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*working together, always learning*

# Practical Farmer

A quarterly publication of Practical Farmers of Iowa

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## On the cover



Attendees at Susan Jutz's June field day head for a tour of one of her moveable high tunnels

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**the Practical Farmer** keeps farmers and friends of farmers in touch with one another and provides informative articles about the latest on-farm research, demonstration and observation to help all types of farming operations to become profitable, while caring for the land that sustains them. Provided as a member benefit to PFI supporters, **the Practical Farmer** also update members on PFI programming, news.

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(Back issues are available upon request.)



LEOPOLD CENTER





## Affection

**W**endell Berry, the octogenarian farmer /writer from Kentucky, is perhaps our nation's best known advocate for small farmers and land-conserving economics. In his recent 2012 Jefferson lecture, Berry talked about how too often modern agribusiness replaces natural health and beauty "with a heartless and sickening ugliness."

Affection, says Berry, is what is needed to counter that ugliness. We need more affection for each other and for, as Berry describes, "soul-sustaining habitations: the houses, households, earthly places where lives can be made and loved." According to Berry, morality, even religious morality, is not an adequate motive for good care of the land community. The primary motive for good care and good use is always going to be affection. Affection involves us entirely.

There is no shortage of these soul-sustaining habitations in the PFI membership. When Mark and Connie Tjelmeland planted a prairie restoration on their land, they did so with affection for the plant species native to Iowa. When Tom and Kristi German turned eroded cropland into a grass-based system, they did so with affection for ruminants. When Craig Fleishman works to reduce chemical use in his corn-soybean rotation, he does so out of affection for the soil. When Rick and Stacy Hartmann improve habitat on their farm, they do so with affection for pollinators.

And then there is the affection that PFI members show to each other. Farmers meet at a PFI workshop, and over the years turn into friends. Their triumphs become ours and their sorrows too. Says Berry: "The economic hardship of one farm family, if they are our neighbors, affects us more painfully than pages of statistics on the decline of the farm population....Wallace Stevens wrote that 'imagination applied to the whole world is vapid in comparison to imagination applied to a detail.'"



**Tamale – Jim and Julie Petersen's miniature dachshund – gets to know the Petersens' new half-Pyrenees pups. Tamale plays the role of pampered pet in the household; the pups will grow up to have careers as farm guard dogs.**



**With affection (clockwise from left): Jim Petersen with cousins / farmland owners Martha Skillman and Charlotte Shivvers; three generations: Ron, Colton and Todd Dunphy; and fellow graziers Mike DeCook and Steve Reinart.**



Over and over again I have seen at Practical Farmers those who have made decisions with affection. Sometimes those decisions result in maximum profits; sometimes they do not. Charlotte Shivvers and Martha Skillman sell farmland to cousin James Petersen; they could have searched for the highest bidder but have the pleasure of helping James's sons Justin and Jacob start farming. Helen Gunderson shepherds young farmer Betsy Dahl with a deliberative strategy that gives Betsy access to her farmland. Ron Dunphy backs off of farming to give his son a chance to take the lead; Earl Hafner does the same. All of this involves affection.

Nature follows a fertility cycle of birth, growth, maturity, death and decay that turns continuously in place. Berry points out that there is a similar cycle in community. "The cultural cycle is an unending conversation between old people and young people, assuring the survival of local memory, which has, as long as it remains local, the greatest practical urgency and value."

In so many Iowa rural communities the cyclical transfer of farm knowledge has sadly dwindled, as farms get larger, more specialized and more mechanized. At Practical Farmers, that transfer of knowledge is really just beginning. A field day provides an opportunity for Steve Reinert to advise Mike DeCook on his pasture species mix. On Farminars, Rob Faux provides

tips to Ellen Walsh Rosmann on extending the vegetable season, Ryan Herman explains his record keeping for cattle with Joel Winnes. In the Savings Incentive Program, Kathy Hohl mentors Morgan Hoenic on scaling up a horticulture farm; Derek Roller is doing the same with Grant Schultz. Greg Koether advises mentee Karla Hanson on how to set up a grazing system. "He's a wealth of information," Karla says. "And he's really interested in helping."

Practical Farmers is here to work for the cause of stable, restorative, locally adapted economies of family-sized farms. "Naive as it may sound now, within the context of our present faith in science, finance and technology – the faith equally of conservatives and liberals," we along with Wendell Berry "hope to abide in and to live from some chosen and cherished small place – which of course is the agrarian vision that Thomas Jefferson spoke for, a sometimes honored human theme, minor and even fugitive, but continuous from ancient times until now."

With affection,

Teresa

## Weed Management Strategies

by Sarah Carlson

***PFI members have been conducting on-farm research trials on weeds every year since 1987, when the PFI Cooperators' Program began. Now is a good time to review that research, because numerous hot days in this year's growing season seemed to help these "plants out of place" really grow. Whether crops are farmed using steel or herbicides to manage weeds, having multiple "little" hammers allows farmers to use the right tool under the right conditions to improve control.***

**P**FI Cooperators have tested hammers including cultural (cover crops), mechanical (cultivation), chemical (herbicide) and thermal (flaming). For these trials, some years were dry, some years were wet, some years had high weed pressure while others had low. Using one silver bullet tool might lead to unintended consequences like weed resistance and dependence on one technology. "Successful weed management is the result of strategic thinking: If hoeing doesn't work then I'll... If the spring turns dry, we'll..." Being able to tweak the system to match the correct tool with the correct situation will improve weed management.

### Conventional Tillage vs Ridge-Tillage

In 1988 Ron Rosmann, one of nine cooperators conducting weed management trials that year, measured increased weeds in conventional tilled versus ridge-tilled fields. More velvetleaf and pigweed were present in the conventional tillage treatment while lambsquarter was greater in the ridge-tillage treatment. At other locations — Dordt College and the farms of Harlan and Sharon Grau, Ray and Marj Stonecypher, Bob and Diane Graff, Allyn and Laura Hagensick, Tom and Marcia Hanks, Todd and Linda Hartsock, and Mark and Rita Mays — side-by-side comparisons of ridge-till with and without banded herbicides showed no corn yield differences in three locations and saved an average \$8.78 per acre in production costs.

Ridge-till with and without herbicide soybean trials at five of six locations showed no yield differences. At the sixth location (the Hanks'), soybean yield without herbicides was reduced by 5.23 bushels per acre, which in 1988 was valued at \$35.00 per acre. The cost of the herbicide at the time was \$24.03 per acre. Farmers used a mixture of

cultural practices to control weeds, including rotary hoeing and cultivating in addition to comparing with and without herbicides.

### Low-Input, Mechanical Control Trials

In 1990 low-input weed treatments were compared to higher-input treatments by 14 PFI Cooperators. Ten out of 11 trials using ridge-tillage without herbicides showed no difference in corn or soybean yield to a chemical comparison. In 1992, Cooperator Paul Mugge compared yield and production costs of mechanical control, including two rotary hoe passes plus three cultivations to banding herbicide plus two cultivation passes. He found that yield was not different but the banded herbicide plus cultivation treatment was more profitable. Dick Thompson tried a unique weed management trial in 1995 when he tested early versus late planted soybeans in combination with planting in the light or dark. Dick had read that even a little light could initiate weed germination. He built housing over the units on the ridge-till planter, which included an electric light and was switched on for the light-planting treatments. At the end of the year Dick's results measured no difference in soybean yield in any of the combinations of treatments. Early planting, though, had a greater amount of broadleaf weeds compared to the late planting date. But planting in the light or the dark did not have a significant effect on the weeds.

### Flame Weeding

In 1998, New Mellera Abbey farm manager Joe Fitzgerald conducted the first formal trial of flame weeding in corn. Flame weeders use jets from a propane tank to burn down weeds similar to burn-down herbicides but use propane instead of chemicals. Flamed weeds are killed by the cell membranes rupturing when exposed to temperatures of 100°C for a split second. The cell then loses water and the plant dies. Also flaming could occur when the soil is too wet for mechanical cultivation. Flame weeding is most effective when leaves are thin and tender and the weed's growing point is above the soil surface. Although flame weeding's effect on weeds was not significantly different in 1998, Joe tested the flame weeder again in 1999. Corn yield was significantly improved and fewer broadleaf and grass weeds were present compared to the cultivation treatment. Flaming was more expensive, but because of better weed control and higher corn yields it was the more profitable treatment.

In 1999, Dennis and Eve Abbas flame-weeded in corn on July 1. Dennis observed reductions in weeds, including quack grass and Canada thistle. Again in 2000 he compared flaming before first cultivation versus flaming before first cultivation and again before second cultivation. The first treatment, flame-weeding before first cultivation, only significantly out-yielded corn compared to the second treatment — but weed pressure was relatively low that year.

In 2000 Gary Guthrie tested weed control in carrots using flame-weeding at an early and later carrot planting date. Broadleaves and grasses were reduced more in the later planting date treatment. The flaming saved on labor and materials at about \$1.30 per 100-foot bed. Building on flame-weeding research, Doug Alert and Margaret Smith flame-weeded and twice cultivated their ridge-till corn. They measured reduced velvetleaf numbers and increased corn yields compared to two cultivation passes only. In 2002



***As a participant in an early PFI weed management trial in 1988, Ray Stonecypher shared details of his research results with field day attendees.***





**As one of the early participants in PFI flame weeding trials, Paul Mugge started experimenting with flame weeding in 2002.**

Paul Mugge tried controlling weeds through a combination of flame weeding and cover crops. Paul measured reduced numbers of broadleaf weeds from either a spring rye cover crop planted on the ridges or a flame-cultivation only. The biggest reduction in weeds came from the combination of cover crops and flame weeding.

## Rye on the Ridges

Several farmers have tried planting rye on the “ridges” to control weeds. To plant on the ridges PFI farmers developed the technique of plugging units on the grain drill so that the tubes only plant on the ridges. The valleys in between the ridges are left undisturbed and not planted. The rye is then left to grow and at planting the planter scrapes the ridges clean providing a clean seedbed for the cash crop. In 2004 and 2006 Dick Thompson and Doug Alert both tried this technique. No significant difference in weed control was noticed as had been observed in other years.

## Cover Crop Control

In 2010 Aaron Lehman planted a winter rye cover crop in the fall prior to soybeans and then in the spring mowed the rye cover crop near boot stage. He then was able to use the mulch from the cover crop to suppress weeds in his organic soybeans. He observed reduced weed pressure and tried the test again in 2011.

## 2012 Flame-Weeding Field Days

A new idea to be explored at an upcoming PFI field day, on August 7 in Stanton, is the use of flame weeding for no-till farmers who have glyphosate-resistant weeds on their farm. Mark Peterson, along with Dr. Stevan Knezevic from the University of Nebraska, will present about the potential for flame-weeding in conventional no-till systems. Also check out the new flame-weeder Scott Shriver uses for organic weed management on September 13th near Jefferson at his field day. See the PFI Field Day guide for more information.

Have ideas for on-farm weed management research projects? Contact Sarah Carlson at 515.232.5661 or sarah@practicalfarmers.org. For more on the many trials on weed management PFI farmers have done through the PFI Cooperators' Program, visit [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org). ■



**1st Photo Above: What rye planted in ridges looks like in the spring.**

**2nd Photo Above: A flame weeder in action on the New Melleray Abbey farm. Flame weeders use jets to zap weeds with a split-second dose of propane instead of herbicides.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**SAVE THE DATE! January 10-12, 2013 – PFI Annual Conference | Scheman Building | Iowa State University | Ames, IA**

**UPCOMING FIELD DAYS – Please check our website or call the office to request a field day guide for full details.**

**August 1, Alta – Integrating Niche Pork, Beef, and Crops**

**August 3, Adel – Orchard + Kitchen + Store = On-Farm Enterprise**

**August 4, Waukon – Better Grass and Fly Control: A Dairy's Path to Profits**

**August 7, Stanton – Cover Crops and Flame-Weeding in Corn and Soybeans**

**August 9, Winfield – Row-Cropping for Multiple Markets: GMO, Non-GMO & Organics**

**August 17, Keystone – High-Value Rotations on a Grass-Based System**

**August 21, Taylor County – Cover Crop Tour: Combatting Compaction**

**August 24, Brandon – Cedar River Coalition (Iowa Learning Farms)**

**August 26, Marshalltown – Harvest from the Heart of Iowa Farm Tour**

**Sept. 8, Solon – A New Farmer's Story: From Production to Policy**

**Sept. 13, Jefferson – Improving Organics: Small Grains, Flame-Weeding & Corn Hybrids**

**Sept. 14, River Falls, Wis. – U.S. Testing Network Breeders' Showcase**

**Sept. 15, Wapello – From Fruits to Nuts- Managing and Marketing Tree Crops**

**Sept. 16, Iowa Falls – Taste the Difference: Picking Pork Characteristics for Flavor**

**Sept. 18, Paullina – High-Density Grazing and Permaculture**

**Sept. 22, Polk & Story Counties – Farm Cruise through Polk and Story Counties**

**Sept. 26, Emmetsburg – Working Toward Vertical Integration**

**October 4, Mechanicsville – Tools and Techniques for Year-Round Harvest**

**October 7, Knoxville & Lacona – Farm Crawl**

**UPCOMING NORTHEAST IOWA GRAZERS PASTURE WALKS – Check our website, field guide or call the office for full details.**

**August 1, New Hampton – Garth Griffin**

**August 4, Waukon – Jeremy and Jody Peake**

**August 15, Garnavillo – Andy Schaefer**

**August 29, Guttenberg – Scott Cheme**

**Sept. 18, Waukon – Joel Winnes**

**FOR MORE UPCOMING EVENTS, CHECK THE PFI WEBSITE: [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org)**

## Going Full-Time With Your Part-Time Farm

by Joel Salatin

*On April 17th, a robust crowd gathered at the farm of Tom and Mary Coy to hear well-known Virginia farmer and author Joel Salatin give his entertaining and insightful comments on running small diversified farms. Here are excerpts from his talk.*

### Build a Team

**T**he first hurdle is to realize that very seldom do all the gifts and talents needed to farm successfully grow on the same torso. I've never been alone in my farming operation, and there have always been gifts and talents around me that complemented my weaknesses.

And do I have weaknesses! I can't balance a checkbook! But I love to do the cow work, keep the production records, figure out the rotation schedule. My wife, Teresa, is meticulous and spends eight hours chasing down every penny. You need someone like that working with you.

For most farmers, their weak link is marketing. We are farmers because we don't like people. That's why we're out there on the back 40 on the tractor. We have a better relationship with our John Deere than we do with our spouse!

Your farm is not going to be a one-man or a one-woman show. It's going to be a show with other people. Maybe they aren't all full-time; maybe they are related and maybe not. But you are going to have to build a team that has the ingredients for success.

### Use Resources Well

Next, take a look at your land. Look at the microclimates around the farmstead and ask: How can we grow something that works for this microclimate? For example, we have a barn that is in the shade. The roof collects moisture and creates this damp area beside the barn. Even in a hot July day in a drought that roof collects moisture. It's a perfect microclimate for mushrooms, so we grow shiitakes there. Look around: What is something on your landscape that can be better used? Take advantage of all those microspots.



*Joel Salatin spoke to a large crowd of listeners in a barn on the farm of Tom and Mary Coy. Salatin spoke about scaling up, diversifying and involving the next generation.*

If you have a machine, you want to use it more rather than less. That's the only way you can pay for that machine. I know a lot of you are thinking that's counter-intuitive. But the darn thing is sitting there

***If you want to farm, you should farm. Why should you have to work in town if farming is the love of your life?***

*Joel Salatin*

depreciating! Get your money out of it as it depreciates! Is there custom work you can do with that tractor? Can you prepare gardens, do landscaping, custom harvest hay?

We want to leverage all the infrastructure we have to its greatest efficiency. My favorite example of this is our growth over time of our Eggmobiles. Thirty years ago, I conceived of the portable henhouse. I built a six-by-

eight foot thing and put bicycle wheels on the edges, added 40 chickens, and then ran them in different parts of our yard. One time I intersected the Eggmobile where a bunch of cows had grazed through. Chickens were going to the cow patties and just tearing them up eating that fly larvae. I saw the advantages of the chickens scratching through the cow patties, spreading that fertility around and reducing fly populations.

That winter, I replicated the Eggmobile, put it on a three-point hitch for a season and ran it behind the cows. The next year I built the first 12 x 20 foot Eggmobile and put a hundred chickens in there and ran them behind the cows. Then people wanted more eggs, so we put a hundred more in. It suddenly dawned on me: It doesn't take one more minute to hook that Eggmobile up to a tractor with 200 chickens than with 100.

Now we have more than 4,000 birds and run 12 Eggmobiles. An Eggmobile can handle 400 birds a piece. We found out the hard way that 500 birds were too many. It was too much social pressure for the birds to come in at night. The bossy hens would stand at the door and keep out the timid hens. 400 hens — with a back





“Take your deer rifle and use your television for target practice. The average American male, between 25-35 years old, spends 20 hours a week playing video games. That’s enough time to start a business!”

Joel Salatin

door for the timid hens – worked. We found a limitation and adapted. We also now feed the chickens 15-20 percent grain. We readily admit we compromise the quality by feeding grain, but we are comfortable with that compromise.

We can’t make our Eggmobile structure any bigger than it is now—it would be too big and heavy and get mired down in the mud in the spring. But we can make a train by hitching the Eggmobiles together and pulling them by tractor. It doesn’t take one more minute to hook up the tractor and move 800 rather than 400. The principle is: If we are going to have infrastructure, we want to run it to our maximum economy of scale.

The last two days I was in California on a couple of great farms. At one, they have three Eggmobiles with 150 chickens that they move independently. I asked them: Have you ever thought about hooking them together? We have to be smart here!

**Create Benchmarks of Efficiency**

Every successful business in the world does time and motion studies, and we should too. You the farmer: If I asked you: How many person minutes does it take to put away a dozen eggs? You should be able to tell me. How many acres of hay can you mow in an hour? You should be able to tell me. How many minutes a day does it take to move cows? You should be able to tell me.

All over our farm, we have benchmarks of efficiency. You should be able to gut a chicken in 30 seconds. A minute is not good enough to stay in business. Our benchmark is 30 dozen eggs in every 20 person minutes. Moving

chicken shelters in the field? Sixty seconds per shelter. That’s our benchmark.

I’m not suggesting what your benchmarks should be, but you need to figure this out. Until you go out with a stopwatch and see how long it is taking you,

establish a benchmark and then check your performance, how do you know what this is all costing you?

**Add Value to Make a Profit**

As farmers we have chips on our shoulders. We feed the world and we do a noble sacred profession, and we think the world owes us something. The world doesn’t owe us anything. We earn what we get. You need to think like a business person. Don’t think like a missionary; they don’t have to make a profit.

As small farmers, we want to wear more hats. Once you get into running a small farm business, you realize how hard it is to do the marketing, the distribution. But its advantage is you can get all that additional value. Take advantage of the money people will pay for various products.

At our farm, we are consistently looking for value-added. Sometimes we partner. An example: We don’t have the manpower or the licensed kitchen to get additional value out of our chicken backs and necks by turning them into chicken stock. I found an outfit called A Hundred Bowls of Soup to do it, and just got our first 500

quarts of chicken stock back. This partnership is allowing us to make \$3 a pound on backs and necks. We’re selling the chicken stock on the website; in the first 24 hours, we sold seven quarts. We’re also working with a family that makes artisanal pasta to turn our cracked eggs and itty bitty eggs into noodles. We’re going to get \$4 a dozen from cracked eggs.

Think about value-added and taking everything you have to the next level. A lot of times that takes a skill set that may involve people other than family.

My most important advice, and I should have said this first: Take your deer rifle and use your television for target practice. The average American male between 25-35 years old spends 20 hours a week playing video games. That’s enough time to start a business! The average nine to 18 year old spends seven and a half hours a day on electronic machines. Folks, that’s a lot of time. We need to leverage that time. ■

Next issue: Salatin’s comments on “working with your kids so they will want to work with you.” Thank you to PFI member Jonathan Andelson and the Center for Prairie Studies at Grinnell College for their partnership for the Joel Salatin visit. Also thank you to sponsors 21st Century Rehab and Premier Supplies, and to an anonymous donor. To watch videos of Salatin’s talks, visit [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org).



Joel Salatin speaks to one of the guests.

## Scaling Up to Meet Demand: Two Points of View

by Marc Strobbe

**Many fruit and vegetable producers in Iowa are considering scaling up production in response to expanding demand for locally grown food. Wholesale buyers in the state such as schools, institutions, and restaurants are considering increasing local purchases or entering the local marketplace for the first time in response to demand.**

**Practical Farmers of Iowa interviewed buyers and growers statewide to get their perspectives on how this wholesale relationship is working and can be improved. They reported that wholesale business is increasing, more expansion is desired, and there is interest in collaboration to create improved purchasing systems. They are concerned that the system's growing pains could deter buyers, growers, and consumers before it matures.**

**Here are perspectives from an aggregator and grower on how the wholesale marketplace is working for fruit and vegetable sales.**

### Aggregator Profile: GROWN Locally

**G**ROWN (Goods Raised Only With Nature) Locally is a grower cooperative in northeast Iowa in its twelfth year. Its system, created by farmers to service farmers, is an example of a functioning aggregator that can help transact sales between buyers and growers.

All products, roughly 65 percent produce, are sourced from more than 30 member producers within a 60-mile radius. GROWN Locally handles marketing, aggregation and distribution to wholesale buyers in its home region. Its staff recruits, trains and organizes growers and buyers alike to make the system work. GROWN Locally posts an updated availability and price list weekly, and delivers products every Tuesday and Friday through the summer season.

GROWN Locally is constantly looking for more growers and buyers. "Supply is our number one limitation. There are never enough growers. Our demand goes up double digits each year, and increased 30 percent last year alone," says manager Johnice Cross. "We look for diversity and volume; we just added mushrooms and honey but still can't get enough carrots and other root crops." Marketing coordinator Kate Scott adds: "The goal is diversity in types and sizes of buyers; we want to keep expanding market access for our members."

"It is initially a struggle to show the value of growing for GROWN Locally to growers," Cross says. "Sometimes, after a short time with

GROWN Locally, a grower will go off on their own to capture all the revenue. Then they realize the services GROWN Locally provides are a great deal. They find out more money can be made if they focus on growing, and we deal with the marketing and distribution." GROWN Locally is seeing an increase of "business savvy" growers who realize this value from the get-go.

In winter the co-op's growers set prices per crop, allowing them to plan seasonal production. The cooperative



has three pricing structures for buyers based on volume and delivery costs, and adds 20 percent to the set prices to cover co-op operating costs.

GROWN Locally also assists with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification and food safety guidelines when necessary. It created a grower manual and organizes certification trips so multiple growers can split the cost. GROWN Locally is in the process of looking for ways to use seconds, especially for new growers who may not make quality requirements.

To improve the local wholesale marketplace, Cross says increasing supply is the number one need. In addition, cash-flow can be problematic at times. Wholesale buyers, accustomed to the billing cycles of the conventional system, may not pay GROWN Locally for one or two months, or even more. GROWN Locally prefers to pay its growers within two weeks of delivery so it may use a line of credit, based on those accounts receivable, in the near future.

Education for growers, buyers, and everyone in between is key for improving local wholesale transactions. Cross: "Distributors are starting to get into local food purchasing and need to understand that these products are different and need to be treated as such." For example, locally-produced fruits and vegetables typically arrive unprocessed, full of flavor, and extremely fresh. The freshness may increase their shelf life, but the products have not been bred to endure shipping and rough handling. In addition, Cross reports:

"There is a learning curve for growers who are increasing in scale. Many growers think expanding will be easy, that they can move from a garden to selling wholesale, then they find out all that is involved and back out."

The time is right for increasing local produce available in the marketplace, according to Cross: "As the health benefits of fresh, local food are being understood, end-users of all types want local, from students and schools to restaurants. Local transitions are an economic engine for rural communities, keeping the money local, so it is a win-win for all."





## Grower Profile: Kyle and Mari Holthaus KyMar Acres

**P**FI and GROWN Locally members Kyle and Mari Holthaus operate KyMar acres in northeast Iowa with five acres in production at their home farm and three more at another location. More than half their receipts are from wholesale, which is all transacted through GROWN Locally. The rest are through retail at the Allamakee Farmers Market in Waukon, the two Winneshiek Farmers Markets in Decorah, and the family's new on-farm store. They like the stability that marketing diversity offers, and production between the two systems varies little for them.

"Wholesale has more handling and volume, but is less finicky and hands-on, so tends to balance out," Kyle says. "Not much changes beyond that as far as our on-farm methods." KyMar Acres has been able to expand sales without increasing acreage by focusing on enhancing fertility and improving yields.

He adds: "GROWN Locally helps bring together a number of similar farmers interested in collaboration to supply demand to a sizeable town near our location. If we were working solely on our own I'm not sure how we could do it. When farmers do all the marketing themselves, they end up robbing their fields."

As founding members of GROWN Locally, the benefits of collaborative marketing are not lost on Kyle and Mari after seeing the distributor improve over time. "After the co-op hired staff, the farmers could focus on farming. Early on, the farmers took turns managing and marketing," Kyle says. "Farming is a business like others but production, managing and marketing skill sets are so different that it can be hard — some farmers may not speak consumer."

The biggest barriers to success working with GROWN Locally is buyer commitment. Kyle: "Despite planning, getting buyers to say an actual number can be a challenge.



*Kyle and Mari Holthaus stand with their daughter, Violet, and son, Teddy, on their farm in northeast Iowa.*

Also, buyers want to treat GROWN Locally like anyone else and make threats about price and delivery requirements." Luckily, GROWN Locally advocates for the growers and explains they have set price guarantees. ■

## Iowa specialty growers get marketing help with IDALS directory listing

Demand for locally-grown fruits and vegetables has flourished in recent years. One of the hindrances to expanding local food purchases continues to be access. Providing an easy source for consumers to go to that allows them to find the products they seek with the attributes they desire offers opportunities for all specialty crop producers.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is offering Iowa fruit and vegetable growers the opportunity to be listed in an easy to use self-enrolled directory. This directory identifies products, location and selling method. Consumers will be able to seek organic products or identify farms offering agritourism opportunities and events. Growers can add to or change their information as needed and a link will send

prospective consumers to their website. Yearly reminders will be emailed to growers to update their production data allowing consumers to access up-to-date information.

An additional feature, created in partnership with the Iowa Department of Education allows school food service an easy method to seek the product and grower location they are looking for and send them a bid request with price, quantity and delivery options with just one click. ■

To enroll in this directory or locate fresh fruits and vegetables from Iowa farmers, visit <http://www.idalsdata.org/fmnp/index.cfm>

## Petersens: All in the family

by Sally Worley

**Julie Petersen grew up in Knoxville and swore she would never marry a farmer. Then she met Jim Petersen, from rural Knoxville, and says his brand new Trans Am and good looks changed her mind.**

**Today Jim and Julie and their four children farm around 2,400 acres, about 450 acres of ground they own and a little less than 2,000 acres of rented ground. This year they planted 950 acres into row crops. Of their crop ground, 130 acres are organic corn and 120 acres are organic soybeans. There are 125 acres planted into oats and approximately 200 acres of hay. The balance of the crop ground is planted with GMO corn and soybeans.**

The remainder of the Petersen farmland is pasture. The Petersens raise 300 cows they calve, some in spring and some in fall. The calves are typically sold as feeder calves. They lamb around 500 ewes per year. They feed out and sell the lambs as breeding stock.

The Petersen farm practically doubled in size five years ago. This growth was possible due to new land being available for purchase and rent, but could not have happened without the involvement of the Petersen family. Justin, Jacob, Joshua, and Jenny, Jim and Julie's kids, are involved in the farm, and Jim's dad still comes out to help on the farm.

### Adding a Farming Generation

Justin graduated from Iowa State in 2006 and now owns part of the crops and livestock and works on the farm. Justin has organic crops planted on 50 acres of rented land. He purchased a baler and does custom baling for supplemental income. Jim: "Justin uses our tractor for the baler because it's bigger. He'll bale our hay, and in trade gets to use our tractor. Other than buying the baler, we pay his expenses. He gets the money from the baling."

Jacob graduated from Iowa State this past December, and purchased a rural house and small parcel of land a few miles from the family farm. He is enrolled in Practical Farmers of Iowa's Savings Incentive Program (SIP). Jacob aims to add a sheep dairy to the farm, and plans to use his savings and match from the program to invest in some milking equipment. Through SIP, Jacob will be mentored by Lois

Reichart to learn about cheese-making. Jacob: "In college I was an animal science major, and realized I could double major in dairy science. Someone joked, 'What, do you want to go back and start a sheep dairy?' I hadn't even heard of that, so started doing some research. It sounded interesting, and there are not many in Iowa, so there's a demand for the product." Jacob plans to use sheep milk just for cheese. Lois lives just a few miles from the Petersens and will buy his milk to make cheese during the start-up phase of the sheep dairy enterprise.

In addition to farming with the family, Jacob works as an agronomist and nutritionist for a local cooperative. Julie: "The job is a good fit

for now. It is flexible with his farm work, he gets to be outside and he likes the opportunity to talk with other farmers."

Joshua graduated from high school a year ago and is training to become a mechanic; Jenny, the youngest at 15, is very active in showing animals but too young to yet know if farming is in her future. Says Julie: "Our kids have to go away, get a college degree, and then come back if they still want to." Jim: "They don't just need the education, but need to experience something other than this little hole in the wall before deciding if this is where they want to be."

### Profit for multiple generations

Adult children made it possible for the Petersens to increase their farm size, but more land and labor mean more people for one farm to support. Jim and Julie do not pay salaries to their sons. In exchange for labor, Jim and Julie provide equipment and pay expenses. Jacob pays for his own housing, but Justin resides on the farm and has his living expenses paid for. "We pay their insurance and cell phones. The boys get income from the livestock and crops they have," Jim says.

(Continued on next page) 





**This page, clockwise from left: Justin Petersen; the Petersen family; and James Petersen**

**Opposite page: Julie Petersen (left) stands with Jim's sister, Mary (right).**



Specifically, the income each son receives is from the portion of livestock they own. Julie and Jim pay all expenses related to raising the livestock. Jim: "When it's time to sell offspring from the breeding stock, the boys get roughly 50% of the sale of their animal." Justin and Jacob receive all of the income from the crops planted on the land they own and rent, with expenses and equipment being provided by Jim and Julie.

Joshua owns some breeding stock that he receives an income from. In addition, Jim and Julie buy parts for his mechanical projects, both farm and non-farm related. Joshua has the opportunity to make income this way by fixing up and selling machinery and vehicles.

Jim: "We don't have a set way of figuring payments out, such as if you work this much, then you are paid this much. So far it has worked out very well. Everyone's still single, and there aren't other family issues and needs yet. Nobody's complained yet."

Jim is still the main decision-maker for the farm, but is including his sons in more conversations about the future of the family farm: "I keep asking them what they'd like to see. I know what I would like to see, but am getting to the age that they need to be telling me what they are thinking. One of these days they'll be making more decisions for the farm."

Justin, Jacob and Joshua have utilized Farm Services Agency beginning farmer loans to buy land and assets and are building their equity.

Jacob: "I used FSA to buy my house, mower, bale trailers, cows and sheep."

Jim: "They're building equity along the way, and eventually they will inherit the farm."

Jim and Julie turned down some rental opportunities over the years before their sons were old enough to contribute. A 350-acre pasture was offered to Jim to rent while Justin



was in college. Jim: "At that time it didn't make sense to add that to our operation. After Justin graduated from college, the pasture came available again, he asked again, and I had enough help to be able to farm it, so I said yes that time."

The Petersens have increased the profitability of their sheep enterprise by adding Romanov crossbreeds with some Polypay. Jim: "The sheep are proficient—they often have more than one lamb. We also add a revenue stream by selling the breeding stock."

Some years, like the last two that were really wet, have been hard on their organic crops. "You have to be able to get into the fields to cultivate, and when it's so wet, you aren't able to do that," said Jim. "The weeds thrive in the wet weather. Our organic acres are down some because we had a couple of fields we had to end up spraying. I would have made more money off crop insurance if I took the loss, but I'm not going to do that. I wanted to try to have a crop. So we sprayed."

Overall adding organic crops to their farm operation has been good, and this year the dry weather is making it easier to grow organically. Having organic and both conventional crops adds to the diversity of the Petersen farm, which is another strategy they use to achieve profitability. Jim: "By being diverse, when some enterprises aren't good, one of the others will make up for it."

The diverse crop and livestock farm also saves input costs by recycling animal manure onto their crop fields. "The downside to being so diverse is that you need more machinery, which is a bigger investment."

## Conservation-minded

Jim: "We've always tried to implement conservation on the farm. Before we raised organic crops, we were primarily no-till farmers."

The Petersens have always put their poor and hilly ground into pasture. "We had some ground that we'd been farming for a few years when

(Continued on page 12) 

# Petersen: All in the family (cont'd)

◀ (Continued from page 11)

we didn't have enough land," said Jim. "It shouldn't have had row crops on it, and we've since transitioned it back to pasture. People are farming too much ground that should never have been farmed. While few farms around us have livestock, where we live there should be. You need livestock."

In addition to profit, the Petersens like the philosophy of raising organic crops, and like how the crop rotations improve their soils. They would like to increase their organic acres to 400-500 acres over time. The Petersens often add a rotation of oats to their conventional acres as well, even on their rented acres, to break weed cycles and improve soil quality. "It's not always possible or typical to seed oats on land that you only have a one-year lease on, but we try to when needed to keep the soil healthy."

Integrating crops and livestock have been beneficial to conservation on the Petersen farm. "We are able to devote poorer ground to pasture and hay and utilize it in a very good way," said Jim. "Meanwhile, the livestock provides us very good manure to put back out on the row crops." The Petersens will put cattle and sheep out in their corn fields after harvest, providing food and fertilizer. This, like many practices on their farm, is beneficial for both conservation and profitability.

The Petersens have used the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to construct ponds and fencing, as well as to switch cropland to pasture. They have had some hard-to-access land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for several years, and used the CRP 22 a few years ago to improve farm areas along streams.

The Petersens have their own tiling machine, and do farm tiling and terracing themselves. Jim: "After talking with our county NRCS, we have started building basins all the way down rather than installing waterways in our terraces. Waterways, if you can hold them are great, but the last four years, nobody could hold them because all the rain would wash them away."

## Community involvement

The Petersens are active members of the First United Methodist Church. Jim serves on the board of trustees for the church. Justin serves as a Soil Water Conservation District commissioner, is on the Farm Bureau Board, serves on the Iowa Sheep and Wool Board and on the 4-H Youth Committee. Jim is poultry superintendent for county fair, and all of the Petersen kids have been active in 4-H and FFA.

The Petersens won "The Way We Live" award in 2009, presented by the Iowa State Fair to recognize Iowa families dedicated to animal agriculture and sound farming values. They also received the Farmer of the Year award from the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce in 2006.

In addition, Jim has been a vocal advocate for diverse agriculture in Iowa. He has attended the International Biotech Convention in Philadelphia to talk about how he is able to produce both GMO and organic crops on one farm. He talked to the Senate sub-committee at the Iowa State Capitol about Iowa Agriculture. He also presented about the family farming operation at the Hawaii Farm Bureau Convention.

Jim and Julie emphasize adding new enterprises and making farm changes gradually. Jim: "We know from experience that if we try to change something too quickly, we have problems. It moves us back so many years instead of ahead. We've done that with cattle, with sheep, with organic too. We didn't know how much time and resources were required and didn't have them available when we needed them. Now we try to be patient and grow slower. So that has been one of my biggest lessons that I've learned." Jim is hoping this lesson passes on to his kids. ■

## A Committed Sister

In the early 2000s, 187 acres came up for sale adjacent to the Petersen farm. Jim: "We couldn't get money to buy it ourselves at the time, so asked my sister if she was interested in buying the land and renting it to us." Jim's sister Mary and her husband had owned other properties but had never owned farmland, and Mary's husband was not sure he wanted to be a farmland owner. "After they talked to different people about the opportunity, they decided to buy and rent it to us." Mary and her husband enjoy being farmland owners. "It's been a good investment for them, one that retained its value through the recession." The relationship has worked out well for both parties. Jim: "We treat it like it's our own farm and do improvements to the land. They rent it to us on favorable terms." For Jim, Julie and family, that equates to a secure rental property at good rates, and for Mary and her husband, a secure investment with good returns and a meaningful tie to Iowa agriculture.

## Sustainable Land Relationships – Sister Trio

We ran a story in 2009 profiling the land purchase Jim made from his distant cousins, sister trio Martha Skillman, Charlotte Shivers and Marietta Carr. At that time, Jim had purchased 160 acres from the sisters—terms of the contract included long-term conservation practices. This year, the Petersen family began renting the sisters' remaining 360 acres of family land. "We're very happy about it, and as we move toward more organic and sustainable with them, our big thing has been moving toward rotational grazing," said Charlotte Shivers. Charlotte and sisters are working in conjunction with NRCS and the Petersens to create a pasture plan with 10 grazing paddocks on part of the ground the Petersens are renting from them this year. Charlotte: "The rest of the rented land is moving toward farming organically. We're very happy. We like rotational grazing, like moving toward organic, and hope we are helping more young people be able to farm."



## Thinking like a “water farmer” in an era of volatile weather and ag intensification

by Andy Johnson

*Our fertile soils have long been described as Iowa’s “black gold,” but they wouldn’t be so productive without water. This “clear gold” has almost always been there for us in roughly the right amounts, at roughly the right times.*

*But a perfect storm could be brewing, threatening our agriculture, our infrastructure and our low-lying communities.*

On the one hand, studies show our changing climate is increasing storm intensity, average year-round temperature and the duration between rainfall periods in the Upper Midwest. On the other hand, consistently higher commodity prices have led to increased agricultural intensification. To top it off, cellulosic ethanol and a \$50/ton price for corn stover in the near future could leave our soils barer than they’ve been in decades.

### Expect more water stress, flood potential

What does this mean for farmers? Even if growing season total precipitation remains steady, it may come in larger bursts, less frequently. Combined with increasing temperatures, we could be seeing much more moisture stress. Tillage intensification and reduced cropping diversity will exacerbate that stress by increasing storm runoff and decreasing infiltration rates and moisture-holding capacity of soils.

What does it mean for counties and communities? They’re already painfully

*“Becoming a better “water farmer” may be an increasingly important insurance policy for farmers in a warmer and less predictable weather future.*

Andy Johnson

aware of the clear trend towards increased storm intensity - we can’t get a much clearer message than June 2008. But the contribution of agricultural intensification to flood potential is not as widely understood. Replacing Conservation Reserve Program [acres], small grains, forages and pastures with more clean-tilled corn is increasing runoff and raising peak flow and flood levels. Removing greater amounts of corn residue will only make this worse.

This isn’t a hypothetical “perfect storm”. The first two parts - increasing storm intensity and agricultural intensification - are happening. The federal renewable fuel standard calls for 16 billion gallons of cellulosic ethanol by 2022. Oak Ridge National Lab data suggest most of this will come from corn residue removal.

Sounds daunting - what’s a good Practical Farmer to do?

It turns out that many practices available to Iowa farmers today that protect soil from the impacts of direct rainfall and increase infiltration, increase moisture holding capacity and decrease soil evaporative losses will also have the extremely important effect of decreasing peak flow and flooding.

### Becoming a “water farmer”

These practices include no-till and high residue management, small grains and forage rotation, cover cropping, and maintaining and increasing land devoted to perennial trees, grasses or wetlands. Many of these practices that have been promoted in the past for soil conservation benefits may gather more converts through their water management benefits. Are you a water farmer yet?

This is an important win-win when it comes to climate change adaptation. Becoming a better “water farmer” may be an increasingly important insurance policy for farmers in a warmer and less predictable weather future. That’s good news for smart farmers, for counties with limited road/bridge budgets, and for communities facing down the next 2008 (or larger) flood.

### Pressure to intensify

But let’s face it, the pressures for increasing agricultural intensification will likely continue



PFI member Andy Johnson

to grow. And the farm bill may provide all the insurance many farmers feel they need and a “license to gamble” to boot. Instead of increasing in-field water holding capacity throughout a watershed, it’s possible that agricultural policies and practices will contribute ever more to flooding - not a pretty thought for county engineers or those on the dry side of dikes.

### Productive partnerships

It’s also possible this “perfect storm” will catalyze new partnerships involving farmers and ag groups, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Soil and Water Conservation Districts / Natural Resources Conservation Service, Extension, counties, cities and others. Agricultural soils can act like sponges or tabletops. Local governments have in the past (especially metro areas) found it economically beneficial to work with farmers in their watersheds on water quality and nutrient management. Are there models for local governments in Iowa to encourage better “water farming”?

One thing is certain: bracing ourselves for the perfect storm, the tighter our black gold can hold onto our clear gold, the better off we’ll all be - “water farmers”, counties, and communities alike. ■

## 2012 Member Survey Results

by Patrick Burke

*Practical Farmers of Iowa strives to be member-directed, meaning that our members should always set the priorities for the organization. One way we encourage that is by asking everyone to fill out an annual member survey.*

*Last year we set a difficult goal of getting responses from 80% of members. The staff and board were in the process of making a five-year strategic plan, and felt it was important to have feedback from a broad cross-section of the PFI membership. After several months and many emails, letters, and phone calls, we achieved that goal.*

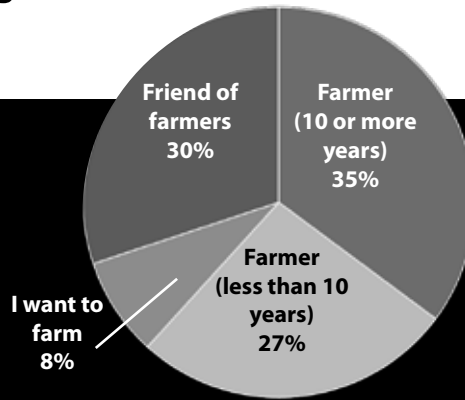
**F**or this year's member survey, we set a 60 percent response rate goal in order to see how members' priorities have changed one year into our strategic plan. We also added a few new questions about farm income and health insurance coverage, to evaluate how PFI members compare to state and national averages. Thanks to all of you who responded, we achieved our goal quickly in just over one month. Here is a summary of what we learned.

### Impact

We asked farmer members how their participation in PFI has impacted their farm's performance in five areas:

- profitability
- ability to cope with volatile markets
- overall efficiency
- stewardship /conservation ability, and
- ability to cope with volatile weather.

Compared to last year's results, a greater percentage of members say their participation in PFI has helped them improve in all five areas.

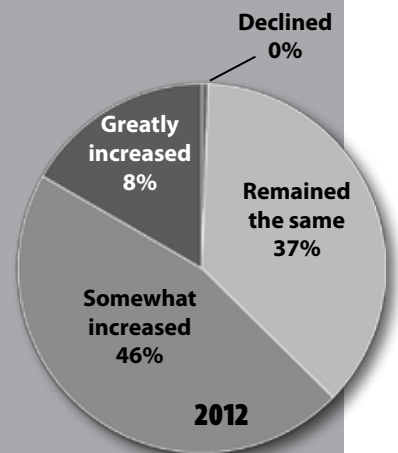
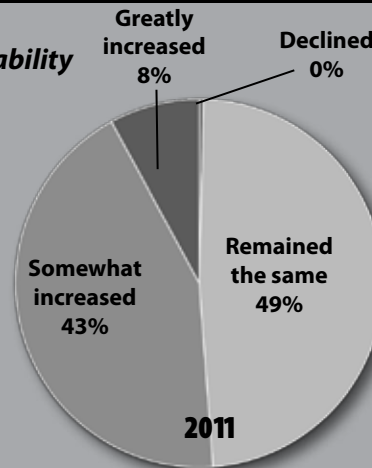


### Member Types

Compared to last year, the beginning farmer group (those farming for less than ten years) and the "friend of farmer" (non-farmer) groups have grown, while the experienced farmer (those farming for ten or more years) and "want to farm" groups have shrunk.

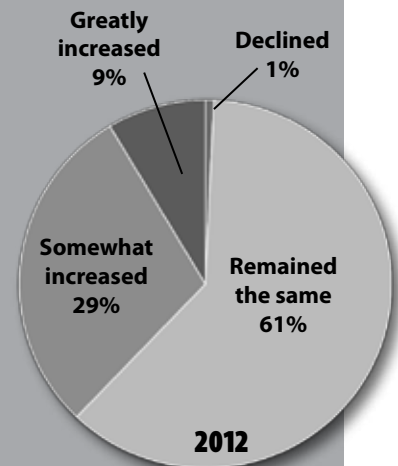
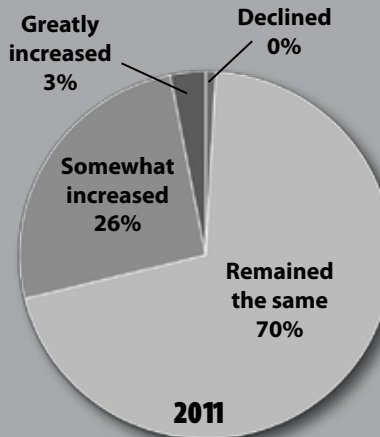
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#### Profitability



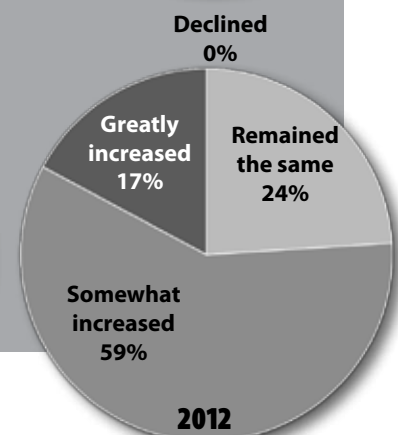
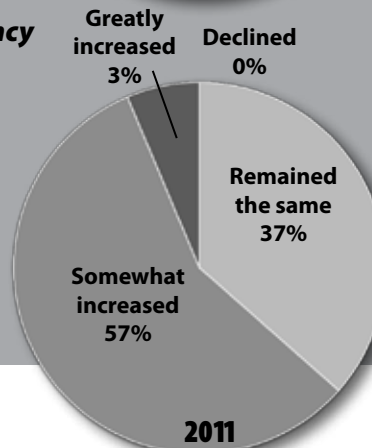
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#### Volatile Markets



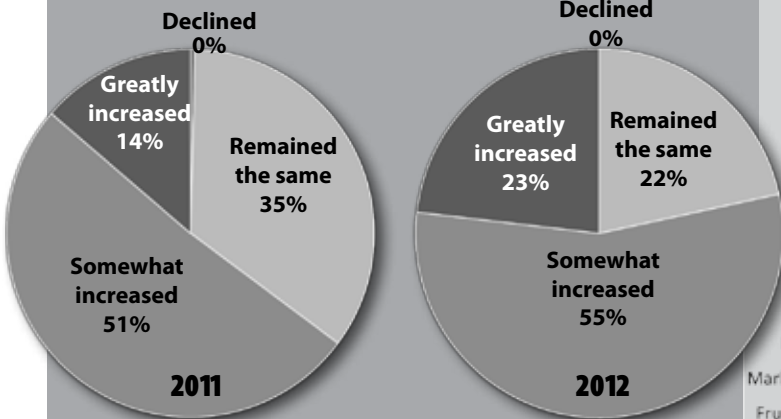
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#### Efficiency

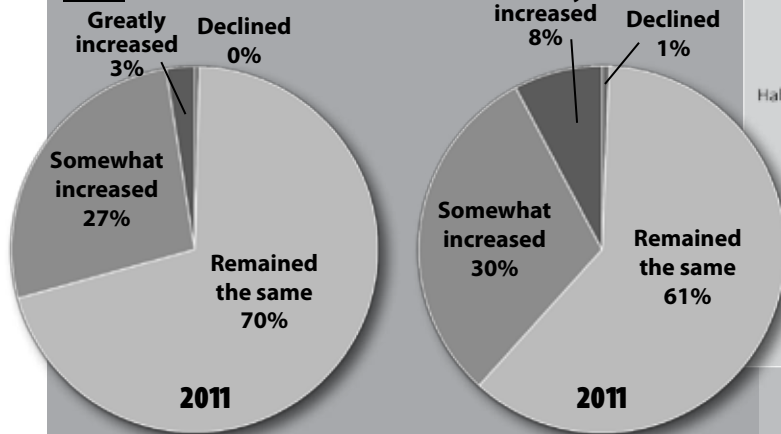




## 4. Conservation & Stewardship

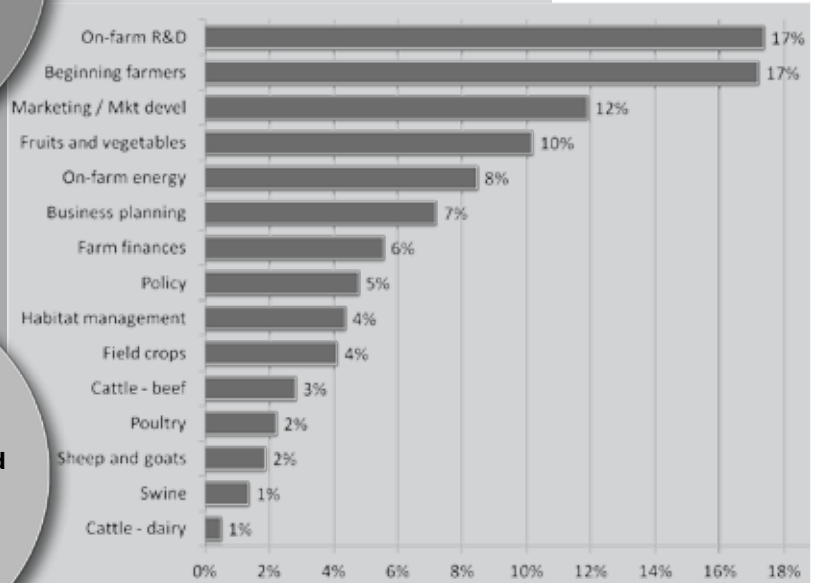


## 5. Volatile Weather



## Future Priorities

We asked members what areas PFI should place the most emphasis on in the future. This year, we asked respondents to be more selective, and choose only their top three priorities. Top priorities were "On-farm Research and Demonstration" (a new choice this year), "Beginning Farmers," and "Marketing / Market Development."

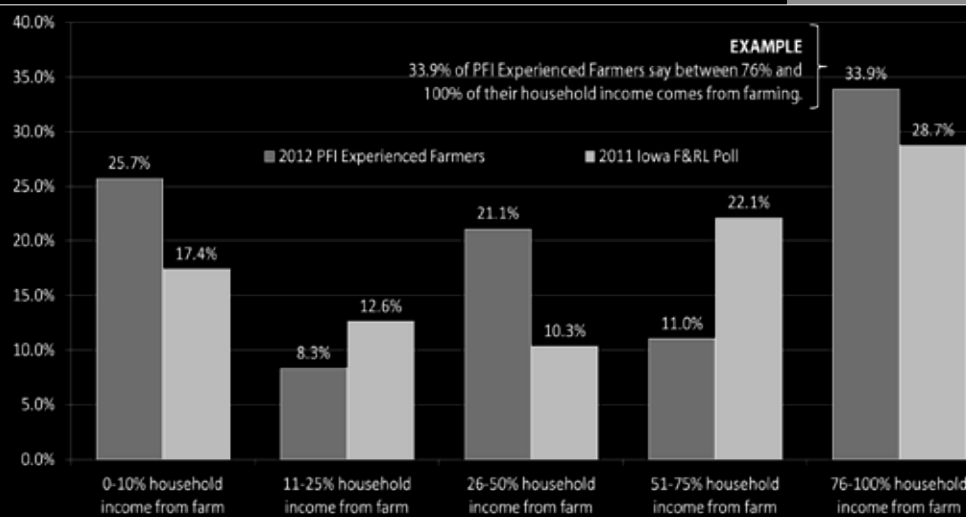


## Income

We asked farmer members what percentage of their personal and household income comes from the farm. We then compared this data with results from the 2011 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll. Experienced PFI farmers compared favorably in some respects: a greater percentage make between 75-100% of their household income from the farm. However, compared to the Farm and Rural Life Poll results, a greater percentage of PFI members make only a small portion of their household income (0-10%) from the farm.

## Caveats

Based on this year's smaller sample size compared to last year, we believe certain segments of the PFI membership may be under-represented by this data. Nearly 70 percent of responses came online, and we did not expend as much time and effort as last year mailing surveys to those who did not respond online or did not have an email address. For that reason, these results skew toward the more technology-inclined segment of the PFI membership.



## Conclusion

If you have questions about the member survey or how we use this data, feel free to email me at [patrick@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:patrick@practicalfarmers.org) or call the PFI office at 515.232.5661. ■

## Samaritan Ministries International: Direct Health Sharing

by Tamsyn Jones

**Finding affordable health care has never been easy for farmers – and it's only getting harder as costs continue to rise. In fact, the need for health insurance from an off-the-farm job is cited as a main obstacle to farming full-time. In response to member requests and interest, PFI updated its five-year Strategic Plan with a new goal: to better understand our members' insurance needs, challenges and options. We surveyed members earlier this year and are compiling a report on the findings. Here is an alternative program some PFI members participate in.**

Samaritan Ministries International (SMI) is a non-profit, Christian-based health sharing program started in Illinois in 1991. Currently, the organization has about 20,500 active households around the U.S. and abroad, and about \$4 million available each month to meet health care needs. Here's what some PFI members using SMI have to say about it:

### Brian & Cheryl Ness Thousand Generations Farm, Newton



Every month we send our share directly to a family with a need. You get a sheet in the mail that tells you the family and what their health need is. We send a share directly to that person, and that person will have a checklist of who will be sending money that month. And it's bigger than just Iowa. We had a check once that came from someone in Scotland.

We've been members for at least six years. Before this, Brian was working full-time, so we had company health insurance. We started with SMI when he took a severance package with his work. We started dabbling in some farm things at that point, and that's when we went with Samaritan Ministries.

We've used it numerous times – for the birth of at least two children, and a couple broken bones. We've had a couple health issues and we're very encouraged with how it's worked out.

One of the major differences we've noticed is that it doesn't pay for anything under \$300, so if you have a well baby checkup, or if you just go to the doctor for something, it's generally out of your pocket. It's more of a major medical thing, but for us this hasn't been an issue because we try to do things more naturally.



### Tom & Mary Cory Cory Family Farm, Elkhart

With SMI, you're agreeing to a basic Christian faith. It's

not denominational-based, but a basic Christian faith that you subscribe to. In addition to filling out all the applications, you have to submit a letter from your church pastor that confirms what you've put in your application – that you're who you say you are, that you are a member in good standing at your local church, and that you attend there regularly.

We've been members for about a year-and-a-half. Tom was a public school teacher, so we had our medical insurance through the school. He retired in 2007 and the insurance lasted a couple years past that. Once that ran out we didn't have any insurance for about a year.

We had heard about SMI, but just hadn't done the paperwork. In October 2010, Tom had hernia surgery – and we had no insurance at all. When it was all said and done, it was about \$12,000. It wasn't devastating, but it was a huge setback.

That was the catalyst we needed. Within a couple months we did the paperwork. We're not looking for prescription help, and because our family's philosophy is to use natural, holistic remedies, we look at SMI more as catastrophic coverage, as a cushion. SMI recently raised rates [for a two-parent family] to \$355 per month, and they don't have a sliding scale. But for us, the cost is manageable. We haven't really shopped around, but from what I've heard it's a very good rate.

It's also philosophically what we're in line with: people helping people rather than depending on a huge system. And it's a proven thing, which was important to us also – that it didn't just sound good, but worked in practice.

### Kevin & Jessica Holst Yellow Barn Farm, Eldridge



The Holst family

**Note: Kevin was recently elected to serve on SMI's Board of Directors**

So far SMI is working out great. We became members after our son Cadrian, who's now three, was born. We had traditional insurance through BlueCross BlueShield (BCBS), which was very expensive because we're self-employed and had to buy an individual policy. Cadrian's was a home birth, and BlueCross BlueShield basically wouldn't cover anything.

We used a midwife that was not part of their plan or network, so we had to pay for it all. We were so disappointed with BlueCross BlueShield. Samaritan Ministries will pay for nearly everything, and the birth of our second son, Denton, was covered. His home birth, midwife expenses and medical stuff associated with his birth were covered almost 100 percent.

It was great. The process was really simple. You get checks from other members and words of encouragement, notes and prayers. It's really comforting to know that Christians are praying for you, and that all your money is going directly to other individuals.

They still have pre-existing conditions. If you've had cancer, or you're having cancer treatment, you can't just sign up to start getting coverage on that. And the coverage is not guaranteed 100 percent. That's the thing, with insurance companies, there are legal requirements: If you qualify for a need, you must get coverage of whatever percent, usually 80 percent.

With SMI, they will try to get all your needs covered, but there's no guarantee. But what SMI has found out is, often, expenses will get discounted, doctors will give discounts, care will get discounted. A lot of times, people will send in extra money too, so often your needs are fully covered, even if SMI comes up short.



*Leave A Legacy*



“By giving a gift of land to PFI, I will be helping a vital and ethical organization continue its work.”

Helen D. Gunderson

There are ways to provide for your loved ones AND leave a legacy for Practical Farmers of Iowa. You can do both, and it's easy.

- Designate a portion of your retirement plan for PFI
- Leave a life insurance policy
- Make a gift through your will
- Make a gift now and receive income for life with a charitable gift annuity.

Many such gifts can help you and your family today as well as help our mission years into the future. You can put some in place today without affecting your cash flow during your lifetime.

Want to learn more? Contact Teresa Opheim, Executive Director, 515.232.5661 or [teresa@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:teresa@practicalfarmers.org).

\* Important: Consult with your own legal and financial advisors before making any planned gift. \*



*Welcome, new members*

**District 1–Northwest**

- Gary Hildreth, Rockwell City
- Rick Wadle, Fonda

**District 2–North Central**

- Greg Birkhofer, Kanawha
- Shay Bradbury, Colo
- Reid Burt, Marshalltown
- Bruce & Liz Calhoun, Ames
- Patti Edwardson, Jefferson
- Brian & Amanda Friedl, Goldfield
- Andrea Gronau, Ames
- Cameron Hall, Nashua
- Benjamin Johansen, Panora
- Ronna Myers, Garner
- John Pieper, Johnston
- Avis Pruin, Radcliffe
- Jenny Richter, Ames
- Troy Siefert, Ames
- Jennine Thomas, Humboldt
- Lauren Zastrow, Ames

**District 3–Northeast**

- Kyle Holthaus, Waukon
- Andy Schaefers, Garnavillo
- Jim Zaffiro, Pella

**District 4–Southwest**

- Dan Allred, Corydon
- Matt Fatka, McClelland
- Rex Fowler, Carlisle
- Dian Frost, Newton
- Jeff Garrison, West Des Moines
- Andy Heggenstaller, Des Moines
- Daniel Heldt, Des Moines
- Hannah Inman, West Des Moines
- Jesse Johnston, Des Moines
- Rachael Loose, Des Moines
- Martin Lucas, Urbandale
- Ally and Brian Marshall, Newton
- Collin Reynolds, Newton
- Werdna Rumelhart, Guthrie Center
- Jan Shervheim, Redding
- Ezra Shrock, Moulton
- Rick & Donna Wilterdink, Van Meter
- Dennis Wimmer, Afton
- Ashlee Stoddard, Des Moines

**District 5–Southeast**

- Corinne & Mike Burkett, Solon
- Pam Kaufman, Bettendorf
- Levi & Jill Lyle, Keota
- Matt Ohloff, Iowa City
- Max Rupe, Eddyville
- Rob & Jean Stout, Washington
- Mark Ungerer, Fairfield
- Ken Wuthrich, Bloomfield

**District 6–Out of State**

- Jay Archer, Arvada, CO
- Anne Galer, Albuquerque, NM
- Mike & Jodi Levine, Omaha, NE
- Luke Mahoney, Canterbury, NH
- Casey McGill, Albert Lea, MN
- Chris Merkel, Oldenburg, IN
- Amber Mohr, Lincoln, NE
- Jon Neugebauer, Mitchell, SD
- Craig Tomera, Eden Prairie, MN

## Now taking applications for PFI's 2014 Savings Incentive Program

**Practical Farmers of Iowa is now taking applications for its 2014 Savings Incentive Program. The Savings Incentive Program (SIP) provides beginning farmers the opportunity to save money while learning how to build a profitable farm.**

Ten farmers enrolled in the inaugural Savings Incentive Program in 2010. In 2011, the program expanded to admit 25 beginning farmers. This year, up to 25 farmers will again be accepted for the 2013-2014 Savings Incentive Program.

**Applications will be accepted now through October 1, 2012.** Download application forms online from [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org) or call 515.232.5661 to receive a copy in the mail.

Developing an ecologically sound and community-enhancing next generation of farmers is a top priority for Practical Farmers of Iowa. The Savings Incentive Program seeks to foster this by equipping beginning farmers with the tools needed for success. SIP encourages enrollees to save \$100 a month for two years while participating in programming to help their farm enterprise succeed. After completing the two-year program, PFI will match their savings dollar-for-dollar (up to \$2,400). This money may be used to purchase a productive farm asset (land, machinery, livestock, etc).

A review panel of PFI members will evaluate and rank applications.

### Eligible applicants must be:

- Farming now and have farmed for five years or fewer
- Legal residents of Iowa, or farm in the state
- Members of Practical Farmers of Iowa (If not a member, candidates can join at [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org) or by calling 515.232.5661)

### Savings Incentive Program enrollees will be required to:

1. Open a separate savings account at a bank and make regular Savings Incentive Program deposits to this account

2. Attend at least four PFI events per year (online, on-farm or in person)
3. Meet with a farmer mentor three times in year one
4. Complete and maintain a business / whole farm plan over two years
5. Check in quarterly with a member of PFI staff to keep on track with goals defined by the beginning farmer

### Make a difference for the future of farming

If you would like to donate to the Savings Incentive Program, please do so online at [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org).

For questions about the Savings Incentive Program application process, contact Savings Incentive Program coordinator Marc Strobbe at 515.232.5661, or [marc@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:marc@practicalfarmers.org). ■

### Savings Incentive Program Class of 2013 and Their Mentors

#### Sip Recipient

Brian Bagge - (Worthington)  
 Thomas Burkhead - (Des Moines)  
 Jordan Clasen - (Des Moines)  
 Chris Corbin - (Nevada)  
 Betsy Dahl - (Rolfe)  
 Luke Dahl - (Rolfe)  
 Kate Edwards - (Solon)  
 Glen Elsbernd - (Cresco)  
 Karla & Todd Hanson - (Monona)  
 Morgan Hoenig - (Mount Pleasant)  
 Cheryl & Mike Hopkins - Walker  
 Jay Jung - (Colwell)  
 Drew Lietz - (Ames)  
 Brian & Cheryl Ness - (Newton)  
 Jacob Petersen - (Knoxville)  
 Ellen & Daniel Rosmann - (Harlan)  
 Mike Salama - (Boone)  
 Jordan Scheibel - (Grinnell)  
 Dave Schmidt - (Garwin)  
 Luke & Linsey Schuldt - (Tripoli)  
 Grant & Adam Schultz - (Cedar Falls)  
 Michael VonWeihe - (Carson)  
 Jake & Amber Wheeler - (Monroe)  
 Erin Wilson - (Paullina)  
 Ben Wise - (Lytton)

#### Mentor

Jay Hansen, (Hudson)  
 Rick & Stacey Hartman - (Minburn)  
 Larry Cleverley - (Mingo)  
 Eric Franzenburg - (Van Horne)  
 David & Norma Williams - (Storm Lake)  
 Martin Kramer - (Algona)  
 Susan Jutz - (Solon)  
 Mike Lind - (Soldiers Grove, WI)  
 Greg Koether - (McGregor)  
 Kathy Hohl - (Donnellson)  
 Jim & Elly Fink - (Vinton)  
 Tim & Maureen Daley - (New Hartford)  
 Jerry Peckum - (Jefferson)  
 Sean Skeeahan & Jill Beebout - (Chariton)  
 Lois Reichert - (Knoxville)  
 Russel Sheeder - (Guthrie Center)  
 Jason Jones - (Des Moines)  
 Gary Guthrie - (Nevada)  
 Nick Wallace - (Keystone)  
 Fred Abels - (Holland)  
 Derek Roller - (Iowa City)  
 Rebecca Bloom - (Omaha, NE)  
 Tai Johnson-Spratt - (Elkhart)  
 Tim Eisenbeis - (Marion, S.D.)  
 Scott & Julie Wilber - (Boone)

## Golden Nuggets from the PFI Farminar Archive

by Luke Gran

**Practical Farmers of Iowa has held 58 Farminars since Fall 2009. Here is some selected farmer wisdom from three of the most recent Farminars – available for viewing online now at [www.practicalfarmers.org/farminar](http://www.practicalfarmers.org/farminar).**

1.

**Ron Rosmann and Nathan Anderson – “ADDING DIVERSITY WITH LONGER CROP ROTATIONS AND LIVESTOCK FERTILITY” – (MARCH 13, 2012)**

**Nathan:** Can you profitably add longer crop rotations to a farm without livestock?



**Ron:** With some reservation, yes. [From the Rodale Institute’s] 30-year farming system comparison, an organic cash grain farm – [which includes a longer crop rotation beyond corn and soybeans] – has compared very favorably to a conventional grain farm. [But we can’t forget that] livestock in this system just provide more flexibility [and can help with] cashflow, especially if you have hogs, sheep or goats – livestock with a fast turnaround.

**Nathan:** What crops do you use in a longer rotation?

**Ron:** Experience is a great teacher. We have developed our rotation over decades. For corn we use tall leafy hybrids (110-114 days) at 30,000 per acre. For soybeans, we use medium-bush or bush-type longer day varieties at 175,000 per acre. We are still in 38-inch rows. When you’re on the ridge [tillage system] and [there is] a lot of trash, [the 38-inch spacing] gives you more space [to cultivate]. We grow oats, succotash and barley for small grains. We use annual forages, like alta swede red clover (mammoth type), turnips, hairy vetch, sorghum sudan grass. Be careful with rye, it can be tough to kill.

**Ron, commenting on Nathan’s business plan:**

In your goals, I would add one more: to be a part of a community. Hopefully it will be more people like you who are out there raising a family and not worrying about farming their neighbor’s land.

**Nathan:** I’m afraid it’s a little lonely in rural Iowa for young folks. My friend Drew is the closest one and he is 15-20 miles away.

**Ron:** You are getting a leg up on our generation. I’m looking forward to the day when there are literally thousands of farmers like you again, Nate! That is our mission. We may not get there in my lifetime, but maybe in yours.

2.

**Adam Montri and Ann Franzenburg – “GROW BETTER WITH HIGH TUNNELS” – (DECEMBER 27, 2011)**

**Ann:** Why go with moveable high tunnels?



**Adam:** The benefits of moveable tunnels are many: soil health, exposure to rain/snowfall, leaching. Crop timing – with a moveable high tunnel, we can keep tomatoes going, plant cool-season crops outside in August/September, then slide the moveable tunnel off the warm-season crops and place it on top of the cool-season crops to grow them out into winter.

**Ann:** What do you do with flea beetles?

**Adam:** Flea beetles are the bane of our existence on our farm. We have moved to not growing many brassicas later into the spring, we move outdoors for lettuce mixes, we use row cover in the field to exclude them.

**Ann:** What are the wildest things you have grown in high tunnels?

**Adam:** We put up some pyramidal structures that we put strawberries in. We aren’t sure the production is where we want it to be, but the quality of the fruits was excellent. This is our third year we have grown ginger. The restaurants really like it.

3.

**Tom Frantzen and Wade Dooley – “INTEGRATING SMALL GRAINS INTO LARGE GRAIN ROW CROPS & INTEGRATED LIVESTOCK FARMS” – (FEBRUARY 21, 2012)**

**Wade:** Why mess with small grains, does it pay for all the work?



**Tom:** If you took the machinery and the fossil fuel out of our farm, I could make it work. But if you took the small grains out of our farm, I wouldn’t know how to make it work. We are extraordinarily dependent upon these and so we rotate and seed down [small grains] every year because the overall package has been profitable.

**Wade:** How do you manage fertility issues and lodging with small grains?

**Tom:** If I grow small grains after corn, I bring the moldboard plow and I bury that trash in the fall with clean black soil in the spring, so there is no competition with microbes that are

breaking down the corn residue. In general, I’ve had great experience with barley standing better than oats.

**Tom:** One of the reasons we went organic is because we are on 385 acres. We need to add value to things. We maintain the crop rotation we have, the diversity we have, and we enjoy the economic stability we have because it comes as a package. Last year, we had the greatest returns per acre I have ever seen in corn, but I’m not going to plant the whole farm in corn, we aren’t going that route. We would never consider reducing our diversity to maximize short-term profitability.

**Wade:** Most of my neighbors are getting as big into grain farming as they can, why should I try something different?

**Tom:** Livestock can help the farm weather financial conditions better. I have not purchased fertilizer since 1993. We get 175 bushel/acre corn on organic land without herbicide or insecticide bills. We don’t have to gross as much money, because our net is better. [Livestock], in my opinion, is where the best long-term money is. ■

### Fall Farminars – Stay Tuned!

Stay tuned for announcements about the upcoming 2012 Fall Farminar series, which runs from November thru February.

Farminars are FREE 90-minute, interactive online seminars broadcast over the internet covering a wide variety of farming topics. Reserve Tuesdays from 7–8:30 pm CST this fall!

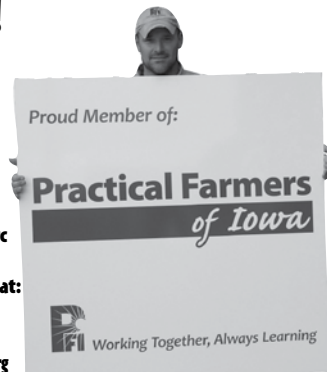
### Help us spread the word – let us install a PFI sign on YOUR farm!

Available in the following sizes:

- MEDIUM – 4 ft x 4 ft
- SMALL – 12 x 18 inches

If interested, contact Marc Strobbe (sign coordinator / installer extraordinaire) at:

515.232.5661 or [marc@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:marc@practicalfarmers.org)



PFI Working Together, Always Learning



## Thompsons release update on five-year rotation study

by Teresa Opheim

**Dick and Sharon Thompson have just released the latest three-year averages for their long-term study on the labor and management return of their five-year rotation.**

**The study shows an average return of \$316.62 per acre for the five-year rotation of corn, soybeans, corn, oats/legume and hay. Government programs are not included in their analysis.**

Dick and Sharon Thompson started farming in 1958 with high inputs of purchased fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides that were required with their continuous corn system. The five-year rotation was used by Dick's father from 1918 to 1958, and then readopted by Dick and Sharon 10 years after they took over the farm. One adjustment was made to include ridge tillage during the row crop years. This has greatly increased the overall profitability, according to the Thompsons.

The Thompsons also do calculations comparing their return to management with the average Boone County corn-soybean rotation, which they find had a three-year average return to labor and management of \$73.38—far below their five-year rotation average. Again, government programs and premiums were not included in calculating the Boone County averages.

"We wanted this to be just a rotation comparison," Dick says, "rather than one that looked at government payments and organic premiums as well. We aren't going to have government payments in the future like we have in the past."

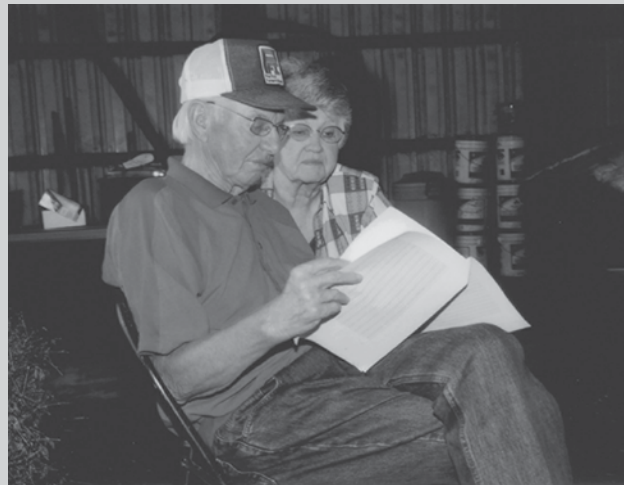
Return to management refers to any profit after all out-of-pocket costs are paid.

The Thompsons have been conducting this study from 1988-2011. Over that time period, returns to management per acre were an average of \$161.40 for the five-year rotation. The conventional Boone County corn-soybean system lost \$21.92 per acre, producing an average difference of \$183.32 per acre. Over the years, hay has been the leading

money maker in their five-year rotation, according to Dick and Sharon.

For the Thompson analysis, crop prices for both systems are from ISU's (FM-1490) year-end inventory prices. Herbicide and purchased fertilizer costs for the conventional systems are taken from ISU estimated production costs (FM-1712). Seed cost is calculated using Iowa State University's price/1,000 seed. The corn-soybean conventional crops are harvested with a combine, hauled to the elevator and stored about three months and sold at the first of the year. Crops from the five-year rotation are harvested and stored on the farm and fed to livestock. The manure cost is prorated over the entire rotation. The profits or losses from the livestock enterprises are not included in this analysis. The number of trips across the field in the conventional two-year system are determined by the number of field operations observed across the road in the neighbor's field.

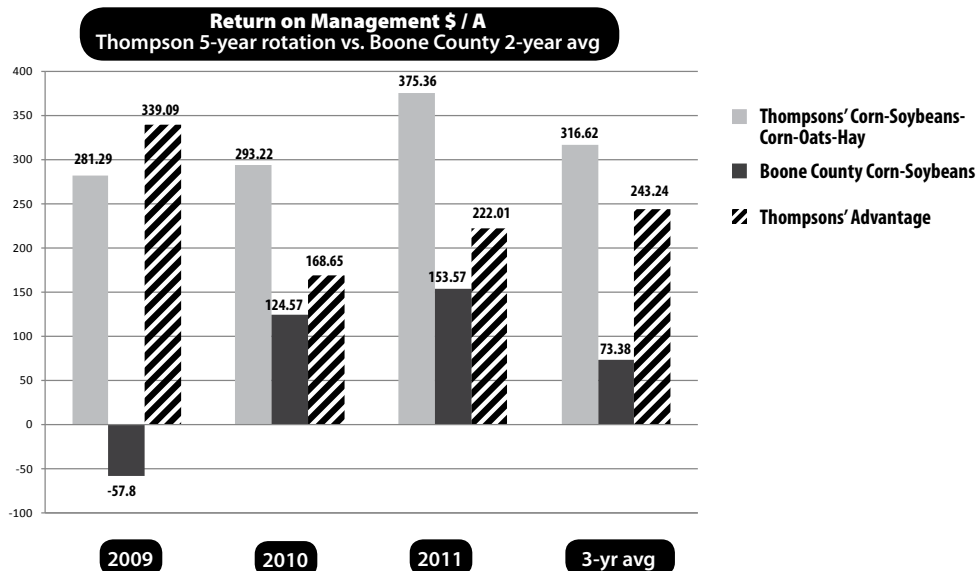
Cover crop costs include seed and machinery costs. ISU's (FM-1698) custom rates, which include



Dick and Sharon Thompson look over data at a past Griffieon field day

labor costs, are used for all machinery operations. The labor cost is computed at \$7 to \$8 per hour multiplied by the amount of field time per field operation based on ISU PM-696 schedule. Twenty-five percent is added to field time for travel to and from the field and for maintenance and repairs. The Boone County average cash rent per acre is used to determine the land charge. ■

For more on this study and Dick and Sharon's other research and demonstration projects, see [www.practicalfarmers.org/resources](http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resources)



## New research projects in 2012

**2012 marks the 25th anniversary of PFI's Cooperators' Program – one of the original priorities of PFI in its early days. In the years since, on-farm research and demonstration has consistently remained one of the top interests indicated by PFI members. This year, nearly 80 farmers and cooperators across Iowa are participating in 53 on-farm research and demonstration projects to answer questions they have about on-farm challenges.**

The Cooperators' Program began in 1987, initiated by farmers looking to save money through more judicious use of inputs. Today, the program focuses on a range of topics areas, including grazing, horticulture, field crops, on-farm energy, niche pork and poultry, and food purchasing questions. Since its debut, PFI farmers have conducted more than 1,000 research trials and shared that information extensively with neighbors and other farmers through field days, workshops and research reports.

This season, cover crops, on-farm energy, fly monitoring in cattle and the feasibility of adding a third crop were among the research priorities identified by PFI members at the annual Cooperators' Meeting.

Dave Schmidt, owner of Rock Valley Livestock in Garwin, says he participated in the Cooperators' Program this year to learn better ways to recognize fly problems and when fly pressure becomes great enough to limit weight gain.

"Last year I had enough face and horn fly problems that I think it affected the cattle's weight gain," Schmidt says. "I would like to try a more or less organic approach, but none of them seem likely to be effective, especially because my cattle are close to several neighboring herds."

The Cooperators' Program is supported by a competitive grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.

Here is the complete list of 2012 research projects. ■

### 2012 PFI Cooperators Program Projects (by program area)

#### Field Crops

- Spring Cover Crop Biomass Evaluation
- Late Spring Soil Nitrate Test Following Cover and No-Cover Strips
- Cover Crop Effect on Cash Crop Yield
- Conventional Corn Hybrid Performance and Quality
- Non-GMO / GMO Corn Hybrid Comparison
- Open-Pollinated Corn Quality Assessment
- Organic Corn Breeding
- Corn Yields Following an Aerial Seeded Hairy Vetch / Brassica Mix
- Establishing Red Clover into Standing Corn & Soybeans in August
- Evaluating Establishment of a Fall 2012 Cover Crop
- Highboy Versus Drilling a Cover Crop
- Normal Versus Reduced Amounts of UAN Sidedress on Corn Following a Cover Crop
- Scarified, Over-Seeded Legumes for Germination Evaluation
- Timing of Manure Application with and without N-Stabilizer
- Effect of a Crimson Clover Cover Crop on Corn Yield
- Economics of Adding a Third Crop
- Frost-Seeding Red Clover into a Winter Rye Cover Crop
- Over-Seeding Mammoth Red Clover at Last Cultivation
- Mow-Killing Versus Leaving Rye Before Soybeans
- Steel Versus Herbicide to Control Weeds in Soybeans

#### On-Farm Energy

- Farm Metered Energy Analysis
  - Getting Baseline Data
- Ground-truth Energy Conservation Measures
  - Farmhouse Window Insulation
  - Insulation and Shading of Walk-In Coolers
- Ground-truth "Off the Shelf" Technologies
  - Solar Photo-voltaic
  - Solar Thermal
  - Wind Turbine
  - Biomass Burning (shelled corn and wood)
  - CoolBot Performance Evaluation
- Ground-truth "New" Energy Solutions
  - Underground Storage and Cooling Structure
  - Gassification (wood and corn cobs)
  - Aerobic Compost Heat Recovery System

#### Grazing

- Fly Monitoring in Cattle
- Pasture Monitoring
- Pasture Production Comparison With and Without Raw Milk Fertilization
- Winter Feed and Forage Monitoring

#### Horticulture

- Spring Cover Crop Biomass Evaluation
- Companion Planting for Controlling Cabbage Worms
- Evaluation of Soybeans as a Cover Crop in Asparagus Production
- Flea Beetle Control in Eggplant
- Comparison of White Clover Living Mulch and Bare Soil in Pepper Production
- Mulching Comparison for Sweet Potato Production
- Quick Turnaround Cover Crops for Horticulture Systems

#### Next Generation

- Managing Winter Rye Cover Crops on an FFA Plot – Webster City
- Managing Winter Rye Cover Crops on an FFA Plot – Clarion-Goldfield
- Managing Winter Rye Cover Crops on an FFA Plot – Carroll

#### Niche Pork

- Record-Keeping Alternative Proteins for Swine Diets

#### Poultry

- Poultry Production Economics

View completed and future research reports online at [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org).

# PFI members filmed in HBO documentary “Weight of the Nation”

by Drake Larsen

*Practical Farmers of Iowa has been in the national spotlight recently, as a featured group in the HBO documentary film, The Weight of the Nation. PFI members are highlighted discussing barriers and ways to increase fruit and vegetable production. The segment was filmed at Andy and Melissa Dunham’s Grinnell Heritage Farm. In addition to the Dunhams, PFI members Ron Rosmann, Maria Rosmann, Jason Jones, Linda Barnes, Rob Faux, Tammy Faux, Mark Quee, Matt Russell and staffers Sally Worley and Sarah Carlson participated in the HBO round table.*



Thirty-six percent of adults and 17 percent of children in the U.S. are now obese. These startling statistics are producing epidemic levels of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and more. The HBO series explores the variety of factors that have led Americans to consume far more calories than they burn, and offers some solutions, such as the availability of more fresh and local fruits and vegetables.

Andy Dunham says part of the problem is that “the vast majority of food in the grocery stores is pre-packaged, boxed, processed foods that are made from corn and soybeans - which tend to be very high in [sugars and fats], salt, very high in starch [that is to say, calories], and quite low in anything that you might consider to be unadulterated nutrients.”

In fact, more than 90 percent of the vegetables consumed by Iowans are imported into the

state. Nationally, the number of fruits and vegetables imported from foreign countries has tripled since 1990. Processed foods have a higher profit margin than fresh produce. Thus, the food industry is willing to spend the most toward marketing of these processed foods. Moreover, current farm policy is driving farmers to grow more of the things we are already overeating.

So there’s a problem, but what is the solution? Andy speculates, “If you made it so it was just as cheap to buy broccoli, or cheaper than it is to buy a Twinkie, I guarantee people would buy broccoli.” But Jason Jones questions: “[A farmer] can’t grow 50 acres of broccoli because, where is he going to take it? There is no market for that right now.” Sally Worley continues: “And what machinery is he going to use? Who is going to pick it? Who is going to pack it? It is a different system [than Iowa corn and bean agriculture].”

Ron Rosmann suggests in the series that part of the solution can be found in PFI’s vision of local and regional food systems.

There is a need for investment in infrastructure at every step of the way: harvesting, cleaning, freezing, packaging and transporting produce. Establishing local and regional food systems is no easy task. However, the central message in *The Weight of the Nation* is a hopeful one: The most important thing is participation. These are human-made problems that we can solve. ■

Watch the “The Weight of the Nation” online at [weightofthenation.hbo.com](http://weightofthenation.hbo.com). PFI is featured in Part 4 of the series – titled “Challenges” – and in the bonus short on “Healthy Foods and Obesity Prevention.”



**Clockwise from top left: Andy Dunham; Jason Jones; Mark Quee; Tammy and Rob Faux; Maria and Ron Rosmann; and Sally Worley.**



## Soil and Water Conservation Districts need PFI members on board

by Drake Larsen

**Do you like to discuss local farm and sustainable agriculture issues? Do you ever see erosion concerns in neighboring fields and wish you were in a position to advocate for stewardship practices? Do you like to associate with conservation-minded and community-minded folks? If you answered YES to any of these questions, you should consider becoming a Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner.**

Each Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) - a legal subdivision of state government - is managed by a board of five commissioners that are elected on the general ballot for four-year terms. Commissioners help to establish conservation priorities, administer conservation revolving

loan funds and shape the way federal programs, such as EQIP, happen on the ground. If you are eligible to vote and live in the district, you are eligible to run.

Currently, 19 Practical Farmers of Iowa members serve as district commissioners, with an additional seven serving as assistant commissioners. I asked a current commissioner and long-time PFI member, Jack Knight, if someone can make progress being on the SWCD board.

His answer: "You bet. It's slow, it's educational, it's diplomatic, it's compromise, and it's commitment. Being a soil commissioner puts you into a position to discuss farm issues, promote sustainable farming and build understanding between the conventional, conservation and organic communities."

PFI encourages members to become Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners and will help members run for open seats during the fall election. Commissioners are elected through the county auditor and the process of getting on the ballot is easy: You just need to submit a nomination petition signed by 25 eligible voters in your county. **The filing period is Monday, August 6th through Wednesday, August 29th.** This year's general election is November 6th.

Surprisingly, many seats for these important positions go unfilled each election. PFI is in the process of determining where uncontested seats are available. **If you are interested in knowing more about openings in your area, contact: drake@practicalfarmers.org at 515.232.5661 ext. 307.** ■

## Supermoms against superbugs: PFI members parlay in D.C.

by Drake Larsen

PFI members Cindy Madsen and Maria Rosmann, along with Ron Rosmann, joined with more than 30 moms from across the country in Washington D.C. in May to discuss the topic of overuse of antibiotics in the livestock industry. The fly-in was organized by the Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our Practical Farmers were able to provide a farmer's point of view on real-world examples for curtailing abuse.



Madsen explained: "For the health of our families and future generations, we cannot keep using antibiotics to compensate for overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the livestock industry."

***“For the health of our families and future generations, we cannot keep using antibiotics to compensate for overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the livestock industry.”***

*Cindy Madsen*

Cindy Madsen explained to lawmakers: "We have been raising chickens without antibiotics for about 25 years and hogs for about 10 years. Our customers want meat raised without antibiotics. We know it can be done."

Antibiotics are perhaps best known for curing illness - but nearly 80 percent of the antibiotics used in the United States are sold for use in food animal production.

The PFI trio isn't opposed to antibiotic use; rather, they fear the utility of these tools is in jeopardy without more judicious use. There are a finite number of antibiotics. With prolonged exposure at sub-therapeutic levels, bacteria eventually develop resistance, rendering the drugs ineffective. The result: Not only do farmers lose a valuable tool for maintaining

animal health, the problem cascades off the farm. A recent study found antibiotic resistance generated an estimated \$21 billion in additional costs per year for the U.S. healthcare system.

In D.C., much of the conversation focused around one particularly nasty superbug: Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA; nearly 20,000 people die from MRSA annually. Madsen and the Rosmanns met one woman who had recently lost her son to MRSA, and another - an animal confinement worker from Oklahoma - who lost her husband after bringing the bacteria home from work.

The discussions were fruitful, but the Practical Farmers returned to Iowa wondering if the FDA was willing to do enough to make a difference. Ron Rosmann explained: "[In the past, the] FDA has succumbed to repeated efforts by the livestock industry to squelch or weaken any efforts to reduce antibiotic dependency." Cindy Madsen asked one industry proponent: "Would you feel differently if someone in your family died?" ■

# Living on the steppes with Mongolian herdsman

by Kayla Koether

**PFI member Kayla Koether grew up on a ranch in Northeast Iowa. She spent five months in Mongolia in 2011 through the School for International Studies Abroad program. Kayla lived with ranch families and studied veterinary practices used by the herdsman. Here are some excerpts from a letter she wrote about her experiences.**

**L**ike our own prairie of 150 years ago, [the Mongolian Steppe] is undergoing massive change. The changes haven't come in the form of plows, fences, corn and soybeans, but rather through overgrazing, mining and climate change.

I lived with nomadic herding families in the steppe and forest-steppe regions. These regions would be the most similar to the shortgrass prairie steppe of the U.S. Great Plains. Herders told me they used flowering plants like foursplit rhodiola, garden, and alpine gentian to treat various livestock diseases. Nomadic graziers have been herding cattle, yaks, horses, camels, sheep and goats here for centuries, well before Genghis Kahn united the warring tribes in 1206 and created the first Mongolian state.

### Political and economic upheavals

From the 13th to the 20th century, a feudal system provided authority over land, livestock and people. Subjects herded the nobility's livestock, filled quotas for meat and milk, and had access to the best grazing lands. They often moved almost 200 miles in planned seasonal migrations.

Then in 1921, Mongolia became the first Communist satellite. For a brief period, herders were left without meat quotas and management from above, and the Mongolian herd grew from approximately 10 million to over 25 million animals. But by the 1950s, the Communist government had collectivized the livestock, and livestock management was once again communal.

My host parents told me that they were employed by the state during this period. He

was a herder and she was a milker. They were paid based on the quota system, with reductions in pay if they failed to meet quotas. They got bonuses if they surpassed them. The USSR built factories and business enterprises in more-populated areas, and provided social services like healthcare and education, as well as maternity leave for women herders.

After the USSR collapsed in the late 1980's, so too did its subsidies, and Mongolia became a capitalist democracy open to the world market. This change has had dramatic consequences for both the nomadic graziers and the grasslands. Meanwhile, urbanized Mongolians turned to herding as jobs evaporated in the rest of the economy. The number of herders increased dramatically. Today, about one-third of Mongolia's 2.8 million people are herders.

Mongolia lost its meat market with the USSR, but as markets opened with China, cashmere from goats became the main source of income. Thus, the Mongolian herd spiked from around 25 million animals in 1990 to over 45 million in 2010. And the proportion of goats, a more intensive grazer, has risen sharply, while the proportion of yaks and camels, gentler grazers, has declined.

### Overtaxed grasslands

About 30 percent of Mongolians now live below the poverty line. Herders cannot afford to make the long moves of the past to graze their livestock. Thus, shorter moves along with more herders, more animals, a greater proportion of goats, and the absence of collective management have all put enormous pressure on the grassland, resulting in environmental degradation from overgrazing.

Under Mongolia's laws, all land is public. Herders have no ownership rights, although customary social arrangements prevent them from overusing the land traditionally grazed by others. Individual herd size is not limited by land holdings, however. Furthermore, herders have little incentive to rest pastures or



Kayla with host brother Altangerel and host father Ganzorig in Mongolia

reserve stands of grasses, since they might be grazed by others. But the often unpredictable climate is why many graziers are against land privatization. They say it would restrict their mobility, crucial when herders move four to 20 times a year depending on the weather.

### Threats to herders: mining and climate change

Meanwhile, the booming Mongolian mining industry is posing another threat to grasslands and other natural resources. Because they have no ownership rights, herders can do little to prevent mining in their traditional grazing lands, or to receive compensation for the resulting environmental degradation.

Finally, herders are feeling the impact of climate change, like those in other northern latitudes. Already, fierce weather events like droughts and blizzards are becoming more frequent and more intense. Given the herders' tiny carbon footprints, and their already stretched resources, this is both ironic and alarming.

I came away with great respect for the natural abilities of the nomadic herders and how they live close to the land. Given equitable rights and effective institutions, I'm sure they could restore their beloved steppe by returning grazing to sustainable levels. Mongolia must include herders in its plan for sustainable development to preserve the rich cultural and natural heritage of the steppe. ■

To read Kayla's entire article, visit [www.practicalfarmers.org/grazing](http://www.practicalfarmers.org/grazing).

# “Farming: A Handbook” – Poems for life, learning & land

by Annie Grieshop

*If you love books, you have one or two that you always look for when you move, just to make double-sure they came along for the ride. For me, those two books are the Fieldbook of Natural History and Wendell Berry's Collected Poems: 1957-1982.*

**M**y favorite collection within the book is *Farming: A Hand Book*, first printed in 1970 and republished as a separate book in 2011 by Counterpoint. It is a mix of pastoral poetry that seems to flow from the 19th century, a few love poems for Berry's wife, another few concerning the Mad Farmer (a Merry Prankster among farmers) and several complaints against the war in Vietnam, which had gone on far too long.

Why republish after forty years? Given the current trend toward local, natural food production, the Occupy Movement and its colorful characters, and another war that has gone on for too long—these poems are as timely now as when they were written.

And they reflect some portion of why we are Practical Farmers of Iowa, who work to balance modern realities and older values. These poems speak to why it matters, why our community is important, why we join together to learn and teach.

*The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,  
whose hands reach into the ground and sprout,  
to him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death  
yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie  
down  
in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.  
His thought passes along the row ends like a mole.  
What miraculous seed has he swallowed  
that the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth  
like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water  
descending in the dark?*



Annie Grieshop with her dogs.

Listening to the crowd at lunch during a PFI conference is like listening to the Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer:

*Don't pray for the rain to stop.  
Pray for good luck fishing  
when the river floods.*

or

*By the excellence of his work, the  
workman is a neighbor. By selling  
only what he would not despise to  
own the salesman is a neighbor. By  
selling what is good his character  
survives his market.*

After living with this book for three decades, many of these poems are as familiar to me as old trees, with roots far in the past and all sorts of memories roosting in their branches. The farming practices, the people, the community and sensibility—all of them reflect an older time. I appreciate the way these poems walk across the land, their humor and spirit, the calling-forth of those who have gone before, and the sense of space and time — and need — to reflect on what we do and why. ■

## Samaritan Ministries (cont'd)

◀ (Continued from page 16)

If more need comes in each month than there are shares available, SMI will have to pro-rate your need. We plan ahead and let them know what we're doing, and share a needs list with other members.

I think anybody that's a Christian should be part of an organization like this. There are maybe three like this in the country. Samaritan Ministries is the largest right now, and growing extremely fast. It's like a national community — and they're able to keep costs down because you have to sign a yearly statement saying you don't abuse alcohol or drugs, and that you strive to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Doing that I think keeps a lot of deadweight expenses from people who don't care about trying to be healthy. ■

### SMI Share Options

SMI has monthly share amounts for four primary participation levels:

- a single member (one person) shares \$150
- a couple (two members of the same nuclear family) shares \$300
- a single-parent family (widowed, divorced, or legally separated) with children shares \$215
- a two-parent family (three or more members of the same nuclear family) shares \$355.

SMI also offers a \$30 per month senior discount for each household member aged 65 and older, as well as a reduced monthly share rate for young adults (aged 25 or younger) and students (no age limit, but must be full-time) at Christian colleges. The discounts range from \$40 to \$80 depending on the participation level.



## New livestock coordinator joins PFI

**Margaret Dunn is thrilled to be joining the staff at Practical Farmers of Iowa as the new Livestock Coordinator. She will work with producers of all livestock species to develop and design research trials, analyze and report data, and organize field days and pasture walks.**

She joins the staff during the end of her time at Iowa State University as a Master's student in animal science, where she worked with mob stocking beef cattle and its effects on the environment and cattle.

Originally from New York, Margaret grew up with 4-H dairy goats before falling in love with beef cattle during her undergrad years

at Cornell University. Knowledge from classes was coupled with hands-on experiences at local farms and doing pasture research. Involvement with a varied producer group in the Finger Lakes led to an appreciation of agriculture of all styles and scales.

The move to the Midwest has added even more experience, as Margaret managed sixty fall-calving cows over two years for her research, rotating them up to four times daily. In addition to her love of ruminants, Margaret has raised meat and egg chickens and has experimented with a few management styles.

As Livestock Coordinator Margaret hopes to combine her scientific and agricultural knowledge with the experiences and lessons



of Iowa farmers, to generate interesting and functional research trials to identify practices that support sound, profitable, and practical farming.

In her spare time Margaret enjoys running and working out, reading a good book, and napping with her cat. ■

## Drake Larsen joins PFI team in policy and communication

**Although I am two generations removed from my family farm heritage, much of my time has been spent in Iowa's agricultural landscapes.**

I am a native Iowan; my childhood yard was bordered on two sides by row crop fields and during high school I was active in the FFA at North Polk. After high school, I built a successful small business as a goose hunting guide. In this capacity, I spent countless hours in Iowa farm fields and built cherished relationships with many farmers and land owners.

From an early age, my aspirations have revolved around conservation. Over time I came to understand that conservation efforts must be directed at our working landscapes if we hope to have a significant and lasting impact. This evolution in thinking prompted me to follow a Bachelor degree in natural resources with a Master of Science degree in sustainable agriculture at Iowa State. During my degree work I was able to expand my understanding of fundamental ecological principles and to better appreciate the social, economic, and political factors affecting



agriculture. My recent research has focused on agricultural land planning and management - specifically concerning the integration of perennial land cover into row crop landscapes.

I am thrilled to be working for Practical Farmers of Iowa because I whole-heartedly believe in its vision and mission. My time working with farmers has made me a firm believer in the power of farmer-to-farmer information sharing. With my science background, I am also excited to be a part of the farmer-led studies coordinated through PFI. Quite frankly, I am worried about the state of agriculture in my home state - and I find Practical Farmers of Iowa to be a breath of fresh air. I look forward to working for the members with hopes of developing ecologically sound and community enhancing approaches to growing food in Iowa. ■

## Visit PFI at the 2012 Farm Progress Show

Come join PFI at the 2012 Farm Progress Show! In our inaugural appearance, PFI hopes to raise a few eyebrows - and win a few converts - with our "Don't Farm Naked" theme at this year's show, Aug. 28-30, in Boone.

As part of the theme, which is a playful take on the benefits of planting cover crops, PFI will offer a range of interactive, fun and informative cover crop-related resources, activities and prizes at our booth in the Varied Industries Tent.

The centerpiece of PFI's booth will be several species of potted cover crop plants. Visitors can play a "cover crop guessing game" and enter a prize drawing to win a 50-pound bag of tillage radish, valued at \$150. A drawing will be held for a new prize each day at 3 p.m. (anyone who plays can enter).

Videos on how to add cover crops to corn and soybeans, books and the Iowa Cover Crop Business Directory will be available to visitors. Cover crop experts and farmers who have planted or plan to try cover crops will also be on hand to answer questions. Look for PFI staff and farmers wearing the "Don't Farm Naked" T-shirt! ■



# Grow your farm with PFI. Join today!

This annual membership is a:

- new membership
- renewal

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.)

I am joining at the level of:

- Student—\$20
- Individual—\$40
- Farm or Household—\$50
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups)—\$100

..... Each membership includes one subscription to *the Practical Farmer*. .....

## Sustain PFI

For the long-term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

- \$1,000
- \$500
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- \$\_\_\_\_\_

## JOIN OUR GIFT OF THE MONTH CLUB

The Gift of the Month Club is an easy way to support Practical Farmers of Iowa! Send in your pledge with your credit card information, and we will automatically deduct your donation the first of each month.

YES! I would like to give \_\_\_\_\_ per month to PFI, to be automatically charged to my credit card the first of the month. (\$10 per month minimum)

Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you!

Individual, Farm or Organization Name\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone (with area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Phone (with area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\* For Farm/Household membership, please list names of persons included. For Organization membership, please list one or two contact persons.

## Payment:

Total: \$\_\_\_\_\_ = \$\_\_\_\_\_ membership + \$\_\_\_\_\_ donation

- Check or money order enclosed. (Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")

**TO PAY WITH A CREDIT CARD, PLEASE GO TO: <http://practicalfarmers.org/join-pfi.html>**

## Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100  
Ames, IA 50010-6071



### Diverse Farms

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



### Healthy Food

Wholesome food that is celebrated  
for its connections  
to local farmers  
to seasons,  
to hard work  
and good stewardship  
Communities alive with  
diverse connections between  
farmers and friends of farmers



### Vibrant Communities

Places where commerce,  
cooperation, creativity  
and spirituality are thriving  
Places where the working landscape,  
the fresh air and the clean water  
remind us of all that is good about Iowa.

