that some pay up front for a season's worth of vegetables through "Community-Supported Agriculture," thereby sharing the farmer's risk. Rick Hartmann near Minburn wrote in his newsletter in June that: "For those of you who are long-term members, you may have some comfort in the average share of produce you have received since supporting the farm. For new members, it is more of a harsh experience, akin to investing your savings in the stock market just before a downturn. Fortunately, for both the farm and the market, over time there has historically been a reasonable return."

> "The absolute necessity to utilize the sun and the wind and the heat of the earth and the many other renewable resources yet untapped will be our only saving grace."
>
> ~Ron Rosmann

More and more Iowans are supporting Iowa's farmers through flood and drought—for the long haul. Susan Jutz reported that her Cedar Rapids customers were very concerned about her farm—even as they dealt with the devastating floods.

For many of us buying food directly from farmers, the message is clear: Whether this year is a bust or a bumper crop, we're with you. You are improving Iowa's quality of life, and we're glad you're here.

We have entered a period of volatile weather that will continue. Addressing it will require thoughtfulness, resolve—and building farming systems that are diverse and resilient. As Ron Rosmann wrote: "There are only so many resources in the world and the absolute necessity to utilize the sun and the wind and the heat of the earth and the many other renewable resources yet untapped will be our only saving grace. Keep your heads above water."

Erosion during the floods created a deep gulley in this Iowa County cropland. Courtesy of Iowa NRCS.

Field Notes

Ryan Herman

We run land at the foot of the Upper Iowa River where it dumps out into the Mississippi near New Albin (farthest NE Iowa).

We received 10+ inches of rain by Monday, June 9th. On June 2nd we had moved our cow herd onto land owned by the DNR. We rent a neighbor's land and building site near there because it is higher ground. This came in quite handy. On Sunday the 8th we moved the cows onto her land. We were about half done calving out the cows and did a head count on our checklist of calves and came up one short. The calves naturally lay in taller grass for cover and sometimes don't get up when the herd is moved. That "taller grass" was then around shoulder high in places—the fertility of this bottom land is unbelievable. Anyway, we turned the cow with the missing calf back out for the night to find the calf herself.

The next morning when we arrived she was standing belly deep in water. She had found a high spot. The gate was a little lower (completely under water) and we began calling her over to it as we trudged through knee deep water. We watched her begin to swim and then Dad said "I think she just swam over the fence." Wow, she had just swam over a very sturdy 6 barbed wire, 4.5 foot tall fence... never seen that before. Unfortunately no calf following.

In the end we brought the entire herd home to the home farm on the ridge on Tuesday the 10th. Only loss, one calf. They remained at home until we got all the debris off the electric fences and the ground firmed up.

I have not approached our organic certifying agency yet, afraid to know. I can only imagine what was in that water. Also, I am investigating doing forage and soil sampling to know if its even safe for the animals to return.

On the plus side, I have seen what a grass-based system can do in such an extreme situation. The DNR land is at the base of the Upper Iowa River before it dumps into the Mississippi. Let me just say we gained a lot of fertility from the fields up river. The grass held the soil where we are.

On the ridge farm, we absorbed the majority of the rains. At a point on Sunday we became so saturated that a 2-inch rain in a little over an hour did run off. But, the water running off was clear. Today we still have areas where water is seeping back out of the ground. Our rotational mob grazing is paying off. I hear of stories of graziers who have practiced this for many years who got the 13 inches of rain last August and there was no runoff. Their ponds filled from the bottom up in the days following the rain event. We are not quite there yet but glad we didn't have exposed soil to wash away.

I am a big proponent of a flexible grass-based system. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those dealing with flood related issues.

Streambank erosion in Iowa County cropland. Courtesy of Iowa NRCS.

Dad said "I think she just swam over the fence." Wow, she had just swam over a very sturdy 6 barbed wire, 4.5 foot tall fence... never seen that before.

~Ryan Herman

The Future of Animal Agriculture

Fred Kirschenmann

Photo courtesy of Connie Falk

When I accepted the invitation to serve on the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production I knew it would be a controversial undertaking. While the meat and animal industry has made huge investments in infrastructure to create the mainstream industrial farm animal production system—and quite rationally wants to protect that investment—a growing population of consumers, environmentalists, rural residents, and, yes, farmers, are opposing the evolution of this system because of unintended consequences that are degrading things they care about.

I decided to join the Commission because I take a longer term view and am increasingly concerned about the fact that we are not helping farmers to prepare for future challenges that will make our entire industrial farming system, including our industrial animal system, increasingly untenable. Challenges like increasing energy costs, depleting water resources and more unstable climates will require major changes in the way we farm. I represented that perspective on the Commission and was invited, by Commission members, to write a concluding segment to the report which I entitled "Toward a Sustainable Animal Agriculture."

Let me say, first of all, that I was honored to serve on this commission. I have never worked with a group of people that were as dedicated to their task or worked as hard as this incredible collection of people—both Commission members and staff.

The Commission was made up of 15 individuals who represented many different points of view, including veterinary medicine, public health, agriculture, animal welfare, food industry and rural society. The Commission also included a former USDA Secretary of Agriculture and was chaired by a former state governor. Despite this diversity, we agreed at the outset that the only recommendations that would go into our report would be those on which we had reached consensus. There would be no "minority reports."

This meant that we often debated issues long and hard and listened to each other intently. We commissioned five groups of scientists to research and write a report in each of the study areas that we identified, and we used their reports in our deliberations. We pored through thousands of pages of documents, visited numerous sites around the country, and listened long and hard to many hours of testimony by a wide spectrum of industry representatives, farmers, government officials, and citizens who came to public hearings we conducted throughout the country.

The Commission was formed in March 2006 and issued its report in April 2008. The core question we addressed was "How do we feed the world without destroying the environment, risking the public health, inhumanely treating farm animals and threatening the future of our rural communities?" We tried to answer that question with a series of recommendations designed to reduce the negative effects of industrial farm animal agriculture. In sum our recommendations are as follows:

1– Restrict the use of antimicrobials in food production animals to medically important treatments in order to reduce the development of resistance to medically important antibiotics and other microbials.

2– Implement a disease monitoring program for food animals that allow a 48-hour trace-back of those animals by means of a fully integrated national database.

3– Treat Industrial Farm Animal Production systems more like other industrial operations and implement a new system for dealing with farm waste to protect Americans from any adverse environmental and human health hazards.

4– Phase out the most inhumane animal production practices within a decade to reduce the risk to public health and to improve animal well-being. Gestation crates and battery cages are specifically mentioned.

5– Amend and enforce Federal and state laws to provide a level playing field for farmers when entering contracts with integrators.

6– Increase funding to expand and reform animal agriculture research.

The Commission summed up its assessment in a 124-page report by noting that while industrial farm animal production systems have increased the speed of production and lowered costs to consumers, "the intensive confinement production system creates a number of problems. These include contributing to the increase in the pool of antibiotic-resistant bacteria because of the overuse of antibiotics; air quality problems; the contamination of rivers, streams, and coastal waters with concentrated animal waste; animal welfare problems, mainly as a result of the extremely close quarters in which the animals are housed; and significant shifts in the social structure and economy of many farming regions throughout the country."

Some have criticized the report for ignoring "science-based" conclusions on which the animal industry claims to have constructed its operations. In my humble opinion that is an illegitimate argument. The term "science-based" is regularly used in the media today to convey the notion that science is a discipline which comes up with incontrovertible conclusions. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Science is a process, not a fixed set of conclusions. Scientific conclusions are always based on the best information available at any given moment, the scope of work undertaken, and the majority consensus of scientists involved. And those conclusions are constantly subject to challenge based on new discoveries, new perspectives and emergent properties. Our report is simply part of that process.

The entire report plus an executive summary is available at www.pcifap.org. Do you agree with the findings? Disagree? Send your reactions to Sally Worley at sally@practicalfarmers.org.

Fred Kirschenmann manages his family's 3,500 acre organic farm in North Dakota. He is a Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center after serving as Director of the Center for five years. Fred is currently the President of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture.

Strategies for Swine Herd Health: Separation and Introduction

Rick Exner

This is the third and final newsletter article based on the recently released Managing for Herd Health in Alternative Swine Systems (http://practicalfarmers.org/resources). The topics covered earlier were all-in-all-out and closing the herd. Finally we come to a topic so basic that every hog farmer deals with it – keeping pigs where they are supposed to be.

If these creatures weren't so curious and smart, that wouldn't be so difficult! And if there weren't so much at stake, it wouldn't matter. But pigs are very good at making each other sick, so separation is a fundamental tool on sustainable swine farms.

Separation might seem impractical on a diversified farm where cropping and different livestock enterprises carry on side by side, where one hoophouse is 10 feet from the next, or where Cargill-type pens are lined up along a concrete pad. Make sunshine and fresh air work for you. Ten feet of separation is far better than none at all. And if you don't fill every Cargill pen, you can break that nose-to-nose contact down the line.

Make sure that a fence is really a fence. This isn't easy with pigs, since all it takes is one little pig wandering all over the operation to share every germ around. There is another equally sinister side when this becomes common, and that is cross-fostering. The wandering pigs find a nursing sow, displace her newborns, and move in. They live high on the hog on milk they don't need, while the sow's piglets starve to death in the straw.

Some alternative systems are using multiple sites to help ensure biosecurity. In some cases two farmers accomplish this by working together. One only farrows; the other finishes. The finisher never sets foot in the farrowing-only operation, and vice versa. Together they accomplish something that would take a much larger single operation. Wherever you set the boundaries, do not allow employees to own or contact pigs outside of the system, and establish procedures for movement within the system.

Introducing Breeding Stock

Why include introduction of stock in a discussion about separation? If you are not running a closed herd, there are times when animals enter your system, and these are situations to manage. The new animals can upset the balance of pathogens and resistance on the farm. Even a clean animal can present problems, because it doesn't necessarily have immunity to the microbial strains found in your operation. At the least, that means that the introduced animal will have to be exposed to, and fight off, each of these pathogen strains. At the worst, bringing a naive animal into a herd that is PRRS-positive may trigger a new flare-up of the disease. Know the vaccination status of the animals before they arrive; then keep them isolated on the farm while you build their resistance.

Before Arrival

- ❖ Communicate with the source herd veterinarian prior to receiving stock.
- ❖ Purchase from herds tested and known to be free of PRRS virus, infectious ileitis, Mycoplasma pneumonia, swine influenza viruses (SIV, all three types), infectious rhinitis (Bordetella and Pasteurella), APP (Actinobacillus pleuropneumonia, all serotypes), and that do not show high levels of ascarid parasite eggs by fecal test.
- ❖ At least three weeks before arrival, gilts and boars coming into a breeding herd should be vaccinated for: 1) ileitis (Lawsonia intracellularis) six weeks prior to entry; 2) SIV, swine influenza virus, (CH1N1, rH1N1, H3N2); 3) Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae; 4) PCV (Porcine circovirus). Vaccinations for SIV, Mycoplasma, and PCV are given two times per year to the whole breeding herd; for example, pre-breeding or pre-farrowing. Follow label instructions.

Arrival and After

- ❖ Isolate new breeding stock for a minimum of 60 days at a separate site a minimum of 300 yards (preferably 2 miles) from any other pigs.
- ❖ Observe the new animals for clinical signs of disease.
- ❖ Tend to the new animals after you have chored the other pigs. That keeps you from being a carrier of any disease present in the new animals.
- ❖ At a minimum vaccinate new stock for porcine parvovirus (PPV), Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae, Leptospira canicola, L. grippotyphosa, L. hardjo, L. icterohaemorrhagiae, and L. pomona. These can all be given with one shot. Other vaccinations will depend on your farm's health status. Follow the label directions but generally give two injections of each vaccine. Do not exceed two injections per week. Complete all vaccinations at least 3 weeks prior to exposure to the main herd.
- ❖ Have blood tests and worm examinations 2 weeks after arrival in isolation, and again before moving into the herd. If ascarid parasite eggs are present, deworm the entire group while in isolation.
- ❖ Feed-back placentas and manure from the farm's farrow-

-continued on page 17-

Cover Crops Benefit Farm Systems

Sarah Carlson

The Benefits

Cover crops are not a new farming practice to PFI farmers. Since the late 80s, PFI on-farm cooperators have experimented with cover crops such as winter rye planted on ridges before and after corn or soybeans, or have used mixes of species to serve as cover. The cover crop's effect on the next year's crop yield or ability to suppress weeds was typically the measurement of the cover's success. Other measurements of a cover crop's success include its ability to improve the resources on which farmers depend. The importance of having a cover crop on the ground during the "brown time" of the year between fall harvested and spring planted crops is well known for providing benefits like:

- 13%-94% reduction in N loss
- 54%-94% reduction in total P loss
- Reduction in soil erosion
- Reduction in weed pressure
- Improved soil structure

During this year's wet spring, some farmers found another benefit by grazing cover crops when hay was in limited supply. The wide range of reduction levels for N and P loss are due to the amount of time the cover crop is covering the ground—the quicker it is established and the longer it is growing, the greater the benefit.

The Costs

Some cover crops like rye over-winter and need to be killed in the spring while others like oats die in the winter. Below is a table of current custom rates based on $4.00/gallon diesel prices adjusted from the ISU Extension 2008 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey. Seed costs are taken from Welter Seed and Honey Co. located in Onslow, IA. Call 1-800-728-8450 or 1-800-470-3325 for more information.

Seed Cost		Planting	
Rye-conventional	$11.75/bu	Drilling (rate: cereals 1 bu; vetch 30lbs)	$13.02/A
Rye-organic	$13.00/bu	Aerial seeding (rate: cereals 1.5 bu; vetch 45lbs)	$ 13.00/A
Hard Winter Wheat	$16.75/bu	Disking	$15.64/A
Soft Winter Wheat	$18.50/bu	**Spring Kill**	
Triticale	$14.75/bu	Herbicide application	$ 6.08/A
Hairy Vetch-conventional	$ 1.80/lb	Glyphosate (most widely used)	$ 8.00/A
Hairy Vetch-organic	$ 1.85/lb	Tandem disk	$11.48/A
		Field Cultivate	$11.36/A

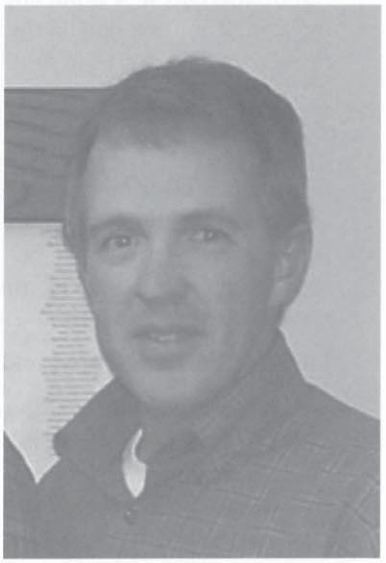
The Cost-Benefit Challenge

The costs to establish and kill an over-wintering cover crop are easier to determine than the monetary value of the benefits. Cover crops can potentially save 17 to 44 pounds nitrate-N per acre. Phosphorus is also captured through reduced soil erosion. Keeping nutrients from being lost through leaching and sediment moved to tile drains can go a long way toward offsetting the cost to establish the cover crop. How close depends on the amount of N and P saved and the value per pound for those nutrients. With nitrogen fertilizer currently selling up to $850 per ton for synthetic and manure prices increasing, reducing any loss of these expensive plant foods is important.

In Indiana, NRCS State Agronomist Barry Fisher touts cover crops as "the precision placement of nutrients to the roots of cash crops. Cover crops build nutrient-enriched paths of least resistance. We see corn and soybean roots follow the same path of previous cover crop roots. This builds an extensive rooting network that will be enriched with nutrients and organic matter from those previous roots."

Is there enough time?

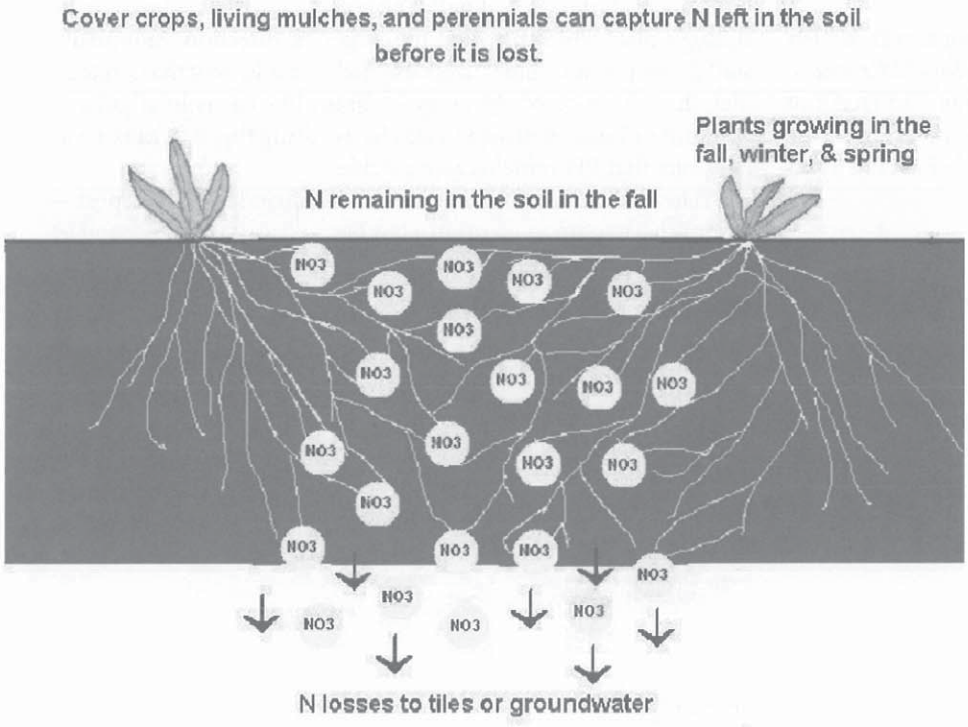
Fall harvest takes up time, making planting a cover crop by October 15th difficult in most parts of Iowa due to Iowa's limited growing season. However, some farmers are successfully adding this practice to their farming system. Washington County farmer Steve Berger has been using cover crops on 1,000 acres of his 2500 acre operation for 10 years.



Steve Berger has utilized cover crops in his farm system for 10 years.

"We don't wait to plant the cover crop in the fall. We get organized before harvest and get it planted right behind the combine," said Berger. "Anyone can plant cover crops because they don't need to be planted straight." Berger hires local teens to drive the drill and plant the cover crop while he is harvesting.

"In our corn and soybeans, we are all about yield. We started using cover crops to build organic matter and keep the soil covered. Now with the need to spread manure, we want that nitrogen kept in place and the rye helps do that." Steve has observed better looking corn stands on fields following a rye cover crop. Steve uses rye+ hog manure + no-till soybeans



on a majority of his cover crop acres.

In Iowa, it is important to get winter cover crops established between October 15th and November 1st. "The sooner the better" suggests Tom Kaspar, National Soil Tilth Lab plant physiologist. Several scenarios to start cover crops in corn and soybean rotations with less yield risk and allowing for more available planting time include:

- Rye following corn silage, sweet corn, or seed corn before soybeans
- Oats over-seeded into soybeans before corn
- Legume inter-seeded or frost-seeded into wheat or oats in a corn-soybean-small grain and legume rotation
- Establishing rye or winter wheat and allowing it to be grazed or harvested for forage
- Synchronize rainfall and interseeding cover crop at layby or corn senescence

What other cover crop options exist?

Several resources to aid in cover crop decision making are currently under construction. The Midwest Cover Crops Council, a regional partnership formed in 2006, was created with the goal of groups including, non-profits, university researchers, farmers and agency and private sector representatives, work together regionally to increase cover crop usage in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Region 30% by 2021.

Two current projects include the development of a website and a decision-making tool. The website, to be publicly released later this year, will include each individual group's website, a list of resources including extension bulletins and peer reviewed publications, contact information for the executive committee, photos, events and programming and access to a decision-making tool. The decision-making tool, which was created from the publication Managing Cover Crops Profitably, provides area-specific information about more than 50 cover crop species. Their performance and roles, cultural traits, planting, potential advantages and disadvantages are reported where substantial information exists. A literature review of extension bulletins, peer-reviewed publications, farmer on-farm research reports and in some cases anecdotes are being summarized to more easily provide comparative information about options in each area of the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region. The decision-making tool will be free to the public. Please look for these resources in the near future.

Your Stories

If you have a cover crop story to share, please contact Sarah Carlson at (515)232-5661 x105 or sarah@practicalfarmers.org.

-Strategies for Swine Herd Health- continued from page 15

ing site. Feed-back most effectively exposes stock to gastro-intestinal pathogens. The most focused approach is careful diagnosis of the diseases on the farm and development of an autogenous vaccine specific to those strains.

❖ During the 60-day isolation, if vaccinations are complete run the new animals with or across the fence from cull sows for two weeks. This exposes the new stock to your system's disease complement without risking your most valuable animals. However, because the cull sows have broad immunity they may not communicate every disease on the farm.

❖ Keep new and main herd gilts and sows separated during the first month of gestation. This gives you additional time to spot any problems and puts off the stress of integration until after the embryos have firmly attached to the uterus.

Introducing Nursery and Feeder Pigs

Use the all-in-all-out approach, keeping introduced animals separate from all others and moving them all together off the farm to market. Vaccination protocols should be implemented based on your farm's health status and the source of the new pigs. Standard vaccinations: erysipelas, Mycoplasma, Circovirus (PCV2), and Salmonella choleraesuis. If you have the option, bring the new feeder pigs to a farm that doesn't already have hogs.

Letter from the Director

-PFI reports on its sustainability- continued from page 3

Jim analyzed the diversity of our income sources—the more sources we have, the more likely we are to be sustainable.

The pie chart below shows that PFI's funding sources are a fairly diverse lot. The highest individual grantor is the Leopold Center, at 20 percent. Experts recommend that no more than 30 percent of an organization's funding should come from one source. Jim covers other economic indicators, such as reserve funds (of which PFI needs more of to be sustainable), in the report as well.

Is PFI sustainable from a social perspective?

Nonprofit organizations exist to serve the public good. PFI needs to be accountable to its members and to the public in its programming and responsible with the money that has been entrusted to it.

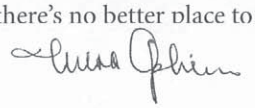
What does PFI do to be accountable? As Jim details in the report, PFI is governed by a 12-person board of directors chosen from and by the membership. PFI has a vision (reprinted every quarter on the back of your newsletter) and a mission to provide "big picture" guidance to the board and staff. The board is currently updating the strategic plan, which provides more specific direction. And finally, staff develop annual objectives designed to implement that strategic plan. If we're succeeding, every program PFI has is in alignment with our vision and mission (see chart). Using this system is a way to ensure that PFI remains accountable.

There are all kinds of other indicators included in the report—we only have room to mention a few here. Please take a look and let us know what you think.

Why did we do this report?

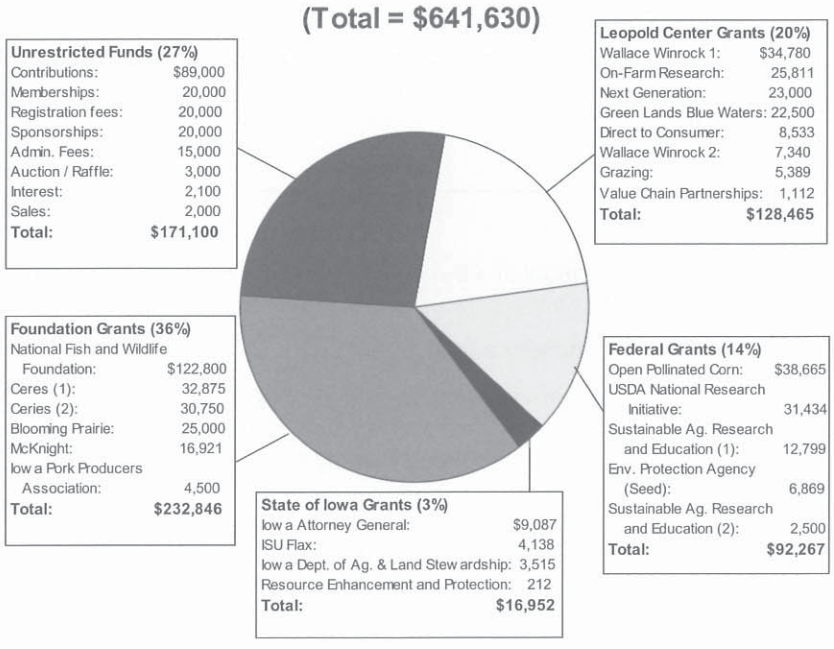
Over the years, many have worked hard to bring PFI to the place where it is today. PFI is important to its members, and they deserve to have the organization around as long as they want it.

As individuals and as an organization, we need to be mindful of the effects of our actions. If we want to stop squandering the resources that our children and grandchildren are going to need, there's no better place to start than a look within.



Teresa Opheim
Executive Director

Our programs should be in alignment with our vision and mission.



Sustainability—How Could PFI Improve?

There are many ideas for helping PFI improve the sustainability of its operations. Additional discussion and thought will likely produce more. As a starting point, Jim Clark, the author of PFI's recent report on sustainability, offered these suggestions:

1– Maximize the potential of this Sustainability Report by distributing it widely.
2– Encourage more carpooling, regional meetings, teleconferences, etc. to lessen the amount that PFI employees and members drive for PFI events.
3– Turn off lights and computers when they are not needed and adjust thermostats to save energy.
4– Consider expanding PFI's research and educational programming on energy conservation and alternative energy use. Continue to build relationships and partnerships with non-profit agencies that advocate for the development of alternative energy. (Board of Directors' approval needed)
5– Continue to strongly hold to the ethic of 'voluntary simplicity,' environmental stewardship and frugality as a guide to purchasing and using materials. Work to lessen the consumption of office paper by printing less, printing double-sided, etc.
6– Consider expanding and improving PFI's research and educational programming that relates to farming practices that improve the quality of streams and rivers, along with preserving and improving wildlife habitat. (Board of Directors' approval needed)
7– With the staff's and board's full involvement, develop a values statement and use it as a compass in making decisions and taking actions. (Board decision needed)
8– Institute a procedure for surveying people who drop their PFI membership to determine why they did so.
9– Work toward increasing compensation and benefits to employees, where the current compensation and benefit levels are lower than other organizations.
10– Keep doing what PFI is doing well.

August

North American Prairie Conference, August 4-8, Winona State University, Winona, MN. This conference has sessions dealing with agriculture, soil management, and prairie restoration for biofuel production hosted by Winona State University. Cost: $150. For further information and registration visit http://www.winona.edu/NAPC/.

Farm Fest, August 5-7, Gilfillan Estates, Redwood County, MN. Programs and demonstrations featuring information on the latest technological advancements in the farming industry. Cost: $7. For more information visit www.farmshows.com.

Vegetable Field Trials, August 16, West Madison Research Station, 8502 Mineral Point Road, Madison, WI. Harriet Behar, Outreach Coordinator for MOSES, will be present to answer questions about organic production and certification. For more information email Judith Reith-Rozelle at jreithrozell@wisc.edu or call (608)262-2257.

Minnesota Garlic Festival, August 16, Wright County Fairgrounds, Howard Lake, MN. Features local foods, chefs, music, artisans, games, competitions, and lots of garlic - all in support of a healthy environment, sustainable farms and vital rural communities in Minnesota. Cost: $5. For more information visit http://www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest/index.html or contact festival director Jerry Ford at (320)543-3394.

Midwestern Bio-Ag Field Day, August 19, 9 am-4 pm, Clyde, WI. Field day on Otter Creek Organic Farm & Bio-Ag Learning Center, 2008 MOSES Farmer of the Year Award winner. Educational presentations on biological farming, crops, forages, dairying & livestock; test plots, booths, guest speakers, tillage & composting demos, farm walk & more. For more information visit http://www.midwesternbioag.com/homepage.html or call (800)327-6012.

Farm Progress Days, August 26-28, Hwy 17 and 30, Boone, IA. State-of-the art information and technology available for today's agricultural producers. 75 acres of exhibits. Cost: Adults $10. For more information visit www.farmprogressshow.com.

Iowa Farmers Union Convention 2008, August 22-23, Best Western Regency Inn, Marshalltown, IA. Two days of speakers and workshops, featuring a lunch of Iowa-grown food. For more information, contact the Iowa Farmers Union, (800) 775-5227, info@iowafarmersunion.org.

Taste Iowa, September 5 and 6, Conrad, Iowa. Local Food Festival including: vendor'S market; producer, consumer, and children's workshops; celebrity chef demonstration; recipe contest; Iron Chef contest; All-Iowa meal; live entertainment. More info: http://www.gnbbank.com/gnb_conrad.asp

September

ISU Allee Demonstration Farm 50th Anniversary Field Day, September 16, 9:30 am, Allee Demonstration Farm, Newell. The 50th anniversary celebration of the Allee Demonstration Farm will include an antique tractor display, 1950s-era corn plot, speakers, and tours of the George Allee mansion. Contact: Dennis Shannon, (515)294-1508, shannond@iastate.edu.

Organic Vegetable Field Day, September 20, 1 pm-4 pm. 2612 County Road 1, Wrenshall, MN 55797. John and Jane Fisher-Merrits will talk about their energy efficient root cellar, along with the fall organic vegetable crop production. Cost: Free. For more information and to Pre-Register: email Jessica Tupa at jessica@mosesorganic.org or call (715)772-3153.

October

Waters That Unite Us, Iowa Environmental Council annual conference, October 17, 8 am to 5 pm, Botanical Center, Des Moines. Explore where and how humans are having positive and negative impacts on Iowa waters and some of the ways individuals and communities can participate in solutions. Contact: Lynn Laws, Iowa Environmental Council, LynnLaws@iaenvironment.org , (515)244-1194, www.iaenvironment.org.

Farming with Grass: Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes in Grassland Environments, October 22-23, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Planned by the Grazinglands Research Laboratory of the USDA in conjunction with the Soil and Water Conservation Society. It will be targeted toward mixed agricultural systems in grassland ecoregions. Contact: Jean Steiner, (405)262-5291, ext. 228, Jean.Steiner@ARS.USDA.GOV.

Iowa State University Field Days

Iowa State University will be hosting a series of Research Farm Demonstration Garden Field Days and Research Farm Crop Production Field Days, to take place at various research farms and gardens across the state. These field days allow farmers and members of the public the chance to observe firsthand the latest in agricultural research, as well as to talk with the researchers involved. For more information, contact: Dennis Shannon, (515) 294-1508, shannond@iastate.edu, or visit http://www.ag.iastate.edu/farms/fielddays.php.

Field Day Guide Corrections!!!!

Karl Dallefeld, August 13: Address originally was his home, not farm. Follow directions in field day guide but not address. Correct phone number for Karl is: (563)590-1929.

Neely-Kinyon Research Farm, August 20: Address is wrong: should be just Greenfield. Directions are correct. Correct phone # is (712)769-2402. Not mentioned in the original guide: Kathleen Delate to speak on organic research. Sponsors also include ISU Organic Program and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice, September 6: Correct town is Wapello.

Complete and CORRECT field day guide at www.practicalfarmers.org.

Iowa Food Cooperative Nears Launch Date

Gary Huber

- A team of people are working on designing and remodeling the initial distribution site at Merle Hay Mall in Des Moines. The team has embraced the concept of green building so the space represents the values of the business. Chaden Halfhill of Silent Rivers, a company specializing in green design and construction, is donating design expertise for the site. The owner of the mall is donating the space, and donations of materials, equipment, and labor will be sought to defray upgrading costs.
- Before the remodeling can happen, the cooperative needs to be legally formed so it can get liability insurance required by the mall. Jim Long, an attorney that specializes in cooperative law, is helping with this process. A founding board of directors will be selected as part of this process, and this founding board will be made up of three consumers and three producers.
- Once the cooperative is formed, members will be recruited. We currently have the names of over 200 consumers who are interested in participating, as well as information from over 70 farmers on products they would like to offer to consumer members of the cooperative. The cost to become a member-owner of the cooperative will be $50 for both farmers and consumers.
- We need to help producers learn how to use the internet-based on-line inventorying system. Available product needs to be uploaded to the website before the ordering windows open. At the start, the ordering window will open the first day of each month, with order fulfillment (ordered product delivered to the mall for pickup) happening the third Thursday of the month We are looking at September 1 or October 1 as dates for the first order cycle.
- A software specialist, Brandon Burnett, is adapting the software to serve our needs. The software is open source, which means it is free. This on-line inventorying and ordering system is a key feature of the cooperative's operations.
- We are working on strategies to expand the cooperative's geographic reach across the entire state. One option is to add a feature to the website that allows consumers and producers who live close to each other to interact for direct sales that occur outside of the cooperative. Another option under consideration for a future date is to work with existing local farmer-led distribution systems to create a hub-and-spoke distribution system across the entire state.
- There have been questions about the long-term relationship between PFI and the new cooperative. The plan has always been to develop a new and separate business entity that will serve the needs of both farmers and consumers. Incorporating it as a 501A cooperative under Iowa law was chosen because this form allows both farmers and consumers to be member-owners. During the cooperative's launch year, PFI will be involved in its operations through funds from a grant provided by the Blooming Prairie Foundation, which will be used to pay for some operating expenses plus some staff time. In addition, we envision that PFI could provide technical assistance to producers (if grant funds can be secured) to help with their needs.
- In our work to bring the Iowa Food Cooperative into reality, we've been struck by the enthusiasm being expressed for this new organization. Being part of something that values people, healthy food, farming with nature, and local self-reliance are key reasons for this enthusiasm. The launch of the cooperative requires a lot of work and we appreciate any volunteer help you are willing to provide! If you want to be involved in the Iowa Food Cooperative, either as a consumer, a producer, or by volunteering your time, needed materials, or equipment, contact Gary Huber at (515)232-5661 (x103) or gary@practicalfarmers.org.

"We've been struck by the enthusiasm for the Iowa Food Cooperative."

~Gary Huber

From Left: Chris Worley, Jason Jones, and Chaden Halfhill mull over site design for the distribution site.

-A Vision for "Good Food" for Iowa- continued from page 11

contribute to diet-related chronic diseases.

Demand for local, sustainable, humanely-raised, fair-trade food production has increased with the organic food industry growing about 20% each year.

Food Systems and Energy Dependency

Iowa diets are heavily dependent on nonrenewable fossil fuels. For every 100 calories of vegetables, 50 calories of fossil fuel energy is needed. Likewise, for every 100 calories of chicken requires 500 calories of fossil fuel energy. For every 100 calories of grain-fed beef, 1,600 calories of fossil fuel energy is needed.

A diet high in processed and packaged foods requires much more energy for production than a fresh, locally-grown diet.

Health Status of Iowans

Two-thirds of Iowans are either overweight or obese. Almost a third of low-income Iowa children between two and five years of age are overweight or at-risk of being overweight.

Iowa's direct costs attributable to obesity are estimated to be more than $783 million, of which $198 million is paid by Medicaid and $165 million by Medicare.

Since 1996, there has been more than a 60% increase in the rate of diabetes in Iowa.

Researchers have predicted that because of the dramatic rise in obesity and related chronic diseases, especially among young people, Iowans may witness a decline in life expectancy by as much as five years over the next few decades. Iowa children may have shorter life spans than their parents.

Public Health Benefits of Community-Based Food Systems

Community-based food systems, or "good food" systems, are formed when agriculture, processing, distribution and consumption are cohesive processes that regenerate rather than degrade natural resources.

Fresh, Flavorful Food. Iowans are interested in the health benefits, food safety and quality of local foods. Local foods are grown closer to the point of consumption providing a fresh, ripe and flavorful product.

Decrease Chronic Disease. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables maximizes good health. Increased fruit and vegetable consumption substantially lowers the risk of developing obesity, diabetes, heart disease and could prevent at least 20% of all cancers, thereby reducing health care costs.

Beneficial Nutrients. Some studies show that organic farming produces crops with higher levels of beneficial nutrients such as antioxidants as compared to conventionally-grown crops. Pasture-raised, grass-fed beef contains less total fat than meat from grain-fed animals. Meat and milk from pasture-raised, grass-fed animals contain greater levels of beneficial fatty acids such as omega-3, alpha-linolenic acid and conjugated linoleic acid.

Diverse Foods. Diverse foods are needed to meet the food, nutrition and health needs of all Iowa eaters. Diversifying farm products helps meet that demand and enable a producer to spread out their production and level of risk.

Strengthen Food Security. Linking fresh, local foods to nutrition assistance programs may decrease food insecurity and hunger and improve the health of low-income Iowans. In the event conventional food distribution channels are disrupted in Iowa, local food sources should be incorporated into emergency preparedness plans.

Establish Relationships. Local foods enable Iowans to reconnect with where their food comes from and how it is produced by establishing personal relationships with farmers.

Healthy individuals, healthy families, healthy farms, healthy communities and healthy ecosystems are a result of vibrant community-based food systems.

Decrease Widespread Contamination. Local production, processing and distribution systems have shorter supply chains and offer less co-mingling of products as compared to a global industrial food system. This decreased vulnerability allows potential food contamination to be contained.

Increase Economic Viability and Stability. Iowans are seeking higher quality, fresh, healthy foods. This demand will result in greater financial opportunities for farmers. This revenue will be recirculated and reinvested within communities and will strengthen local economies.

Higher and More Stable Farm Incomes. Iowans are more likely to purchase locally-grown foods if available. This demand, if matched by local production, may enhance the farmer's share of the final retail price as there are fewer exchanges between farmer and consumer.

Saves Farmland. Community-based food systems will slow the rapid loss of farmland to residential and commercial development. Iowa can establish sustainable communities centered around profitable local food production.

Preserves Natural Resources. As Sir Albert Howard said in 1939, "...soil is the basis of public health..." Diversified farming systems regenerate natural resources, maintain soil nutrients, reduce dependence upon chemical pesticides and fertilizers, promote crop diversity, decrease erosion and preserve water quality.

Decrease Dependence on Nonrenewable Energy. If Iowa grew and transported more produce intended for Iowa consumption, there would be an annual savings of 280,000 to 346,000 gallons of fuel and an annual reduction of 6.7 million to 7.9 million pounds of CO_2 emissions.

Foundation of a Vibrant Community. Iowa's food system is a reflection of the ecological, social, economic and public health stability and integrity of Iowa communities. These elements are essential for sustainability, not just for Iowa's food system, but also for the whole of society and the future of humanity. Healthy individuals, healthy families, healthy farms, healthy communities and healthy ecosystems are a result of vibrant community-based food systems.

Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD is a Food & Society Policy Fellow working to educate the public about the link between healthy soils, healthy food, and healthy communities.

Graziers Tour Central Iowa by Bus

"This day depends on where you want to go with it," Doug Gunnink, an expert at finishing cattle on grass, told PFI's Ankeny grazing cluster. The group gathered in the Griffieon barn near Ankeny. The 19 assembled were soon on their way to Craig and LaVon Griffieon's pasture, then to a tour and lunch at Bruce Carney's operation, and finally to Larry and Kay Matson's before heading home.

Below are some kernels of wisdom from Gunnink, gathered throughout the day.

Other PFI grazing clusters have been meeting for pasture walks and consultations with experts of their choosing. For example, the PFI grazing cluster in Northwest Iowa had a rolling tour with Holistic Management and forages expert Terry Gompert. The Northeast Iowa cluster will spend a day with the live animal evaluator Gearld Fry later this summer.

If you're a PFI grazier and not yet part of a grazing cluster, contact Tom German at tagerman@netllc.net or (712)830-3281. Thank you to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the McKnight Foundation and the Ceres Foundation for their support of PFI's grazing clusters.

"Quality feed is where it is at. The costs of supplements are going to rise dramatically. For example, Vitamin E has recently gone from $2.80 to $12 a pound," Gunnink said. "On our farm, we've spent a lot of time building grass that has all the requirements we need. Then we don't have to go to Cargill to buy minerals."

"We have forgotten about biological issues. Phosphorous and magnesium aren't available to plants until the soil warms up. You can't have a high energy grass without the right phosphorus," Gunnink said. Gordon Graham in the background.

"It's amazing the difference in flavor of white clover in different pastures. You can do a lot of monitoring by tasting your clover. You need high sugar content in grass if you want to finish on grass," Gunnink said.

Gunnink is a big fan of refractometers, and Bruce Carney had one he had never used, so when the bus tour landed at his house, he ran in to get his so that Gunnink could demonstrate. "To get sugars in grass, you need nutrient density and mineral content. The BRIX here is four to six," Gunnink said. "To really finish cattle, the BRIX must be 9 or over."

"Bluegrass doesn't grow very much, but cows like it," Gunnink said. "With bluegrass, graze every 20 to 25 days in the spring. You could double its productivity by giving it a rest. By interseeding and managing it in the spring, you can get better grazing later on." Bill and Betty Kimble listen in.

Winter Farm Tours—Virtually

PFI has will be developing eight virtual farm tours of niche pork operations as part of a new grant. Plans are to recruit eight farms, take digital images of various features of these farms, turn these images into presentations that will be burned onto CDs, and then conduct eight 1.5 hour long virtual tours next winter using conference calls and/or the Internet. Rick Exner and ISU Extension swine field specialist Dave Stender will be making farm visits over the next few months to take digital images and talk to the operators about topics they would like to highlight as innovative practices, plus topics they would like help figuring out. The images will focus on features that can easily be captured with photographs. Examples include:

- Feeders (types, adjustment mechanisms, placement, etc.)
- Waterers (types, placement, etc.)
- Designs of farrowing pens
- Designs of breeding areas for hand-mating or artificial insemination
- Designs of grow/finish facilities
- Designs of feeding areas for gestating sows
- Manure handling features
- Building ventilation and heating systems
- Utility and fuel saving techniques and devices
- On-farm feed grinding and handling systems
- Pig handling facilities (sorting, loading, etc.)

During the actual tours, host farmers will discuss the images with others who sign up to participate. The goal is to help participants learn about ways to improve their niche hog operations.

We are currently in the process of recruiting host farms, who will receive reimbursement for participating. If you are interested in being part of this project, either as a host farm or a participant in the tours, contact Gary Huber at 515-232-5661 (x103) or gary@practicalfarmers.org.

Thanks to the Smithfield Swine Industry for funding this program.

Niche Pork Summer Field Days

Dave Stender, ISU Extension Swine Field Specialist, talks about options for using an open-front finishing building at the farm of Mark and Valerie Olson.

PFI and ISU Extension worked together to host three June 2008 field days that explored options to bring farms with unused hog facilities back into production for niche markets. One of these field days was held at the farm of Mark and Valerie Olson near Schaller, IA, which is where these photos came from. Funding for the field days came from the ISU On-Farm Research and Demonstration Program, and co-sponsors included the Iowa Pork Producers Association, Organic Valley, Hubbard Feeds, Niman Ranch, and Natural Farrowing Systems, LLC.

Mark and Valerie Olson (at right) listen as Dean Ekstrand talks about his perspective on how to use the finishing building.

Mark Olson listens as Ron Mardeson, a field agent for Niman Ranch, offers ideas on turning an unused confinement farrowing building into a pen farrowing facility that would use bedding and have outdoor access.

The view from the outside of the confinement farrowing building.

Participants look over one of several open-front finishing buildings on the Olson farm.

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