

the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 14, #4
Winter 2000

COLIN WILSON ELECTED NEW PFI PRESIDENT

Hail to the Chief! In a bipartisan election held in conjunction with the PFI Annual Meeting, the PFI Board of Directors elected Colin Wilson to be its new president. Wilson, a Paullina farmer and fifteen-year member of PFI, takes charge after serving as the organization's Vice President. Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, Solon, became Vice President the same evening, and, incidentally, PFI's first female officer.

These two step to the helm at an exciting time in PFI's history. Colin writes, "At present I see the PFI board shifting their energies in a little different direction. In the past we have focused mainly on grants for our funding, but as we continue to grow and diversify our organization we are finding it necessary to find a more reliable funding source for

the day-to-day operations of the organization. Thus the decision to start an endowment fund which would only support the day-to-day operations like membership services, the newsletter, office supplies, etc. With this decision comes the shift of energy for a year or so until we get the endowment fund under way. This doesn't mean that we have forgotten or abandoned the other parts of PFI, only shifted some time and energy away from them for a while. The amount of time that we have to shift will depend a lot on how much



Colin Wilson, right, confers with Dave Lubben, then PFI President, at a summer '99 board meeting.

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help we get from the membership at large. So stay tuned to see where and when your help is needed.

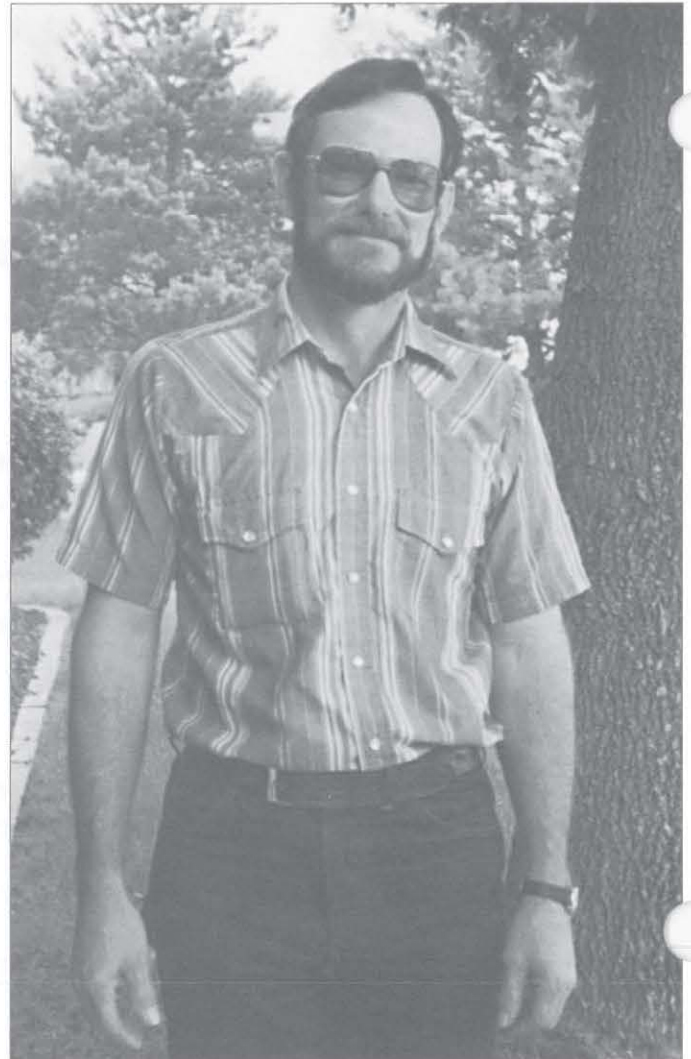
There are a couple of areas that I find quite exciting in PFI. The first is the continued diversification in both the membership and the programs. The whole area of local foods systems opens up a lot of opportunities for a lot of members whether you are a meat producer, fruit and veggie producer, or a specialty grains producer. It is exciting to see the possibilities that spring up as we bring the food consumers closer to the food producers.

For most of you that were at the Winter Workshops and heard John Ikerd, you know what I mean. The huge variety of consumers out there and the huge variety of food products that they desire means a lot of

“Where can you find a group of producers and consumers together that are more willing to exchange ideas and skills to solve the problems at hand?”

marketing opportunities. All we have to do is find ways to meet the consumers' desire for better and healthier food. And that is where PFI comes in. Where can you find a group of producers and consumers together that are more willing to exchange ideas and skills to solve the problems at hand? I would encourage everyone to be part of the solution and share your ideas with others, as well as your talents and skills. The challenges ahead will affect us all and together we can meet these challenges and overcome them.

The second area that I'm excited about is the continued research cooperation with ISU. As the challenges in agricultural production change we are able to find researchers at ISU that are very willing to help meet those challenges. As new appropriate technology comes along, like hoop houses for pork production, we have people like Dr. Mark Honeyman who step up to help smooth out the learning curve. When we need help dealing with hoop house manure, we have Tom Richard and Matt Liebman right there to help. Even when we may not agree with everything coming out of the university, we need to be thankful



Colin Wilson, Paullina, became PFI's new President in January 2000.

for those at the university who are very willing to help us find solutions to the problems that we are facing.

I find these to be exciting and challenging times for PFI. Even though our membership growth is small, I think the enthusiasm and commitment is growing. That is exciting! As we find grants harder to get and the need for the endowment fund a reality, that is challenging. As agriculture continues to change, the need for organizations like PFI is greater than ever. So let us continue to work together for the betterment of us all.”

WINTER MEETING DRAWS BIGGEST CROWD EVER

Editor's note: For a complete summary of the evaluations received from this year's event, contact Nan at the PFI office, 515-294-8512 or nanb@iastate.edu. She'll be happy to mail you a copy.

Over three hundred people attended the PFI Annual Meeting and Winter Workshops at the Gateway Holiday Inn in Ames on January 14 and 15, 2000. Participants filled every corner of the facility to attend their choices of seventeen concurrent sessions, conduct PFI business, network like crazy, and listen enraptured to both Mark Honeyman (see page 4) and John Ikerd, the keynote speaker. (An abstract of Ikerd's speech starts on this page.) Once again the Gateway chefs assembled a wonderful Iowa Bounty Buffet featuring items created from the goodness of PFI farms.

A new venture for PFI this year was our campaign to bring more students to the meeting. We held the event one week later than usual to assure that students would be back on campus and we offered a discounted \$10 registration fee with no obligation for the students to join PFI. Knowing that these two conditions were essential but not sufficient, we called on PFI member Deb Cooper to get the word out to students. As a result, eighteen students attended and two of those joined PFI. In the past we have had no significant participation from students (perhaps one or two graduate students have attended), so eighteen is a big boost! In the written evaluations of the meeting, the consensus was strong support for students attending.

Cob Rolls were also a new item on the program. Designed as an alternative to the typical concurrent session, Cob Rolls were intended to promote broader conversations in a workshop setting. The majority of people returning evaluations wanted to see Cob Rolls continue. Thanks to **Carla Wilson, Larry Cleverley, Connie Tjelmeland, and Lorna Wilson** for breaking ground with this new format. What happened at the silent auction? The basket tree was going, going, gone with **Neil Hamilton; Von Kaster** was high bidder on the willow basket. Thanks again to PFI member **Randy Nowotny** for crafting the basket tree and arranging for a basket to be donated by Iowa River Willow Products in Marengo. **Barney Bahrenfuss** delivered the goods to Ames, while **Shelly Gradwell** organized the display and bidding

Mark your calendar now for January 12 and 13, 2001.

system. Once again, most evaluators recommended continuing and even expanding the silent auction.

As the scope and scale of the annual meeting continues to expand, so do the expenses. We'd be running in the red for sure without the generous support of both the **Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture** and the **North Central Region SARE**. Thank you to these sponsors once again.

This was the first year for seeking commercial sponsors to help cover costs. **Anderson-Erickson Dairy, Mrs. Clark's Foods, Mariposa Farms, Stanhope Locker, and Wapsie Produce** paid for your coffee, tea, and hot cider. **Steve Wallace** took care of the rental for toys in the child care suite. Helping to sweet talk potential sponsors or becoming one yourself is a welcome way for any PFI member to lend a hand next autumn when we gear up for another great annual meeting. Think about it! And mark your calendar now for January 12 and 13, 2001. We'll return to the Gateway Holiday Inn in Ames, where we're sure to use every inch of their new expanded conference facilities.

JOHN IKERD'S THOUGHTS ON THE NEW AMERICAN FARM

Though nothing can match the power of Ikerd's delivery, we intended to reprint his rousing keynote in its entirety. Alas, space constraints restrict us to this abstract, written by Ikerd himself. For a complete transcript of Ikerd's speech at the PFI Annual Meeting, contact Nan at the office or check out the PFI web site www.pfi.iastate.edu. In addition, John Ikerd has his own web site, hometown.aol.com/jeikerd, on which he recently placed eleven new papers.

"American Agriculture as we have known it is coming to an end. In fact, there will be no future in farming unless we have the courage to challenge conventional wisdom based on the economics of short-run, self-interests. However, once we realize that economics is nothing more than a belief system, that it is not based on fundamental truths, we can begin to change the conceptual foundation for the future of agriculture and for society as a whole. We

Helping to sweet talk potential sponsors or becoming one yourself is a welcome way for any PFI member to lend a hand...

“The time to choose between the pursuit of greed and the conscious choices for good is at hand.”

have no obligation to accept the market as God. A new post-industrial model for American Agriculture is arising under the conceptual umbrella of sustainability that is based on a higher concept of self interests – a concept that recognizes personal, interpersonal, and spiritual values as but different levels of self-interests, and thus, as equally important dimensions of quality of life. The New American Farm is being developed under many names and takes on many forms, but some fundamental principles of this new paradigm for farming are beginning to emerge.” 🍀



As keynote speaker, Dr. John Ikerd brought a powerful voice and message to the podium .

HONEYMAN ACCEPTS SUSTAINABLE AG AWARD

Vic Madsen may have tugged at a few heart strings at the annual meeting when he introduced Mark Honeyman, recipient of PFI’s Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award. But when Honeyman quoted Wendell Berry in his acceptance speech, there were actually teary eyes in the quiet audience. Mark shares Berry’s verses here once again. They are from Farming: A Hand Book, by Wendell Berry, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1967.

TO KNOW THE DARK

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

THE MAN BORN TO FARMING

The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,
whose hand reaches 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? 🍀



Vic Madsen, former PFI President, left, presents the Sustainable Agriculture Award to Dr. Mark Honeyman. Honeyman was honored for his work at ISU in swine nutrition and production.

THE EDITOR MUSES

Spring? Not yet. Everyone knows that despite what the migrants indicate, spring is not officially here until after the PFI winter newsletter goes to press. It's an event neatly timed to follow the basketball tournament blizzard. So hold on. The best is yet to come, even though this newsletter doesn't beat the equinox.

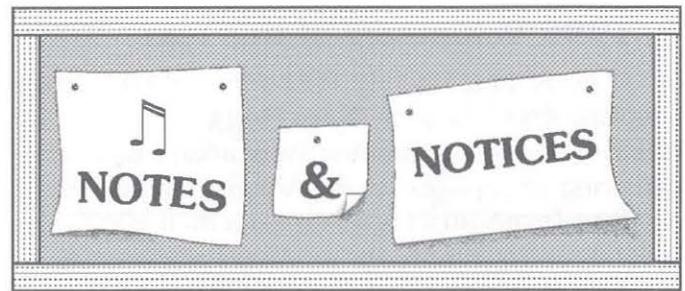
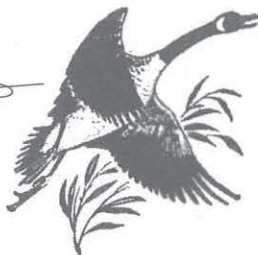
Here at the PFI office, we're still recovering from the annual meeting and kicking around ideas for how to make next year's better. You'll find member-written summaries of the workshops make up the bulk of this newsletter. For readers who did not make it to the actual event, these inky replays will have to suffice. Meeting attendance was up about 10% from last year. Get with the trend!

New features in this newsletter include a Board Business section, designed to keep members in touch with what your directors are up to. You'll find it on page 12. As editor, I welcome your feedback. Is this sort of thing helpful? Or does the time lag between board meetings and newsletters make it much ado about old stuff? Let me know. I'm at 515-294-8512 or nanb@iastate.edu.

Speaking of board members, please in welcome Dan Chadima and Mark Tjelmeland as newly elected district directors, representing districts 5 and 2 respectively. You can look forward to reading more about these gentlemen in the spring newsletter. Congratulations to Donna Bauer who was re-elected to represent district 4 for another term. Stepping down from the board are Steve Weis and Dave Lubben, who also served as PFI's president for four years. We owe them both a big thank you for their dedicated service and clear heads.

The spring newsletter will follow close on the heels of this one. We already have a number of articles on file that did not make the cut for this volume. If you have additional articles to submit, send them to the PFI office by May 1st. Thanks everyone – and enjoy the season. 🐾

Nan Bonfils



🎵 **SARE Producer Grant Deadline is April 28, 2000**

North Central Region SARE producer grant application packets are now available. You can get them either from ISU Extension at (515) 294-1923 or from the regional SARE office at (402) 472-7081. The application deadline is April 28th (that means the applications have to be in the regional office by close of business on that date).

Grants of up to \$5,000 are available for individual producers investigating a sustainable agriculture practice or concept, and grants of up to \$15,000 are available for groups of 3 or more producers. This year the Agricultural Marketing Service of USDA has provided additional producer grant money earmarked for marketing projects.

You can get more information from the regional SARE web page at www.sare.org/san/ncrsare/. And you can look over the list of Iowa projects funded in years past posted on ISU Extension's sustainable agriculture web page, extension.agron.iastate.edu/sustag//default.htm. Click on the "Research and Education" button and then on "Iowa SARE-funded projects." As you will see, a number of PFI farmers have received grants from this source.

🎵 **PFI Camp 2000 Set for Early June**

This year is our 6th PFI Camp! The dates are June 7-10 with counselor training beginning on June 6. This year's theme will emerge as camp becomes part of a year-long statewide "Iowa Earth Year 2000" celebration. We're returning to the YMCA Camp north of Boone. See inside back cover of this newsletter for more information and check the PFI web site for updates as well. Call **Shelly Gradwell** at 515-294-0887 with questions.



🎵 1999 Volunteers of the Year

At the Annual Meeting, PFI honored three women as volunteers of the year. **Kate Hogg** was recognized for her work organizing the women's winter gathering. (See pages 38-39.) **Virginia Wadsley** and **Sue Jarnagin** were honored for their efforts collating and publishing the results of the women's survey (see Summer Newsletter 1999 vol. 14, #2). In a thank you note Virginia wrote, "Now the best reward for all involved will be cultivating and watching the seeds that were planted grow with PFI. Onward to the fields, pastures, gardens, and markets of our mutual endeavors!"

🎵 More Volunteer Opportunities for PFI Libraries and Hats

Mark Runquist is stepping down as manager of the PFI library collection. This volunteer position consists of quarterly phone calls to five "keepers of the books" across the state, followed by a spreadsheet update. Is someone else willing to take this on? It's a job you can do from the comfort of home. The next volunteer should also be willing to do some investigating of the effectiveness of the PFI library system and make recommendations to the staff and board for how it can be improved. Call Nan at the office if you are interested in helping on this. Thank you, Mark, for several years of working behind the scenes to keep resources accessible.

Hats off to **Donna Bauer** who has initiated the search for a new PFI cap. We are almost out of stock and as our old manufacturer is no longer making hats, this seems like an excellent time to investigate a new style. Since Donna's already volunteering plenty of time as a board member, it would be great if someone else in PFI would take on this project. The goal is to determine a source for a moderately priced cap and report the results of your quest to staff and board. Again, it's a job you can work on at home – access to the web would probably be a plus. If you've been complaining about the PFI caps, this is your chance to make a difference. Let Nan hear from you.

🎵 Nationwide List for Community Supported Agriculture

To tap into an increasing demand for fresh food alternatives, USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) has assembled a nationwide list of CSA farms.

To access the list, see www.sare.org/san/csa/index.htm, where you can search by state. Or write to CSA/CSREES, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Stop 2207, Washington DC 20250-2207. Please specify whether you want a state list or a directory.

Shelly Gradwell alerts us that the list for Iowa CSAs is incomplete. If you have a new CSA, please let Shelly or **Diane Mayerfeld** know by calling 515-294-0887.

🎵 New on the Web

The new PFI Web site, www.pfi.iastate.edu, shortens our "reaction time" for getting out information. Look there soon for the announcement of a major environmental award to be presented to PFI and ISU in Washington, D.C. And since the Web site was announced in the last newsletter, several PFI meeting notices have appeared there. In response to a request at one of the January workshops, a listing of botanical parasite treatments has been included. We'll post a tentative schedule of field days this spring, with the full field day guide available in the first days of June. In case you miss the mailing, PFI summer camp information will be put on the Web. The online version of the Member Directory will appear in the next months as well.

Just because you throw a party on the Internet doesn't mean anybody will come. Belatedly, some time after the last newsletter we opened the "Over the Back Fence" discussion area. Maybe no one's been back to check the PFI site, because *nobody* has contributed an item for the discussion.

Tom Frantzen is new to the computer world and has been furiously generating plans and photos of the farrowing huts he's designed. Find them in the Photo Albums section, at <http://www.pfi.iastate.edu>.

🎵 North American Prairie Conference July 16-19, 2000

North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City is proud to host the North American Prairie Conference. To receive registration materials or for questions about the conference itself, please contact **Carol W. Schutte**, North Iowa Area Community College, 500 College Drive, Mason City, IA. 50401. Phone 515-422-4319, fax: 515-422-4115, email

schutcar@niacc.cc.ia.us. Try their developing web site for more information, also: <http://niacc.com/prairie2000/>.

♪ ISU Extension Sustainable Agriculture Web Page

Check out our new look at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/sustag//>. You will find information on upcoming sustainable agriculture events, funding opportunities, links to other sustainable agriculture web sites, and more. Please send your comments, reactions, and suggestions for improvement to dmayerfe@iastate.edu.

♪ New Board Baby

Congratulations to **Steve and Wendy Williams** (district 4) on the arrival of **Michaela Grace** on February 20th. Steve reports that Michaela is beautiful with lots of dark hair and that her older siblings don't want to send her back yet.

♪ Barn Rehab Alert

Many of us try to find practical uses for older buildings on our farms. And let's face it, they don't build them like they used to. There is exciting new proposed legislation to give back as tax credit 25% of cost of rehabilitation of barns older than 1935. Please contact your rep as this is currently on the agenda at the Iowa House of Representatives. The main telephone line is 515-281-3221; they can help you find your representative.

Also, there is a current law that many counties haven't put on the local books yet. Iowa code 427.16 freezes property taxes after some sorts of rehabilitation on barns and homes meeting certain criteria. If you want to learn more or help get code on the books in your county, call Joyce Barrett at the Historical Alliance 319-337-3514. Thanks, **Wende Elliott**, iowafood@netins.net.

FIELD TO FAMILY REPORT

Gary Huber and Robert Karp

Last July PFI's Field to Family Project, in conjunction with Audubon County Family Farms, began a



Leopold Center-funded project to explore the potential of institutional markets in Iowa. The project's title is "Making the Connection – Linking Farms to HRI's." Its objectives are:

- to quantify the potential market for Iowa-grown and raised foods among hotels, restaurants, and institutions (HRI's) and grocery stores;
- to identify barriers to be addressed to gain access to HRI and grocery store markets;
- to identify the conditions under which farmers can profitably sell to HRI's and grocery stores;
- to analyze models that will help link farmers to HRI and grocery store markets.

Since last July we have conducted personal interviews with representatives from industry associations, restaurants, grocery stores, food brokers, food distributors, hospitals and hotel/conference centers. Audubon County Family Farms has also met with various institutions. Using information from this work and our efforts to broker local and Iowa foods, we have developed some preliminary findings described below. For more information, please contact Gary or Robert directly at 515-232-5649, or by email at fff@isunet.net.

Quantify the potential market

Considerable market potential exists for Iowa-grown and raised foods. If Iowa farmers were to gain just 10% of the total dollars spent annually by both grocery stores and HRI's in Iowa for fruits, vegetables, meat, fish and poultry, the income generated would be almost \$171 million dollars. Our research reveals a strong interest in Iowa-grown and raised foods among Iowa HRI's and grocery stores and their clients and customers. Getting these products to market in a

timely manner in the form, volume and price needed by buyers is the challenge.

Identify barriers

Primary challenges perceived by buyers include: quality, adequate supply, competitive prices, product consistency, use of standard packaging, delivery frequency, advertising and promotional support, ease of ordering, dependability, and transportation/distribution issues. Given current production levels and existing infrastructures, some of the best opportunities appear to exist with the high-end restaurant market. These buyers typically have greater flexibility than other buyers in relation to packaging and consistency, have lower volume demands, place a higher value on quality and connection to the farmer, and express a willingness to pay a higher premium than other types of buyers. In addition, the organic foods market is clearly growing and spreading into the mainstream grocery stores in Iowa.

Myriad opportunities exist for producers, distributors and entrepreneurs to work together to capture parts of this market. And with appropriate support systems, hospitals, schools and conference centers appear to be capable of converting to local buying. To take advantage of these opportunities, it appears that a) forms of infrastructure are needed that can effectively link farmers to local markets in a buyer-friendly manner, and b) more technical support needs to be provided to producers in areas such as organic and sustainable production methods, packaging, marketing and business planning.

Identify the conditions under which farmers can profitably sell

While data required to answer this question adequately are still being gathered, there is evidence to suggest that selling to HRI's and grocery stores can be very helpful to producers as one part of their total marketing strategy. It appears, however, that to be profitable while selling strictly to high volume HRI's and grocery stores would require some problematic compromises. For example, to meet the volume and price demands of a large supermarket chain in Iowa for horticultural crops, production methods would likely need to be adopted that would have negative environmental impacts. On the other hand, selling strictly to the natural foods and high end restaurant market, where higher prices and premiums are more

Getting these products to market in a timely manner in the form, volume and price needed by buyers is the challenge.

common, appears to be more feasible. More research is necessary, however, to substantiate this working hypothesis.

In addition, there is a need for a more detailed market and agronomic analysis of different fruit and vegetable crops sold to HRI's and grocery stores in order to determine which can be grown most competitively in Iowa, using sustainable and organic practices. There may exist, for example, profitable opportunities for the import replacement of specific crops. We hope to make some efforts in this direction in the second year of this project.

Analyze models

Another important factor in both profitability as well as feasibility, appears to lie with brokers, distributors, marketers and producer cooperatives that are committed to helping farmers get adequate prices and who seek markets and create systems capable of paying these prices. This requires entrepreneurial efforts that seek not only their own or the end users' interests, but also the interests of the producers. This research, the growth of the organic industry, and the success of a variety of small scale ventures, including PFI's Field to Family brokering effort, suggests that there are very real opportunities for value-laden entrepreneurial efforts focused on locally grown foods.

In the next year, we will attempt to articulate, conceptualize and study a number of business and service models at different scales that have the potential to successfully link Iowa farmers practicing sustainable agriculture with the grocery store and HRI market.

There are very real opportunities for value-laden entrepreneurial efforts focused on locally grown foods.



Cooperators practiced preparing fecal samples for parasite egg counts.

IS IT SPRING ALREADY? COOPERATORS LOOK AHEAD

Rick Exner

No sooner were the PFI Winter Workshops over than we found ourselves at the annual research planning meeting for cooperators. The planning meeting is always a good time to huddle with scientists from ISU and elsewhere and brainstorm about trials and other on-farm activity. Here are a few themes you can expect to see at field days this summer.

- Alternative swine systems, especially focusing on cost of production
- Manure management, especially handling of hoop house bedding
- Fertilizers and nutrient management, especially with IFB cooperators
- Small grains, and their value in crop rotations
- Vegetable production – several new research topics are in the offing
- Corn genetics – initial examinations developing “synthetic” and open-pollinated varieties
- Fertility – the second year comparing cation ratio and sufficiency approaches
- Organic management of gastrointestinal parasites

Other sessions at the cooperators’ meeting were not directly tied to on-farm research. We got to visit with Lorna Butler, the first person to hold the Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU. (See page 10.) Cooperators talked about making rural-urban connections, about sustainable agriculture in other countries, and about climate forecasts for 2001. Veterinarian Randy Kidd, whom you may remember



Venita Wilcox, Correctionville, drew smiles in the discussion on making rural-urban connections.

from the Winter Workshops, talked about teaching farmers to use holistic veterinary practices. There is even interest in getting a group together and submitting a proposal for a SARE producers’ grant to support this kind of training. If you’d like to be part of such a group, check the information on page 36.

PFI has received a grant of \$7,630 from the Organic Farming Research Foundation for farmer expenses related to the parasite research, and \$4,000 of a grant from the Wallace Genetic Foundation will help provide staff support in this effort. Through the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, PFI will receive \$5,608 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service for on-farm research of manure management. That will fit nicely with the project of Drs. Tom Richard, Cindy Cambardella and Matt Liebman that examines hoop house manure and how best to handle it. For the second year, the Iowa Farm Bureau has pledged approximately \$20,000 to involve IFB members in on-farm research. ISU Extension will contribute \$10,000, and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture is expected to renew PFI’s request for \$50,000 in support of on-farm research.

Thanks to these supporters, to our collaborating scientists, and most of all to the cooperators themselves. Look for a tentative list of field day dates on the PFI web site this spring, with the field day guide showing up in your mailbox in early June. 🐾

Practical Farmers of Iowa
www.pfi@iastate.edu



MEET LORNA MICHAEL BUTLER

Nan Bonfils

"I'm not from Iowa. I don't think I probably even speak like an Iowan," confessed Lorna Butler. "My best credential is that I'm married to an Iowa farm boy." Thus she introduced herself to PFI cooperators and ISU guests gathered at the Best Western Starlite Village in Ames on February 10th.

Dr. Butler is the first to take on the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture, a new position at ISU in the College of Agriculture. From roots on an Alberta cattle ranch, she began a professional career with Canadian 4-H and Extension. International work in Africa and the Middle East followed after she married Bob Butler, originally from Northwood, Iowa. Two months ago, she left her post in rural sociology at Washington State University to make the move to Ames.

Dr. Butler, an agricultural anthropologist by training, sees today's issues as being "tied up in people's personal and community experiences and the way they translate these over a lifetime." One of her most recent activities has focused on the relationships between rural and urban communities. "One of my goals is to find ways of encouraging non-farm people to understand and appreciate the changes in agriculture and food systems and what they mean for all of our futures."

Getting to the goal includes activities that increase profitability for farmers and responding to urban people's "thirsting for a way to touch agriculture and the land." Butler advocates cooperative projects that give more visibility for food and agriculture in city people's lives, and activities around those things held in common. She sees her work as building creative alliances and finding common denominators.

Butler is also here to learn the facts associated with agriculture, both the science-based knowledge and experience-based knowledge. Decisions are rarely based on scientific facts alone, she says. She's ready to go to work with a variety of players, PFI among them. She asked "How can we achieve greater visibility for all sustainable projects and activities in Iowa? How can we encourage increased knowledge and appreciation of the ongoing changes in food and agriculture systems?...among urban people?...among the public at large? What kind of changes do we need in higher education – not just at ISU – to achieve our common goals in sustainable ag?" Butler concluded her remarks with her own tough questions, but left the final word to the audience.

"Welcome to Iowa," Gary Guthrie offered. And his peers echoed his welcome with warm applause. 🍷

TEACHING AND LEARNING ON THE ROAD

Rick Exner

At this writing PFI President Colin Wilson is preparing to travel to Haiti, board member Donna Bauer is planning to travel to the Dominican Republic, board member Ron Brunk has returned from Guatemala, PFI member Mike Bell is on a study trip to Cuba and cooperators Gary and Nancy Guthrie are getting ready to visit old friends in El Salvador. There should

be a few good newsletter articles and slide shows to come from all that!

In February, Dick and Sharon Thompson and I had the opportunity to talk about sustainable agriculture in Mexico, at a conference on conservation tillage. We were quite well received, and I think for some people at the meeting it was a first exposure to the sustainable agriculture message as it has developed in the U.S. Thanks to Patricia Negreros at ISU and the ISU office of MIAC (the MidAmerica International Agricultural Consortium) for making our participation possible.

We probably learned more than we taught. We found ourselves in the state of Sinaloa, on the Pacific coast across from the tip of Baja California. It's the part of Mexico that provides much of the produce we saw on our grocery shelves this winter. In many ways, it could have been California, with large-scale, input-intensive production. Water is key. Although there is an eight-month dry season, rivers coming from the mountains make it possible to irrigate.

After the conference, my wife Sue and I saw agriculture without water. We drove over the mountains to the neighboring state of Durango. There a five-year drought has forced producers to cut their corn for fodder. The farms are smaller – tens of acres – and the land is owned by individual producers or by the community trusts called ejidos.

In Durango we were fortunate to stay in the home of a Mexican farmer who attended a conference we organized in Iowa several years ago. I had the opportunity to visit with him and his neighbors about things we all share and the particular challenges they face.



Farming talk always came back to water in Durango.

Without understanding the nuances of their situation, I offered a few ideas they might pursue. I hope to stay in touch with my friend there and see how things develop in that community over time. ☘

GROWING VEGETABLES FOR THE FIELD TO FAMILY PROJECT: IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

Don Adams and Nan Bonfils, Madrid

In January 1999 we joined a group of eight other producers who would form the first tier of growers in a new project. Field to Family Co-Director Gary Huber would call on us to supply vegetables for the new *Iowa's Choice* meals on the Scheman Conference Center menu. (See PFI newsletters, Summer 99, p. 7 and Fall 99, p. 7.)

We had four goals when we joined the group:

1. To lend support to what we saw as a worthwhile endeavor
2. To diversify our total farm operation
3. To learn about becoming better vegetable growers
4. To not go broke doing it

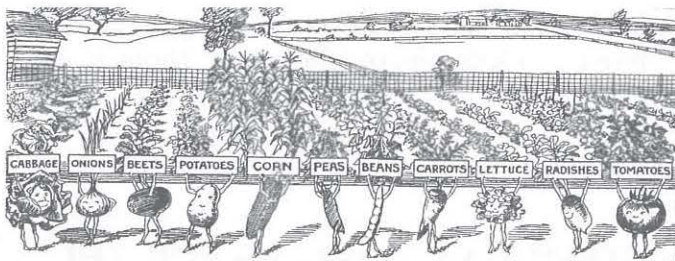
Writing this in December, we can declare that we achieved our first three goals. As for number four, we certainly did not go broke, but our experience raises serious doubt about profitability.

PFI Sustainable Projects Grant

Since this was the first year for the Scheman project, we anticipated plenty of ups and downs. How would we predict demand? What would we do with inevitable excess? Could we really make money on this venture?

To answer these and other perplexing questions, we obtained support from PFI in the form of a Sustainable Projects grant. Accordingly, we were to track our time and efforts, our income and expenses, and the path of the food we produced. We share our experiences here as a reality check.

We grew two vegetables to be used for the Scheman's spring menu (spinach and strawberries), four for summer (green beans, zucchini, cherry tomatoes, and summer squash), and three for fall (winter squash, bok choy, and fall greens).



The Bottom Line

We're proud of meeting three out of four goals the first year of this venture. But we did not make a monetary profit. The bottom line is not pretty and will hardly encourage anyone contemplating a similar enterprise.

Gross sales cash income \$255.76

(We grossed \$104.54 in Field to Family brokered sales and \$151.22 in produce sold directly off our farm.)

Total hard costs \$128.72

(These included fencing, seeds and plugs, hand tools, and a scale.)

Net income \$127.04

Total hours of labor= 235

You do the math. Factor in transportation and delivery costs, and the profitability drops. (Fortunately, Nan's PFI job in Ames allowed us to absorb delivery costs to Scheman.)

To be fair, what these numbers don't reflect is the fabulous food we consumed all summer and the value of what we preserved for winter. How does one calculate the value of eating from the garden? You'd have to know exactly how many pounds were consumed and compare the cost of buying equivalent amounts from a farmers' market or set it against the cost of a CSA share/subscription. As for putting food by, can one even go to the grocery store and buy organic frozen green beans? Just how much goodness was packed in those Mason jars and Ziploc bags?

Is this sustainable?

Perhaps other vegetable growers who made the Field to Family venture an extension of a larger vegetable enterprise fared better. Our testimony only tells the story of one farm for one year. Still, labor intensity and the lack of profit are severe enough to bring doubt to anyone seeking to significantly boost income by incorporating vegetables into an already diverse operation.

Is this sustainable? With modifications, yes. In 2000 we plan to continue to work with Field to Family. We will also look at the cost effectiveness of teaming with another producer at a farmers' market. Meanwhile, we are already enrolling neighborhood customers in our own CSA venture.

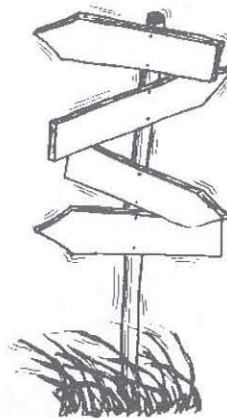
Is this adding value?

Clearly, for us, value-added cannot be counted in dollars alone. We must also apply other assessments to this experience. How does one measure the new wisdom crammed into the cranium and the good karma spread around our community? How can you measure the value of what you give away when it comes back to you so much later, unexpectedly, and in another form altogether? Not to mention the laughs we had – how much are they worth?

What's the value of terrific fresh food consumed, shared, preserved? Besides growing vegetables last summer, we met wonderful people through the brokering process, and hooked up with new clients. We also shared moments of supreme satisfaction as we uncovered new possibilities for Full Circle Farm. Therein lies the value and the sustainability. 🍷

BOARD BUSINESS

Editor's note: It seems with new officers at the helm, now is a good time to review for PFI folks some of the board basics. Who are they? How often do they meet? How are officers elected? We'll also use this space to bring you up to date on the agendas and minutes of board meetings.



The PFI Board of Directors is comprised of two elected directors from each of five districts in Iowa. The term of service is three years, eligible for re-election up to three consecutive terms.

Out of these ten directors, one serves as president for a two-year term and another serves as vice president, also for a two-year term. These officers are nominated and elected by board vote.

Up to two additional advisory directors (currently Larry Kallem of the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives) may also serve on the board and vote.

The directors select an executive vice president who serves as an ex officio member of the board. Currently this is Dick Thompson. Dick also serves as treasurer.

Typically, the directors meet quarterly for a day-long meeting, and briefly, in conjunction with the annual meeting. There is often a board meeting attached to the cooperators' meeting.

Staff members attend board meetings, but they do not vote. The program assistant (currently Nan Bonfils) serves as secretary for the board.

What are the topics of current interest to the board?

- Endowed campaign
- Membership eligibility to vote
- Review of annual meeting and plans for 2001

When is the next board meeting? The board will meet on March 23rd at the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives in Ames. At the March meeting they will set a date for the next meeting.

How can members communicate with the board? Email, phone numbers and postal addresses are printed on the back of each newsletter. The board is in place to serve the membership, so you should not be reluctant to contact your district board member.

To find out more about the current board members, check out their profiles in past newsletters (Spring and Summer '99) or on the PFI web site at www.pfi.iastate.edu. Newly elected board members Mark Tjelmeland and Dan Chadima will be profiled in the next newsletter. ♡



WINTER WORKSHOP SUMMARIES

Editor's note: The summaries presented here and continuing to page 27 were recorded by PFI members who attended the annual meeting in Ames on January 15, 2000. Thanks to all these fine recorders! Sorry, we had to edit some content for space. Workshops are listed in alphabetical order by title. Special thanks to PFI member Lonna Nachtigal for custom designing the PFI barnyard shown above and featured throughout the conference.

Ag Crisis: Responding with Responsibility

Barney Bahrenfuse, Grinnell

Carla Wilson led this cob roll for about 20 people, several of whom were involved in the social services. Farmers present shared problems such as inability to meet health care needs and not being able to pass on the farm to the next generation. Someone noted that CRP land has deprived new farmers of the poorer ground that used to serve as "entry level" farms. While it seems that there has always been a "crisis" in some sector of agriculture, the present mass exodus from the land may well be the beginning of a larger societal crisis. No one present really expected the government to respond in

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a dramatic fashion, but anti-trust legislation and tax incentives for small farms and for renting to young farmers would be a meaningful beginning. There was also common consensus that the all too frequent blaming and dependency behaviors of many farmers are contributing to the problem.

Positive change will come fastest when farmers take individual responsibility for their lives by meeting ag challenges head-on. Those who find this change easiest are often those who are very desperate or those facing only minor problems who have plenty of energy to experiment in new directions. Farmers in between experience the hopelessness of being locked into conventional systems, not having either enough energy or enough fear to move. For this very reason conventional farmers may not be our best allies in making effective agricultural change. Rather our more natural allies may well be the consumers and students of all ages who are interested in being educated about environmentally friendly agriculture and who are eager to find an emotional tie to the land and nature.

“Sharing” our farms through hospitality experiences can go a long way in changing attitudes of voters and consumers as well as possibly providing another niche for marketing.

“Sharing” our farms through hospitality experiences can go a long way in changing attitudes of voters and consumers as well as possibly providing another niche for marketing. Crop and livestock diversity is another direction for positive change because of the economic flexibility it allows. It may require taking the risk of “being different,” but as someone said: “If you copy everyone, you have to be the best of all those people.”

So go ahead and be creative in identifying your “unfair advantage,” or what you have that others do not. Perhaps it is being a survivor of adversity, or having worn-out machinery or having no assets at all. Whatever the case, remember to value the things that last beyond the problems of today: family, friends and faith. Liberally sow and reap humor, because the land and its inhabitants are a priceless treasure and meant to be enjoyed. 🍷

Choosing and Using Open-Pollinated and Synthetic Corn Varieties

Walt Ebert, Plainfield

Because seed technology fees rise, restrictions tighten and marketing options narrow, some corn raisers are looking again at open-pollinated corn. The presenters at this session were **Dr. Walter Goldstein** of the Michael Fields Ag Institute and **Dr. Kendall Lamkey**, an ARS corn breeder. The two men approach this subject in different ways. Dr. Lamkey refers to this corn as “synthetic” varieties. These varieties are usually used to make hybrids, but farmers can replant them.

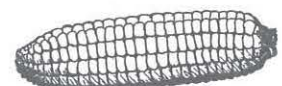
Dr. Lamkey told us how these varieties are crossed to create the hybrids we use. The processes he talked about were too technical for this reporter to comprehend.

When a farmer is saving seed it is very, very important to save a large number of ears from wide locations. If this is not done, undesirable in-breds will result. Dr. Lamkey reported that 20% of the corn raised in Brazil is planted to open-pollinated or synthetics, but these are bred by commercial companies.

While Dr. Lamkey does his work by selecting and crossing selected strains, Dr. Goldstein has been developing his corn by “selection.” Over the past nine years, Dr. Goldstein has selected, selected, and selected to get past disadvantages, and to enhance the desirable traits in his corn. He started being able to plant at a population of 16,000 plants per acre and now can plant 29,000 plants per acre and still have it stand fairly well. Dr. Goldstein is working toward the goal of breeding for a food-grade corn. Open-pollinated corn runs about 10% to 20% higher protein.

Because of the cost of hybrid corn more must be raised to pay for the seed, 20% less yield of an open-pollinated corn would be acceptable. It is generally agreed that open-pollinated corn yields about 30% less than hybrid corn in high production environments.

Open-pollinated corn is being seriously considered by farmers who want to save their own seed, by farmers who want to raise it for grazing corn, and for those who want to do something different. 🍷



Economic Outlook for Organics

Merlin Pfannkuch, Ames

The overall consensus of the panel discussing the economic outlook for organic grains was that some price improvement for organic soybeans and corn is likely during 2000, particularly if producers watch closely for spot pricing opportunities. The longer-run price outlook for organic grains was seen as brighter, although much depends on whether the rapid increase during the past two years in the number of producers wanting to certify as organic slows as expected.

Gary Bogenrief, general manager of ProfiSeed International in Hampton, attributed the lower than year-ago price for organic soybeans (\$12-15/bu in mid-January) largely to a doubling of acreage combined with the downturn in the Japanese economy. Bogenrief said he expected the rate of increase in the number of producers wanting to certify as organic to slow because of the time and paperwork necessary and because of production techniques necessary.

Cullen Harder, organic buyer for Agri Trading Corporation, Eden Prairie, Minnesota, said he thought prices for conventionally grown crops would turn around this year, especially prices for conventional beans. He said the GMO issue has hurt demand for conventional beans. He also said corn prices this year could become as volatile as bean prices. Although the oversupply of organic grains at the moment is helping hold prices down, Harder suggested producers keep in touch with buyers for spot pricing opportunities. Harder cited the inclusion of an organics section in most conventional supermarkets as one reason why he is fairly excited about the future of organic grains.

Jim Boes of Heartland Organic Marketing Co-op in Greenfield said an increase in the number of organic dairy operations in Iowa and the opportunity to market meat as organic since early last year provide additional markets for organic grains. He said a

producer can always figure to get a dollar per bushel premium for organic corn, with the closer the market the better the price. Boes said the fastest growing thing in organics is the number of organic dairies. He said he has been in touch with three or four operations who are likely to start organic dairies in Iowa in the next year. Boes noted that with no accurate numbers on the amount of organic acreage, prices for organics depend on usage. He said his intuition tells him we are going to run out of organic corn this year. ☘

Extending the Growing Season

Steve Weis, Osage

Dr. Matt Liebman explained the principles involved in extending the growing season in Iowa using some simple practices he learned while in Maine. By using plastic-covered hoop-houses and row covers, a vegetable producer can effectively lengthen the growing season by taking advantage of the modified environment these structures afford. Hoop structures have been shown to increase the inside temperature 20 degrees over the outside ambient temperature in the wintertime. By using hoop-houses along with a spun-fiber row cover, a person could raise vegetables all winter long with no supplemental heat. This is possible because of the way you are able to shelter the crop by affecting the minimum temperature, the rate of temperature decline, wind speed and wet/dry fluctuations.



Matt Liebman shared his ideas for extending your growing season.

...some price improvement for organic soybeans and corn is likely during 2000, particularly if producers watch closely for spot pricing opportunities.

This also makes these structures especially good choices to just extend your growing season, by being able to plant earlier in the spring and extend production later into the fall. It is important though that a person use cold adapted species in this modified cold environment. Covers have a stronger effect on cold hardy crops than on frost tender crops. Some well adapted crops include beets, broccoli, carrots, chard, endive, kale, leeks, lettuce, potato, radishes, scallions, spinach, and turnips. Costs for poly covered hoop-houses are approximately \$1.25 / sq. ft. and spun-fiber row covers are \$0.02 / sq. ft.. For more information you can reach Matt at the ISU Agronomy Department where he is a cropping systems specialist. His phone number is 515-294-7486. 🐾

Farmers' Markets or Supermarkets, What Works for You?

Gary Huber, Ames

PFI members **Larry Cleverley** of Mingo and **Connie & Mark Tjelmeland** of McCallsburg led a discussion on marketing during this cob roll. Mark and Connie sell free-range eggs to two large supermarkets, a health food store, and a natural food cooperative grocery in Ames. Larry sells organic vegetables at the Court Avenue Farmers' Market in Des Moines and to twelve local restaurants.

Mark and Connie began with information about their egg operation. They started several years ago with some hens for their own eggs, but they had too many so they began selling to friends and neighbors. But sales to friends and neighbors was slow and labor intensive, so they began selling their eggs to one store. This transition to selling in stores required an egg handler's license. Over several years their effort grew into the current operation, which is four stores and about 220 dozen each week.

Key points made by Mark and Connie were:

- need always clean, high quality product with unique features
- need to be predictable, come on regular days with regular amounts, and keep prices steady
- need to comply with rules and regulations
- need to adapt to the different requirements of different stores

- not a big problem to have supply run out in stores (they thought it would be), but is a problem to have eggs left over
- need to know who to approach and begin with sending a letter, give some samples, and call back frequently
- very important to get to know buyers in person, personally
- best to grow in incremental stages so you can solve little problems

Advantages: 1) a year around market, 2) convenience because someone else does the selling, and 3) easy to make deliveries

Disadvantages: 1) takes time to develop relationships, 2) lose control over your product's price to consumers, and 3) waiting four to six weeks for payment

Larry began by saying, "I enjoy growing, but I love to sell." He grows five major crops. In 1999 he grew and sold 10,000 heads of garlic, 5,000 lbs of potatoes, 6,000 lbs of mixed lettuces and greens, 1,000 lbs of basil, and 4,000 lbs of tomatoes. He sells these and smaller amounts of other crops direct to consumers during the 26 week season of the Court Avenue Farmers' Market, as well as to twelve wholesale accounts that he delivers to one to three times a week.

Key points made by Larry were:

- talk to who buys the food, let them tell you the best times (for restaurants typically 8-10 am or 3-4 pm)
- need to have a constant supply of product
- if you make a promise, keep it or you're done
- don't take anything of poor quality

Setting prices is a complicated issue, and it can be done by 1) using wholesale prices, 2) looking at prices for similar product and 3) using the novel idea of basing them on the costs of production

Larry also said he invites his customers to his farm in the summer on Sundays to show them around and cook them a meal. He also visits his restaurant buyers starting in late January to go over the prior year's sales records and talk about what to grow more or less of in the coming year. 🐾

GMOs: Updates and Concerns

Laura C. Merrick, Ames

This workshop focused on handling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs—specifically in this case, corn and soybean grain crops) in relation to current markets, both domestic and international ones. The workshop was led by two Iowa State University professors, **Dr. Charles Hurburgh** of the Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Department and **Dr. Robert Wisner** of the Economics Department. Hurburgh is responsible for coordination of the Iowa Grain Quality Initiative, a description of which can be found on the Internet at <http://www.iowagrains.org>. Summaries of GM crop-related presentations by both speakers are available at the web site.

During the 1999 field season 35-40% of U.S. corn acreage and 45-55% of the soybean acreage was planted with GM varieties, which consisted mainly of herbicide resistant types (e.g., Roundup-Ready® corn and soybean) or insect resistant types (e.g., “Bt-corn,” that is, corn varieties genetically engineered to express genes for *Bacillus thuringiensis*). During that year, less than 5% of U.S. grain elevators segregated GM crops from non-GM ones. However, the situation is expected to be drastically different in the 2000 season due to heightened public controversy about GMOs on a global basis. A main objective of the workshop was to provide some indication of how growers might need to respond to demands of the marketplace for segregation and certification of GM vs. non-GM grain crops. One of Wisner’s closing points was that volume of grain is critical—low volume = high cost—but the current market climate clearly indicates that an increasing degree of segregation will occur in the future.

In Hurburgh’s opinion, consumer acceptance has a more significant impact on prospects for GM grains than regulation does. He cited a 1999 survey from the U.S. where 70-75% of the consumers polled were not concerned about GMOs, but 66% said they would like labeling that indicates whether or not a food or other ingredient resulted from genetic engineering. In contrast, Wisner cited a survey from Japan in which 90% of consumers said they wanted labeling.

As an increasing number of grain processors and supermarket chains enact non-GMO policies, the presenters cautioned that there will be a long term impact on the U.S. as those industries or foreign markets seek reliable sources for certified non-GMOs. In the next year, the European Union is requesting a

certification level of less than 1% for GM contamination of grain sold as “non-GMO,” while by spring 2001, Japan is likely to enforce a certification level of less than 5%. In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are all involved in some aspects of regulation of GM crops.

To establish rulings about safety, the regulatory system relies heavily on data provided by the company or other institution who seeks to release the GMO. In contrast to their approval for commercial use in the U.S., certain GM “events” or specific genetic transformations are currently not approved by either the European Union (E.U.) at large, Japan or Korea. Individual European countries have even more restrictions. Key areas to watch in terms of market demand and prospects for non-GMO price premiums relate to labeling of grain to be used as feed in the E.U. and that for food in the U.S. Both speakers stated “the situation is changing fast”.

Among audience participants of the workshop, the most lively discussion was stimulated by a description of several of the current tests for assessing whether or not a grain sample has resulted from genetic engineering. The “events” or specific genetic transformations that have affected GMOs are not directly visible. Instead, detection is by changes in DNA itself or plant biochemistry that result from the genetic modification. Individual seeds either have or do not have the modification, which distinguishes testing for GMOs from other types of standard seed tests such as percent moisture assessment. Three main tests were described. The most precise one uses a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique, a procedure in which DNA is amplified and identified. The drawbacks are that the PCR reaction method is relatively expensive (> \$300 per sample) and can take up to five days for results. Another test is an immunoassay or ELISA technique that screens for an antibody to specific proteins. It takes 5-20 minutes and costs about \$3-10 per sample. A third test is a near-infrared (NIR) screen-

Hurburgh cautioned that handling and mixing errors can occur at a wide range of points (some in the farmer’s control and some not)...

ing method that takes only 1-2 minutes and costs under \$4 per sample. Workshop participants were interested in pros and cons of the methods and asked questions about sample sizes, availability, and reliability.

Hurburgh cautioned that handling and mixing errors can occur at a wide range of points (some in the farmer's control and some not), including with original purchased seed stock or in the planter box, combine, or transportation vehicles. A potentially significant factor – although its degree is hard to predict – is potential for cross-pollination. Such a factor is relevant, for example, even for organic producers of non-GM corn varieties where near neighbors or possibly quite distant farms are producing GM varieties. 🐾

Grazing Standing Crops

Nina Biensen, State Center

Grazing standing crops can cut feed costs in half for finishing cattle, according to **Terry Gompert**, a University of Nebraska Livestock Specialist. Although most of the data focused on grazing standing corn, Gompert noted that anything which grows can be grazed. However, he pointed out that as corn can be grazed from mid July to early April, the corn crop comes the closest to allowing year around grazing.

Cattle should be trained to polytape fencing before they are started grazing standing crops. Gompert noted that he preferred to graze 1000 square feet (100 x 10) of corn at one time because it reduced the number of feet of fencing he had to move per day. In order to make room for the fencing, he explained that it took him 6 minutes to chop down 100 feet of corn. However, he pointed out that some producers took more enjoyment out of running over the crop with their pickup trucks, using the exercise as a stress reliever.

In contrast, if the cattle all tried to crowd in, this was an indication that the cattle were underfed and that the daily grazing area needed to be increased in size.



There was standing room only to hear what Terry Gompert had to say about grazing standing crops.

Additionally the cattle should be started on the corn at the tassel stage as no grain is present. However, as the crop matures, Gompert stated that the increase in corn kernels matches the increased need for the cattle to have a concentrated diet. Gompert suggested moving cattle on a daily basis and that during the move cattle should be closely watched. He explained that cattle entering the new grazing area one-at-a-time was an indication that the cattle were content. In contrast, if the cattle all tried to crowd in, this was an indication that the cattle were underfed and that the daily grazing area needed to be increased in size. However, if the cattle smelled like acetone, it signaled acidosis and was a sign that the cattle were eating too much concentrate and the grazing area needed to be decreased in size.

An average of 2.1 pounds of gain per day was documented by Gompert in 1996, however daily gains ranged between 2 and 3 pounds per day per animal. Each acre of corn which was grazed produced 494 pounds of cattle gain and the cost of that gain was 32 cents per pound, less than one-half of the cost of feeding cattle in the feedlot (75 cents per pound). Gompert noted that grazing cattle appeared to spend more time ruminating than did feedlot cattle, and that may have allowed them to more fully digest their meals (increased efficiency). Additionally, he said that

grazed cattle may be under less stress than feedlot animals.

Net profits per acre of corn grazed ranged from \$181 to \$370 depending on the price paid for market animals during the year. Additionally, Gompert explained that when corn costs \$1.60, \$2.20 or \$4.00 per bushel the respective feed cost per pound of gain are 15 cents, 18 cents and 45 cents. Triticale, sudangrass and Sudex can also be grazed but have certain disadvantages compared to corn. All three are summer annuals which fall over as they are allowed to grow, increasing the per cent of the crop which can be wasted by the cattle. Of the three, triticale has the longest grazing season.

Additionally, turnips interseeded with oats can be grazed. Interestingly, in the spring, the turnip and oat seed can be broadcast on the ground in a corn stubble field where the cattle are still grazing, allowing the cattle to trample the seed into the ground (a rather inexpensive method of planting). Gompert noted that the turnips were an excellent crop which could be grown during a potential drought year. However, because turnips are 80% TDN compared to the 72% TDN of corn, cattle should weigh at least 550 pounds before being allowed to graze in a turnip patch due to reduced dry matter of the turnips.

In closing, Gompert pointed out that grazing standing crops was easier than Managed Intensive Grazing. He noted that he felt this feeding method was a reflection of nature's way and allowed the animal to do a majority of the work. Additionally Gompert noted the strength of agriculture could be found in Einstein's words of wisdom – "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Any additional questions should be addressed to Terry Gompert, 402-288-4224.

Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits

Donna Bauer, Audubon

Marcia Miquelon shared tools and techniques that promote health, safety and work efficiency for fresh-market vegetable growers. Many of the ideas, which have come from growers themselves, target three common problems: stoop labor, lifting and carrying, and repetitive tasks. In short, Marcia's message was "buffer your body!"

By applying the following inexpensive tips, you can get a good start on taking care of yourself while in the field: 1) wear gloves; 2) use hearing protection when around motors; 3) use kneepads when kneeling; and 4) wear supportive boots. Another list of suggestions focuses on ways to avoid fatigue and injury while working: 1) do some stretching exercises before beginning your work; 2) take frequent short breaks; 3) drink plenty of water; 4) change posture often; 5) use wheels in place of carrying everything; 6) ask for help when you need it; and 7) keep your tools sharp.

Making or purchasing the appropriate technology, when needed, is also important to keep in mind. This list includes appropriate containers, carts, roller tables, a hands-free washing station, a seated work cart, and counters designed to your height. (Hint: the counter top should be at the height that is midway between your wrist and elbow.)

To receive more information about how to improve your work efficiency and take care of your body, contact: Cooperative Extension Publishing, Room 170, 630 W. Mifflin St., Madison WI 53703. Phone: (608) 262-3346. Ask them about their "Work Efficiency Tip Sheets."

To learn more about the "Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits Project" visit their web site at: <http://bse.wisc.edu/hghp/> or call 608-265-9451. Marcia Miquelon is also interested in hearing from you if you have any tips, techniques and technology that you would like to share with other farmers.



Healthy Farmers,
Healthy Profits
Project

Methods Of Organic Parasite Control in Livestock

Mike Natvig, Cresco

Julie Jarvinen, George Beran, and Frances Zacharakis-Jutz led the session. For organic farmers there are many challenges. When it comes to parasite management in livestock, where do we turn when conventional chemical parasiticides are no longer an option? The health and comfort of our livestock is important, so how do we eliminate parasites? We don't, but we can "control" them to a level that is manageable. Even after many years of conventional

Some of the early PFI research done here in Iowa with herbal remedies on goats suggests that they may decrease parasites.

chemical parasite “elimination” methods used by the livestock industry, they still have parasite problems, so why should we think that we could eliminate them now? Our line of thought should be to use sound and proven animal husbandry methods that reduce livestock stress and increase their resistance to parasites. Examples of these management practices would be to reduce housing overcrowding, to keep the animal on a high level of nutrition, (including all of the minerals needed with good clean water), and to use good sanitation of equipment by using barn lime, steam cleaning, lye soap, and exposure to sunlight and wind.

Livestock should be rotationally grazed, and pastures in a crop rotation to break up the life cycle of some parasites. During good drying conditions the use of a drag to break up and dry out pasture manure pats may help. Composting of manures can reach a high enough temperature to kill most parasites.

As for treatments to be fed continually or given at a specific time, there are herbal preparations. Some herbs may raise the animals’ immunity to parasites and others will kill those parasites that already are in the gut. Herbal remedies have been used for generation around the world. Some of the early PFI research done here in Iowa with herbal remedies on goats suggests that they may decrease parasites.



Julie Jarvinen, veterinary parasitologist, presented parasite management research to packed house.

Parasites have been around forever and will continue to be as long as there is life on this planet. What we as organic farmers can do is to use a wide range of methods and share our experiences with others, as is the PFI tradition. 🐾

Midwest Value-Added Pork Initiatives

Vic Madsen, Audubon

The Midwest Value-Added Pork Initiative Workshop featured two speakers, **Paul Willis** and **Allen Moody**. Paul Willis is an Iowa farmer who helped develop the Niman Ranch pork marketing system. The hogs are slaughtered in either Des Moines or Sioux Center at Sioux-Preme Pack. The products then go to California where most are sold to restaurants along and some grocery stores.

Fifty to seventy farmers now supply about 1,000 hogs per week. Demand for the hogs is increasing and they will soon need one hundred more producers.

The special requirements for qualifying include no antibiotics in the feed, no meat and bone meal, and growing facilities that meet animal welfare guidelines. There are also some genetics guidelines.

Allen Moody is the pork, egg, and vegetable coordinator for the Organic Valley Co-op at LaFarge, Wisconsin. The co-op has grown from 7 farms in 1980 to about 200 farm families in 11 states. Meat is the newest line of products at CPOPP/Organic Valley.

The organic pork pool was started in the summer of 1998 and currently processes hogs every two weeks. Under the Valley’s Family Farms brand, products marketed include bacon, ham, five pork sausages and limited fresh cuts.

The co-op will need more producers as sales grow. The hog production area targeted is a circle with a 300-mile radius around Sioux City, Iowa.

The pork program has several specific production standards. General requirements include a Berkshire cross-breed, not raised in confinement, 100% organic

“...the future of organics is so bright we need sunglasses.”

feed from the last third of gestation, and access to the outdoors when appropriate.

Allen finished his presentation with the comment that "...the future of organics is so bright we need sunglasses."

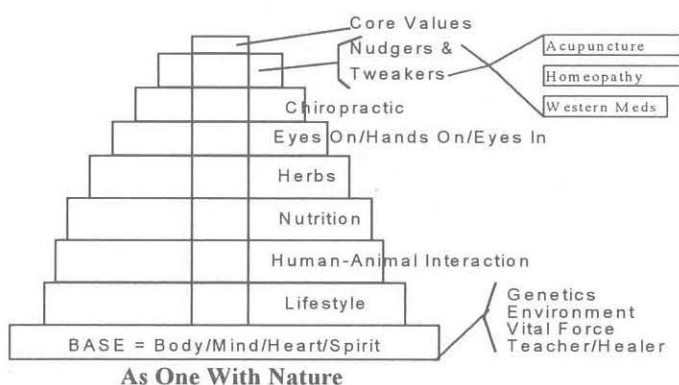
Realities of Holistic Veterinary Practices

Matt Stewart, Oelwein

Editor's note: Matt was able to obtain the entire protocol from Dr. Randy Kidd. Only the introduction is reprinted here. For the complete document, contact Dr. Kidd at 913-381-9100. Randykidd@ruralnet1.com

This protocol allows us to think about the holistic perspective of wellness, and it forces us to think in the proper sequence of the healing methods we ultimately select. Using this model forces us to think about all aspects of health in a logical, sequential manner.

Build from the bottom up: Just as you would when building anything with structural integrity, always begin with the base to establish a firm foundation for holistic health. Next, look closely at each of the rings, proceeding from the bottom, larger rings to the



smaller ones at the top. The larger the ring, the greater the emphasis required from that area of health.

Also, remember that as we proceed from the bottom to the top of the model, our ability to "tweak the patient's vital force (or chi) toward wellness" is progressively stronger...as are our chances to create harm in the patient, if the method is not applied properly. In a practical sense, this means that we should not use any of the potent medicines, including herbs, homeopathy, chiropractic, or acupuncture,

UNLESS we have the knowledge base that comes from adequate training in the method.

Editor's note: Do you want to learn holistic animal health methods? See page 36.

The Rural Midwestern Ideals of Henry A. Wallace

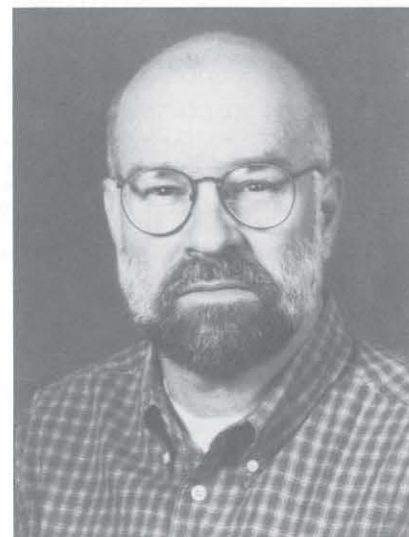
Steve Hopkins, Newton

University of Wisconsin rural sociologist and New Deal scholar **Dr. Jess Gilbert** (a former professor of mine) presented a workshop on the "Rural Midwestern Ideals of Henry A. Wallace." Wallace, born in 1888 in Adair County, rose to the offices of Secretary of Agriculture in 1933 and Vice President in 1941, and he went on to an unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1948.

According to Gilbert, Wallace saw himself as part of a long Midwestern tradition promoting democracy. Henry A. drew upon the work of his grandfather, Henry C. Wallace, and his father, Henry Wallace, both of whom were "progressive Republicans" in the tradition of Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.

Henry A. Wallace was broadly educated and held a wide range of occupations – agriculturalist, statistician, economist, businessman, and editor. Wallace was a developer of hybrid corn and a founder of Pioneer Hybrid. As editor of Wallaces Farmer Magazine, he crusaded for farm assistance in the 1920's. Gilbert called Wallace "arguably the best and best-prepared Secretary of Agriculture," given his broad background in agriculture. Linking past ideals with the needs of his times, Wallace looked forward to achieving Lincoln's "government of the people."

As Secretary of Agriculture, Wallace immediately began creating institutions to



Jess Gilbert, rural sociologist.

Wallace exemplified a “practical idealist.”

deal with the farm problems of the 1930's. In 1933 he began the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (now called the Farm Service Agency) to help adjust farm production. He later created the Farm Security Administration (referred to as the “poor people’s farm agency”), which became the Farmers Home Administration. Wallace also began the Soil Conservation Service (originally called Soil Erosion Service), the Rural Resettlement Administration, and other agencies within the Agriculture Department.

According to Gilbert, Wallace understood that farm traditions had to be updated, or “replaced, renewed, and reformed.” First, Wallace wanted to replace the materialism of pioneer society and promote cooperation, replace the abuse of natural resources (evidenced by the Dust Bowl) with conservation, and replace strictly *laissez faire* economics with an economy based on more than just market forces. Second, Wallace sought to renew citizen participation in government by organizing AAA county committees and local soil conservation districts. Third, he sought reform by attempting to create a balance between agriculture and industry. Wallace thought the economy was “out of whack,” and that what was needed was “agricultural parity” with industry. He also sought balance between urban and rural people, and between farmers and consumers.

Wallace worked strenuously to bring together scientists and farmer to solve problems and conduct research to help farmers. Perhaps Wallace’s most radical work, according to Gilbert, was his effort to elevate the Agriculture Department’s Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE), to encourage its work in social science planning, and to garner farmer input into its work. Wallace did this by setting up county planning committees, comprised of farmers, across the country, as a means of achieving citizen participation in planning. In this, Gilbert said Wallace exemplified a “practical idealist.”

The workshop also included comments about Wallace’s life from Kent Newman of the Wallace House Foundation in Des Moines, Iowa. In response to the question “Would Wallace have dropped the atomic bomb if he were elected president?”, Newman

emphasized that Wallace wanted to use atomic power for peaceful purposes only. ☺

Soil Quality

Beth Larabee, Ames

Dr. Tom Moorman, of USDA-ARS National Soil Tilth Laboratory in Ames led the session. What is soil quality? We know soil quality when we see it, but measuring soil quality has been very difficult. Protection of soil quality should be a fundamental goal along with air and water quality. Soil health and conservation is critical for sustainability, considering the ability of soils to resist erosion, decompose pesticides and herbicides, retain phosphorus and suppress animal pathogens. Soil quality can be defined as its capacity to sustain biological productivity, maintain environmental quality and promote animal and plant health. In order to measure that soil quality we must develop an integrated point of view utilizing physical, chemical and biological aspects of soil. The NSTL is working on ways to measure properties of soils that reflect soil functions, providing relevant information on differing scales such as soil map unit, field, farm, and watershed.

One area we can measure is soil organic matter status in the soil. A typical corn crop will have 40% of its carbon in shoots and leaves, 20-30% in grain and the rest will be in underground structures. With greater yield comes larger amounts of biomass from both above-and below-ground structures. Any manipulation of the soil by tillage speeds carbon loss from the soil as carbon dioxide while leaving the nitrogen content unchanged. Irrigation increases the leaching of nitrogen and also alters the activity of the microbial community.

Organic matter is not uniform in the soil. The residence time of organic matter in the soil will vary

Soil quality can be defined as its capacity to sustain biological productivity, maintain environmental quality and promote animal and plant health.

widely depending on the type of organic matter. Stable humus composed of mostly lignin has a long residence time of 20 to 500 years. Active organic matter composed of sugars and amino acids from plant residues or particulate organic matter (POM) has a residence time of 3 days to 5 years. Bio-matter in the forms of roots, mesofauna and microbes has a 2-5 year residence time. The process of decomposition takes place within a microbial food web.

Each step within the web decreases the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of the remaining organic matter. As the organic matter moves through the soil food web, carbon is lost through respiration of the organisms consuming it. Crop residue becomes POM (particulate organic matter) with a high carbon to nitrogen ratio. POM is converted to aggregate POM with a medium carbon to nitrogen ratio, then to aggregate POM with a low carbon to nitrogen ratio, and finally to stable organic matter with a very low carbon to nitrogen level.

Nitrogen is also an integral part of organic matter. Soil nitrogen may exist in several forms: nitrate, ammonium, living biomass, dead biomass and labile organic matter. Nitrogen residing in soil as living organisms or organic matter is not easily lost by leaching and will be available to future crops. Stable organic matter contributes to the ability of soil particles to aggregate. Well-aggregated soils have better soil structure and resist erosion. Fungal activity is a very important contributor to the formation of large aggregates.

A third area of concern for Iowa farmers is the phosphorus content of soils. Phosphorus increases with the application of manure. Many Iowa soils have high to very high phosphorus levels. When these soils erode, environmentally significant amounts of phosphorus may be carried into surface water.

Technology allows us to make measurements of soil physical and chemical characteristics. Presence or absence of a characteristic may indicate soil quality or the lack of it. These measurements provide us with a yardstick for comparison between areas, farms and watersheds. Areas that have experienced degradation and areas at risk are easier to identify using field measurement. A test-kit is now available to aid farm managers in understanding soil quality. (For example, check out the Lamotte kit available through the Gempler's catalog and web site.) Cost varies with frequency and intensity of sampling. Soil sampling

procedures also apply to this test kit. Sample in controlled or representative areas. Sample at similar temperature and moisture conditions. Be aware of spatial and temporal variability within the sampling area. Changes in soil quality take place over long periods of time, and a three year interval between testing procedures is recommended. As always the cost of the sampling should be weighed against the potential benefits.

Tips for Business Startups

Wally Greenlees, Adel

Liz Garst has a wealth of experience working in the banking and finance industry. Currently she manages her own startup business, which is called Garst Farm Resorts, near Coon Rapids, Iowa.



Liz Garst manages Garst Farm Resorts, Coon Rapids.

Liz mentioned some short statistics about Iowans. She said that most Iowans are price takers not price makers; she said that Iowa has one of the lowest indices of entrepreneurship in the United States.

Liz counsels those interested in starting their own businesses to have a business plan. She strongly recommends that entrepreneurs spend time developing a plan before spending money. She says, "business plans do not need to be fancy." When making a business plan, she says an entrepreneur should ask the following questions:

- 1) How much money it will take to start a business?
 - Add up all the costs. Consider the following:
 - a) Vehicle and equipment costs
 - b) Accounts receivable (often overlooked by many entrepreneurs)
 - c) Startup losses
 - d) Inventory costs
 - e) Insurance

...most Iowans are price takers not price makers; she said that Iowa has one of the lowest indices of entrepreneurship in the United States.

2) Where will the money come from?

a) Self. Put in your own cash. You will need to contribute a minimum of 30% from your own cash pool toward the startup cost.

b) Bank Loan. Most banks will only finance 70% of the cost of equipment. A lender will want to know that the entrepreneur is taking the brunt of the risk; that he/she will be hurt the most if the business fails.

c) Venture Capital. Venture capital is hard to find in Iowa, and it is expensive. Most venture capitalists seek a 33% rate of return on their money.

d) Credit Card Loan. Liz says credit cards are a horrible way to start a business. She strongly recommends that credit cards be used only for emergencies and then only if bad spending habits can be controlled.

3) How does the market look?

a) Estimate the selling price for each unit of your product. Liz says this is difficult, but you have to make an attempt.

b) Talk to others in similar businesses outside the local market where you plan to start. Others outside of the local market will be less hesitant to talk with you because you won't represent competition.

c) Get help from 1 of 16 Small Business Development Centers (SBDC's) located throughout Iowa. The SBDC nearest you can provide free consultation. Call the SBDC headquarters at 800-373-7232 to learn of the SBDC office nearest you.

4) What if...? Entrepreneurs should know:

- a) Variable costs
- b) Fixed costs (like insurance for example)
- c) Income generated from sales of product
- d) $\text{Gross Margin} = \text{Income} - \text{Variable costs}$
- e) $\text{Profit} = \text{Gross Margin} - \text{Fixed costs}$

Liz suggests using spreadsheet software on a personal computer to generate thorough "What if?" scenarios.

5) If necessary, when do I give up? If after you start your business and your progress is less than you expected, know when to quit to minimize your losses.

Since Liz has experience working in banking and finance, she shared with the audience a little about the mentality of bankers. We learned that bankers love to make loans but they hate risk. A typical bank collects 10% interest from the loans it makes, it pays 6% on deposits, and it pays 3% on staff and other fixed costs. That leaves the typical bank a 1% profit, which, according to Liz, "leaves very little room for risk."

We also learned that bankers hate inefficiency. Liz recommends that a person seeking a business start up loan be organized with a detailed business plan. Liz reminded us again that a detailed business plan does not need to be fancy. A detailed business plan simply needs to answer the pertinent questions introduced above. Finally, bankers also hate it when the people to whom they have loaned money fail to communicate with them.

As for special programs available to those seeking business startup loans, Liz says, "There are a thousand different programs out there!" She said each bank has a copy of the Economic Development Resource Guide by the Iowa Banker's Association. The guide helps determine an entrepreneur's eligibility for loan programs. During the session, she mentioned two of the more prominent programs available.

1) Small Business Administration (SBA) loans.

a) The person seeking a SBA loan must first work through his/her local bank by completing all of the required paperwork.

b) The bank then solicits SBA's assistance, and eligibility is determined.

c) The SBA typically guarantees 70%-80% of the loan amount.

...a detailed business plan does not need to be fancy... it simply needs to answer the pertinent questions...

d) The SBA expects the local bank to assume some risk.

e) A SBA loan works like a FSA loan.

2) Linked Deposit Program. This is an interest rate buy-down program that is available to entrepreneurs starting the following types of businesses:

a) Horticulture

b) Alternative agriculture

c) Women owned business

d) Purchase of existing business on rural Main Street

Liz taught the audience the Five "C's" of Credit. They are as follows:

1) Character of the person seeking credit

2) Cash flow

3) Collateral (NOT retirement accounts)

4) Capacity...How much risk can the person seeking credit carry?

5) Conditions of the market place...Will the person's product sell? Is the idea viable?

Liz recommended that we frequently check our credit reports. She said that as many as 30% of all credit reports have errors in them. If you find an error in your personal credit report, you should call the reporting agency to correct the error. When correcting an error on your credit report, the credit reporting agency usually presumes the error in your favor, which means that they will accept the corrected information from you without dispute and require the source of the error to defend their original information about you. You have the right to insert explanatory statements into your personal credit report. For instance, if you once required emergency treatment at a hospital, and you had difficulty paying off the hospital bill, you may insert a statement into your credit report explaining the credit difficulty. Credit reports are not always easy to read, so Liz encouraged us in the audience to ask our local bankers for help if we needed help understanding the reports.

Here are the names and phone numbers for four credit reporting agencies:

Consumer Services Counseling (CSC): 1-800-392-7816

Experian: 1-888-397-3742 or <http://www.experian.com/product/consumer/index.html>

TransUnion: 1-800-888-4213 or <http://www.transunion.com/CreditReport/>

Equifax: 1-800-997-2493 or <https://www.econsumer.equifax.com/equifax.app/>
Welcome

Trends in Consumer Driven Marketing

Jan Libbey, Kanawha

Dan Looker, Neil Hamilton, Mary Myers, and **Mary Swalla Holmes** painted several interesting perspectives. The following were highlighted as trends in direct marketing farmers should be paying attention to:

- While demand for organic/natural foods continues, continued premiums for those foods is not assured. Increased supply and corporate consolidation is impacting the natural foods markets.
- There is projected to be continued demand for "convenience foods," with an accompanying ability of the consumer to pay for the convenience.
- Given Iowa's aging population and rising interest in nutraceuticals, there's increasing value in providing food of high chemical benefit.
- Providing food involves much more than production, as high interest in local food is fueled through a strong sense of relationship and connection.
- As consumers do assume a more active role in their food, they will demand more information, such as thorough labeling. The implications with regards to future regulations are uncertain.
- Farmers who assume roles previously held by middle people, must be prepared to also assume the responsibilities and obligations that accompany that role. One example is the need to assure food safety.

Strategies suggested for dealing with the above trends include:

- Organize cooperatively with other farmers
- Have sound information on costs of production
- Have access to and make use of good advisors, accountants, legal resources and counsel

- Consider third party certification and/or ecolabeling to tell your story
- Invest consciously in relationships with customers 🍀

Update on Organics

Karen Wise, Sac City

Dr. Kathleen Delate, ISU Assistant Professor of Horticulture and Agronomy, Organics Specialist and **Jim Boes**, Heartland Organic Marketing Coop, presented. In Iowa, in 1998, 120,000 acres were reported, which was double the 1997 reports. In the U.S., the organic industry is predicted to reach six billion dollars this year. Worldwide consumption of organic products is surpassing U.S. growth, mainly because of the GMO issue.

Regarding certification, in 2001, the federal Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) will deliver their updated rules. They will require all farmers who gross more than \$5000 per year from organic sales, to be certified through an agency accredited with the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). Today, there is a movement in responsibility from the inspectors to the international office and the number of organic farmers has increased 150%. There are fourteen organizations worldwide which are involved in making certification rules. One of these is IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement, which OCIA is trying to comply with. Some U.S. organizations are Oregon's TILTH, California's CCOF, Nebraska and Iowa's OCIA, North Dakota's FVO and Minnesota's OGBA.

Uniform standards are needed worldwide, and while the process is still under construction, the government against private industry is a major problem. Other key points were: In Japan, the GMO issue is very strong. In Germany, organic sales are 2% of the total food market, but demand is dampened by confusing labels, high prices, and availability. In the UK, organic markets have more than doubled in 1998. There is a lot more competition growing in China, Central America, Poland and Hungary, as they've gotten into certification, too. Bottom line—to protect ourselves through the certification process.

Dr. Delate's slide presentation reflected examples of ISU's research farms. This past year some trials were: weed populations, corn, beans, oats, and alfalfa yields, both organic and conventional, soil sampling,

stalk nitrate levels, grain quality, compost experiments, rye as a cover crop, rye and soybeans together, spring moldboard plowing, herb farming, Cherokee red clover, hairy vetch and rye, CRP trials, and making tofu.

Questions raised at the end of the session were:

- (1) Purple/black staining on '98-'99 soybeans were mainly an aesthetic problem for tofu varieties. Cause: virus. All Iowa extremely susceptible to rejection. Fifty farmers' crops were beans that were grown in fields that came out of CRP acres.
- (2) Problems with flame burning for weed control—Must be timely! Weeds too high, too big, were biggest problem. 🍀

Weeds on the Landscape

Mary Bradford, Iowa City

Impressed by John Ikerd's keynote address (as we all were), Dr. Wyse altered his first-ever PFI presentation by drawing on elements of that speech. A focus on management of landscape is vastly different from a focus on herbicide technology. Although land grant university scientists have historically relied on technologic solutions in weed management, Dr. Wyse advised that land grant researchers should be part of the dialogue to which PFI is dedicated. In so doing, the questions posed in research are no longer defined by technology but by practitioners in landscape design.

What does this mean for PFI? All previous tools and options to affect environmental impacts have been considered in the context of corn and soybeans. Yet this cropping system, like sugarbeet and wheat culture in the Red River Valley, has fostered water quality and plant pest problems. As cropping systems became increasingly limited, so, too, have genetic options. For example, barley can no longer be grown in the Red River Valley. The focus on technology has distorted the biology of the system.

And with the loss of biological balance went hundreds of farmers. It's vital to build a scientific base as to why increasing specialization brings increasing risk to farmers, communities, environment and diminishing opportunity related to landscape design. Most technologies replace people. It is time-consuming work to explore dynamics of a species, biotypes,

“We continue to select for a particular weed through its control. Each treatment simply selects another biotype.”

and interactions between species. But the common experience today merely overlays cropping systems which, in effect, select for the type and combination of weeds that can tolerate the latest technology. Dr. Wyse has 27 biotypes of quack grass that can tolerate 2.5 lbs of Roundup because they can develop dormant buds. “We continue to select for a particular weed through its control. Each treatment simply selects another biotype.”

With corporations propping up the corn and soybean “rotation,” obvious or easy alternatives are nonexistent. Is there genuine opportunity for another focus? How do you bring people together to forge a clientele group that will call attention to such issues? When a group of people are committed to community, environment, and sustainability, they can and must demand supporting effort from land grant universities. Dr. Wyse advised such groups to partner with others having similar goals and figure out how to market a different strategy. The time for having such communication is now.

A listener related that he had noticed the tips of Canada thistle yellowing and asked, “why.” Dr. Wyse wondered aloud if this was a planted question. It turns out that 32 years ago as an undergraduate student, Dr. Wyse had a job mowing weeds. He, too, observed the tips of Canada thistle leaves yellowing. His curiosity piqued, he included a specimen in his plant collection and pursued the study of weed science. Yet he only recently investigated the causal agent, a bacterium, finding that it kept Canada thistle population in check in undisturbed systems.

The moral of the story is that a much needed understanding of the biology of weeds and other pests could lead to a revision in thinking about them; view the weed in the context of the landscape. The next step would be the creation or modification of the landscape design to control the weed. 🐾



Mary Sand, Joe Lynch, Rick Exner, and Jeff Olson kept everybody's toes tapping.

**Thanks again to
The Pretty Good Band
for great music
on Friday night.**

**Photos from the
Annual Meeting continue
on the next page.**



Lonna Nachtigal called the steps.



Colin Greenan takes care of Eric Hurley at Friday night registration. Kristen Vetterlein and Deb Cooper work on down the line.



Wende Elliott, holding Sam Elliott-Rude, hobnobs with LaVon Griffefon and Ed Fallon.



Two Steves – Wallace and Williams. That's Dick Thompson, Von Kaster, and Jerry DeWitt in the background.



PFI sweethearts, Sharon and Dick Thompson.



Off duty Ph.D.'s – Matt Liebman from ISU and Walter Goldstein from Michael Fields Agriculture Institute.



Rick Exner attempts to demystify Saturday morning registration to Steve Weis, Barney Bahrenfuse, Dave Zahrt, Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, and Deb Cooper.

PFI 1999 ON-FARM TRIAL RESULTS – I

(Editors' note: On-farm research results for 1999 appeared in the program for the Jan. 15 Winter Workshops. Those trials will be featured over the course of 2000, while cooperators are hard at work on new trials. As we approach planting season, here is some research that involves the choice of varieties or the choice of treated vs. untreated seed. Mixed in with that is a little biological pest control and in-field cross pollination. Finally, looking at the whole system, two producers evaluate the profitability of alternatives.)

Variety and Planting Trials

The **Dordt College Agricultural Stewardship Center** continued in 1999 its comparison of three kinds of corn hybrid: a well-known commercial hybrid, its Bt-gene cousin, and an inexpensive hybrid from a local seed company (Table 1). The exact hybrids have changed over time, but the variety types have remained the same. In the first year, the local hybrid yielded more poorly than the other two. In 1998, the local hybrid outyielded the hybrids from the better-known company. As Table 1 shows, 1999 was a repeat of the previous year. The local number needed

a bit more drying than the other two hybrids, but its greater yield and cheaper price made it the financial winner. A picture is emerging: if you choose carefully, you can find value in local seed.

Responding to rising interest in specialty markets, the Dordt Stewardship Center also evaluated a num-

A picture is emerging: if you choose carefully, you can find value in local seed.

Reading Numbers, Knowing Terms

When you see the outcome of a PFI trial, you also see a statistical indication of the strength of the difference observed. The following information should help you to understand the reports of the trials contained in this report. The symbol "*" shows that there was a "statistically significant" difference between treatments; that is, one that likely did not occur just by chance. We require ourselves to be 95% sure before we declare a significant difference. If instead of a "*" there is a "N.S.," you know the difference was "not significant" at the 95 percent confidence level.

Comparing Two Practices Many on-farm trials are of a straightforward "A versus B" type. These trials, which are easy to design and analyze, correspond to the typical experimental question "Is alternative 'B' better than, worse than, or the same as my customary practice 'A'?" This approach can be used to evaluate individual practices or whole systems of practices.

There is a handy "yardstick" called the "LSD," or "least significant difference," that can be used in a trial with only two practices or treatments. If the difference between the two treatments is greater

than the LSD, then the difference is significant. You will see in the tables that when the difference between two practices is, for example, 5 bushels (or minus 5 bushels, depending on the arithmetic), and the LSD is only, say, 3 bushels, then there is a "*" indicating a significant difference.

Multiple Treatment Trials The LSD doesn't work well in trials with more than two treatments. In those cases, letters are added to show whether treatments are statistically different from each other. (We usually use a statistical test called a Duncan multiple range grouping.) The highest yield or weed count in a trial will have a letter "a" beside it. A number with a "b" next to it is significantly different from one with an "a," but neither is statistically different from a result bearing an "ab." A third treatment might produce a number with a "c" (or it might not), and so on.


Economics Average 1998 statewide prices for inputs were assumed in calculating the economics of these trials. Average fixed and variable costs and time requirements were also used. These can vary greatly from farm to farm, of course. The calculations use 1998 prices of \$2.00 per bushel for corn, \$5.20 for soybeans, and \$1.10 for oats. Labor was charged at \$9.00 per hour. 

Table 1. Multiple-Treatment Variety and Planting Trials

COOPERATOR	CROP	PREVIOUS CROP	YIELD SIGNIFI-CANCE	TREATMENT "A"				
				DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT
DORDT COLLEGE	CORN	SOYBEANS	*	NK 44640	168.5	b	\$44.09	\$0.00
DORDT COLLEGE	SOY-BEANS	CORN	*	ASGROW 2247	56.8	a	—	
				IA1009	56.1	ab	~\$18.70	
WILCOX	CORN	SOYBEANS	NS	GARST 8600IT	190.7	a	\$29.39	\$0.00

(Trials, continued from page 33.)

ber of light-hilum, food-type soybeans. The Asgrow number yielded the best of the six varieties (Table 1). For a producer marketing food-type soybeans, economics of these varieties would depend not only on their yields and seed costs, but also on the preferences of the buyer. Until now, many buyers of beans for the Japanese tofu market have preferred Vinton-81. That presents a quandary for growers, since Vinton yields do not measure up to modern varieties (as in this trial). That's just another reason to make sales arrangements before the crop is planted.

Gary and Venita Wilcox, Correctionville, were, like Arlyn Valvick, stimulated by a magazine article—one in the John Deere *Furrow* describing how Minne-

sota farmers increased their corn yields by mixing hybrids in the field. The scientist who was involved with that work is Dr. Mark Westgate, and he is now at Iowa State University. As Mark explained to the field day audience, cross-pollination can lead to a yield increase of 5-8 bushels under the right conditions. It is important to find combinations of hybrids that do not share any inbred parent lines. In Minnesota, the farmers Westgate worked with tried many combinations of hybrids.

Naturally seed companies do not readily share information about hybrid parent lines. Gary worked with Garst dealer Gary Manker to choose two appropriate hybrids, 8600-IT and 8550. Wilcox seeded the two hybrids in separate strips and in strips of alternat-



Dordt College students hear from Ron Stertler (right, with clipboard) about custom processing specialty varieties.



Mark Westgate (left, with corn stalk) traveled to the Wilcox field day to explain the cross-pollination effect.

Multiple Treatment Variety and Planting Trials										
TREATMENT "B"					TREATMENT "C"					OVERALL COMMENTS
DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT	DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu. or T)	STAT.	TRT COSTS	\$ BENEFIT	
NK 4640Bt	169.4	b	\$55.54	(\$11.46)	VIKING 4921	180.1	a	\$37.38	\$25.86	LOCAL HYBRID > NK HYBRID > NK Bt HYBRID. LOCAL HYBRID NEEDED DRYING
VINTON 81	50.6	b	\$22.94		IA1008	55.9	ab	~\$22.00		
IA2016	54.4	ab	26.51		IA2034	51.3	ab	\$22.66		
GARST 8550	205.8	a	\$29.39	\$0.00	ALTERNATE ROW MIX	198.8	a	\$29.39	\$0.00	HYBRIDS TASSELED WITHIN 1-2 DAYS. 8550 FLEXED WITH LATE-SEASON RAIN

ing rows of the two hybrids. He reports that these two hybrids seemed to tassel within a day or two.

... cross-pollination can lead to a yield increase of 5-8 bushels under the right conditions. It is important to find combinations of hybrids that do not share any inbred parent lines.

How did the trial turn out? Well, we will have to wait at least another year to see the yield boost Minnesota farmers found. The yield of the hybrid mix was almost exactly halfway between that of the two individual hybrids (Table 1). Although it's hard to pinpoint the problem in this trial, Mark Westgate is interested in working with more farmers to get information on silking times for hybrids. That knowledge could lead to future trials.

	Yield	Relative Advantage
Garst 8600IT	190.7	\$0
Garst 8550	205.8	\$0
alternating	198.8	\$0

IPM and Seed Trials

Gary and Nancy Guthrie, Nevada, raise vegetables for their own CSA (community supported agriculture), Growing Harmony Farm. As the son of a corn entomologist, Gary keeps a particular eye on challenges from the insect world. In their organic operation, the Guthries look for cultural and biological solutions to these problems, so when Gary read about an biological remedy for corn earworm, an on-farm trial was born. Gary writes:



Gary demonstrates how he applies the oil-Bt mix to sweetcorn silks.

Table 2. IPM and Seed Trials

COOPERATOR	CROP	TREATMENT "A"			TREATMENT "B"
		DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu.)	TREATMENT COST	DESCRIPTION
GUTHRIE	SENECA DAYBREAK, SWEETCORN	OIL/Bt TREATED EARS	7,650	\$798.84	NOT TREATED
GUTHRIE	BODACEOUS, SWEETCORN	OIL/Bt TREATED EARS	13,996	\$798.84	NOT TREATED
GUTHRIE	INCREDIBLE, SWEETCORN	OIL/Bt TREATED EARS	16,800	\$798.84	NOT TREATED
GUTHRIE	TENDER TREAT, SWEETCORN	OIL/Bt TREATED EARS	17,400	\$798.84	NOT TREATED
NEELY-KINYON	CORN	TREATED SEED	117.0	\$69.61	UNTREATED SEED
ROSMANN	CORN	TREATED SEED	99.7	\$39.94	UNTREATED SEED
SPECHT	CORN	OP-NOKOMIS GOLD	98.2		FONTANELLE 1493

In 1998 I treated two varieties, *Bodacious* and *Incredible* using a mixture of vegetable oil and Btk (three teaspoons/quart oil). I discovered then that applying a small squirt of the treatment at full brush stage of the silk just as the silk was turning brown could be effective in controlling corn ear worm damage. In *Bodacious* the treatment dropped damage from 47% to 15%, but there was virtually no corn ear worm infestation in *Incredible*.

In 1999, I wanted to follow up last year's experiment with a broader experiment treating four varieties. On May 1st, *Seneca Daybreak* (65 days), *Bodacious* (75), *Incredible* (85), and *Tender Treat* (95) were planted at a population of 25,000 plants/acre.

Table 2 and Figure 1 show the yield of undamaged ears (on a per-acre basis) for treated and untreated corn of the four varieties. By the way, Gary suspects that his Bt wasn't the freshest

at the first treatment date. Besides the effectiveness of the oil-Bt treatment, weather, the natural cycle of the insect, and the physiology of the varieties all play a

Bt Effect on Earworm Damage

Four Varieties, July, 1999, Guthrie

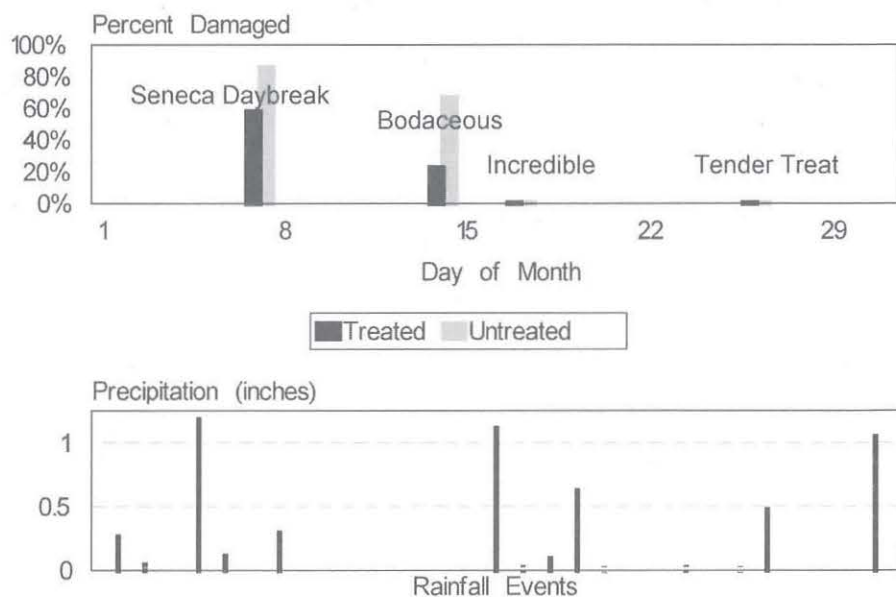


Figure 1. Growing Harmony Farm 1999 earworm trials.

IPM and Variety Trials

TRT "B"		DIFFERENCE				COMMENT
YIELD (bu.)	TREATMENT COST	YIELD DIFF.	YLD LSD (bu.)	YLD SIG.	\$ BENEFIT OF TRT "A"	
2,550	\$0.00	5,100	8,250	NS	-\$798.84	\$476 Bt BENEFIT IF YIELD DIFF WERE SIGNIFICANT
6,037	\$0.00	7,959	3,641	*	\$1,190.94	YIELDS IN UNDAMAGED EARS PER ACRE. ECONOMICS BASED ON UNDAMAGED EARS.
12,450	\$0.00	4,350	2,019	*	\$288.66	
17,550	\$0.00	(150)	1,104	NS	-\$836.34	
127.3	\$61.75	-10.3	13.1	NS	-\$7.86	\$ DIFFERENCE FROM 2.7% MOISTURE DIFFERENCE
103.1	\$39.94	-3.4	9.0	NS	\$0.00	1-3,000 HIGHER POP W. TREATED, PLANTED 5/14
160.7		-62.5	7.2	*		PLANTED 6/3 AT 27,800. WEEDY

“I wonder if it might be worthwhile to treat the first several varieties and not the last one or even two, depending upon what one’s tolerance level is for infestation.”

part in earworm infestations. Although every year is different, experience will show which varieties and which silking times are most likely to reward treatment. Gary writes: *I wonder if it might be worthwhile to treat the first several varieties and not the last one or even two, depending upon what one’s tolerance level is for infestation.* Of course, beyond the arithmetic, there is the intangible benefit of being able to present the customer an ear of sweetcorn that hasn’t already been a worm’s breakfast.

The **Neely-Kinyon Research Farm** in Greenfield has responded to a number of concerns expressed by farmers who grow – or are considering growing – organically. One of the current issues in organic agriculture is seed treatment. Some certifying

organizations prohibit seed treatment, others merely discourage it. Some evidence suggests that corn yields can be severely limited without seed treatment (see below). In 1999, the Neely-Kinyon Farm planted treated and untreated corn seed at 28,000 per acre on May 27. As Table 2 shows, there was considerable variability in the field, with a 13-bushel LSD that exceeded the 10.3 bushel advantage to the untreated seed.

	Yield	Relative Advantage
Treated	117.0	
Untreated	127.3	\$7.86

Ron and Maria Rosmann, Harlan, repeated their seed treatment trial of 1998. In that year, a severe storm shortly after crop emergence reduced the population of corn in the untreated strips, leading to a

(Rosmann continued on page 36.)

Some certifying organizations prohibit seed treatment, others merely discourage it.

Cropping Systems

Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell, Farmersburg, have documented the economics of cropping as they transitioned to organic production. Jeff's reports have appeared in these PFI annual publications, but in the past the "conventional" comparison came from his own farm. As he writes below, that was not possible for this soybean comparison. The figures in Table 3 come from 1998 because he didn't sell the crop until recently. Jeff writes:

1998 was the first year that I ever grew soybeans. To do it organically made it more of a challenge. Despite problems with black nightshade and a 10% hail loss, things turned out quite well. I compared my organic soybeans to a neighboring farmer's conventional beans because I do not have any conventional crops. I based this information on actual sales from 32.5 acres of organic soybeans which were not sold until June of 1999. That is why this material is a year behind. The conventional information came from actual sales from 110 acres.

Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone, have kept close track of yields and farming operations for more than a decade. Dick has put this information together in a way designed to allow comparisons to other farming systems. Leaving out government price supports, and using local land rental rates and custom charges for the operations, he generates net profit for each crop in each year of his two crop rotations and for a hypothetical corn-soybean rotation that is representative of Boone County. This approach was described in "Can You Afford a Crop Rotation," in *The Practical Farmer*, Vol. 11, #4, winter 1996-97.

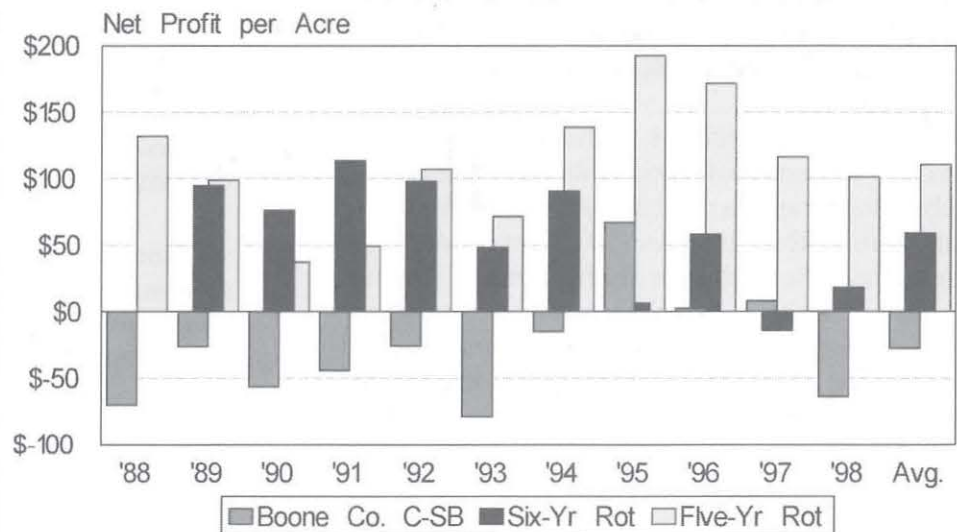
As Figure 2 shows, when you take away the outside support, the Boone County corn-soybean rotation has not kept pace with the more diversified rotations on the Thompson farm. Dick is interested in seeing more producers learn to use this tool. He believes that over time it can be a way to track a farm's progress toward its goals and to compare farming systems. ☺



Checking the quality of harvested soybeans for the organic tofu market at the Klinge/Tidwell field day

Cropping System Documentation

Boone County Corn-Soybean Avg. and Thompson



Five-year rotation: corn-soybeans-corn-oats/hay-hay
 Six-year rotation: corn-soybeans-oats-meadow-meadow-meadow.

Figure 2. Thompson cropping system documentation, 1988-1998.

Table 3. Soybean production budgets, organic and conventional, Klinge farm, 1998 Crop Year.

Item		Organic	Conventional
Pre-Harvest Machinery		\$27.50 †	\$15.50 ‡
Seed			
Organic	@\$15.50/50# bag x 1.8 bags, Dyna-grow 3233	\$27.90	
Conventional	@\$22/50# bag x 1.5 bags, Roundup Ready™		\$33.00
Fertilizer		\$0.00	\$0.00
Weed Control			
Organic	hand weeding (3 hrs x \$8/hr)	\$24.00	
Conventional	herbicide (Roundup)		\$12.00
Crop Insurance		\$10.00	\$10.00
Interest	Pre-harvest expense, 9.0% for 8 months	\$5.36	\$4.23
Pre-Harvest Total		\$94.76	\$74.73
Harvest Machinery			
Combine		\$25.00	\$25.00
Haul grain from field		\$0.50	\$0.50
Dry Grain (\$0.05/bu x 42 bu)		\$2.10	\$0.00
Trucking		buyer pd.	\$6.84
Harvest Total		\$27.60	\$25.50
Labor	@\$8.00/hr	\$40.00	\$24.00
Land	cash rent equivalent	\$160.00	\$160.00
Certification & user fees	(approx. 1% of sales)	\$8.00	\$0.00
Extra Handling		\$4.00 §	\$0.00
6 months interest and storage		\$14.00 ¶	\$0.00
Total Cost per Acre		\$348.36	\$291.07
Crop Yield (bu/acre)		42	57
Cost per Bushel		\$8.29	\$5.11
Sale Price (per bu)		\$19.00	\$6.00
Field Border Harvest	(½ bu @\$6/bu)	\$3.00	\$0.00
Insurance Claim	(10% hail loss)	\$40.00	\$0.00
Gross Income/Acre		\$841.00	\$342.00
Net Profit/Acre		\$492.64	\$50.93

† Organic: tandem disk, chisel, field cultivate (2x), harrow, plant, cultivate (3x).

‡ Conventional: chisel plow, field cultivate, harrow, plant, cultivate (1x).

§ First load of beans was rejected because of black nightshade, shipped back to the farm, and the entire crop was dried until the nightshade berries were completely dried up. Extra handling included the costs of trucking and drying.

¶ The organic soybeans were not marketed until June, 1999. Costs included storage and interest on all expenses.

(Rosmann continued from page 33.)

43-bushel yield loss. After planting on May 14, Ron carefully evaluated the crop stand over the course of 1999, looking for treatment effects. The treated seed did lead to a population advantage that varied from one to three thousand plants per acre over the growing season. However, there was no difference in yield between the two treatments (Table 2). Seed treatment does provide some "insurance," but these trials suggest that in many instances untreated seed can perform satisfactorily.

	<u>Yield</u>	<u>Relative Advantage</u>
Treated	99.7	\$0
Untreated	103.1	\$0

HOLISTIC LIVESTOCK HEALTH

Holistic Veterinary:

Holistic animal health utilizes basic building blocks of good husbandry and adds additional tools. Two are simple enough to be used by any producer: herbs and homeopathy. Herbs are natural sources for medications and dietary supplements. For almost 200 years homeopathic remedies have been used extensively for disease prevention and cure in both people and animals. While homeopathy is much more common in Europe than in the U.S., veterinarians in this country have also found it a useful (and inexpensive) alternative medicine.

Objectives:

1. To teach a core group of Iowa livestock producers how to use homeopathic medicines correctly
2. To encourage this core group to implement homeopathic treatments for their own livestock
3. To maintain a written data base of homeopathic treatments used by Iowa producers
4. To train the core group of Iowa livestock producers so they can teach other producers how to use homeopathic medicines

Would you like to learn more? Veterinarian Randy Kidd would donate his time to teach these skills – if enough farmers were interested in being part of a SARE producer grant proposal to cover other training expenses. Contact Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, 319-644-3052 (zjfarm@ia.net) or Rick Exner, 515-294-5486 (dnexner@iastate.edu) by April 10.

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER We Begin to Develop Real Community

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

The social dimension of sustainable agriculture is a sensitive and often difficult aspect for many people to understand. What does it mean to build rural communities? Should more people just live in the country? Are farms just separate enterprises run by farmers who at times socialize with each other? Do these farms compete for markets, or can they cooperate with each other at marketing? I want to share some experiences that I have had with cooperative marketing that is having a real effect on our local community.

In February of 1998 I was asked to provide some market hogs to the Niman Ranch Pork Company. Later that spring I took Paul Willis, who manages this company, on a tour of local hog farmers who live near Alta Vista. Soon the demand for non-confinement hogs grew to the level where six local farmers were

Are farms just separate enterprises run by farmers who at times socialize with each other?

sending hogs to Niman Ranch. We could see the advantages of cooperation among us when it was time to ship. We began to meet at the Howard County Equity, our cooperative local elevator. The management of this coop has refused to imitate the other coops that financed large-scale confinement with patron-retained dividends. The Equity decided to sell and actively promote hoop buildings as a way of keeping their independent hog farmers in business. We met in an office provided by this coop and felt at home! They offered the assistance of one staff person. In time this would prove to be a crucial assistance.

Dr. Laura Jackson and Dr. Mark Grey from the University of Northern Iowa were participants in an EPA study on the social and ecological ramifications of concentrated hog production. I suggested that they compare the hog farmers in the Alta Vista area to an area that has intense concentration of pork production. They became familiar with all of the farmers in

our group and offered assistance. Dr. Grey was very active in the details of putting our group together as a cooperative. We developed bylaws and formally organized in January of 1999. We selected the name F.R.E.S.H. AIR PORK CIRCLE. The FRESH is an acronym for Family Raised Environmentally Sound Hogs. We had this name copyrighted a month later.

Our group meets twice a month. Most of our business is in providing a steady supply of hogs for the Niman program. Linda Gesell, an employee of the Equity, coordinates our group. When Niman needs hogs they call her. She has the list of farmers who have available hogs. She also arranges the transportation. A major advantage of our circle is that we have a business office with someone answering the phone 40 hours a week. Having a fax number, an answering machine, and a toll free number are all in the assistance we get from this coop. In time we will have an email address at this office too.

In March of last year we began to process some of our hogs in a state inspected locker and sell pork under our own name. This has been a real education for all of us! Many of our members believe that they now have a degree from the college of hard knocks – with a meat marketing major! I could easily fill up this article with stories we have experienced. I may do those stories in another column. We have succeeded in building a satisfied customer base. In fact one of the reasons we keep going is that some people would get really angry at us if we quit! Not the bankers! We have an outstanding weiner, bratwurst, and luncheon meat. Our tasting demos have been very well received.

What does this have to do with community? We are making progress in developing true economic community. The most significant impact is in the transportation logistics. We are 225 miles east of Sioux Center. That is where Niman kills most of their hogs. To arrange for economical transportation we need to fill up a semi load. None of us are large enough producers to do that alone. Here we are totally dependent on the viability of each other to make this work. I cannot get my hogs to market unless you stay in business and need to get your hogs to the same place. Allan Nation once said in the Stockman Grass Farmer that “we need to learn to need each other.” Here we do. The dependence goes well beyond just shipping. We meet to share production ideas and to solve

problems. It is easier to get an animal health specialist to come and offer assistance when he can visit many farms instead of a few. The effect of using alternative practices can be weighted across several farms. This makes observations more valuable.

Niman Ranch is moving to require their producers to have the genetically engineered feed ingredients removed from the hog diets. This is another example of where cooperative community takes hold. How

Allan Nation once said in the Stockman Grass Farmer that “we need to learn to need each other.” Here we do. The dependence goes well beyond just shipping.

could single, isolated producers go about locating all the necessary grains to make this switch? Who would supervise this process of segregation? Here we will depend upon close communication with our elevator in securing supplies and processing of non-GMO feedstuffs. They need us and we need them.

Last year alone over 1000 meat lockers went out of business in the U.S. These small businesses need local support to stay in business. Our circle does extensive business with three lockers. Keeping these lockers busy helps other people in our community who want and need this service as well. Even if they do not buy any of our products, they see where we each can benefit from having local business economy. The customers know where their food comes from, people have more options to choose from, and everyone is better off because of this cooperation.

What we are experiencing here is a totally different trend than the existing movement within the pork industry. The drive to industrialize and concentrate swine production has eliminated thousands of independent producers and fragmented rural communities. Our alternative marketing has opened new doors for business growth, stabilized the economy and opened our eyes to how much we really do need each other. I like this path much better!! 🐷





BITS OF SUSTENANCE

The Bits of Sustenance pages are a place where PFI members can share their writing – stories, poems, letters, book reviews, experiences. Hopefully, Bits of Sustenance will give every reader something to ponder.

ing woman, and it was well worth finding out about her.

After hearing about Hildegard, we had a little free time, and then it was time for a special meal, cooked for us by the Prairiewoods staff, featuring all Iowa grown foods. We feasted on pork chops, mashed potatoes, carrots, winter squash, salad greens, and baked apples, all grown in Iowa and gathered for our meal. Thanks to Jan Libbey, who attended the retreat and brought potatoes, and to Carol Hunt, who coordinated the food.

PFI Women's Winter Gathering is a Real Treat

by Linda Nash, Postville

Twenty-one women from across Iowa gathered the weekend of February 5-6 for the annual PFI Women's Winter Gathering. The retreat was held at Prairiewoods, a Franciscan Spiritual Center in Hiawatha, just north of Cedar Rapids. The facility is beautiful and is also highly energy efficient and environmentally conscious, making it a perfect site for the retreat.

Our opening workshop gave us a chance to see some of the features of the center that make it so unique, such as the heat chimney in the main building, and the berms around each building. We also saw a slide show about the construction of two straw bale houses on the property, and then we were able to tour one of the houses to see the finished product. The houses feature solar power, radiant heat flooring, and many other renewable energy designs. Although small, they seem very comfortable, with each having full bathroom, full kitchen, and a sitting/sleeping area. Prairiewoods runs workshops on straw bale construction and solar power for those who might be interested in pursuing this further.

Our second workshop was about Hildegard von Bingen, an amazing woman who lived in the twelfth century and was far ahead of her time when it came to women's issues. Many of her writings have been recently published, and they cover a wide variety of health and nutrition ideas, including avoiding coffee and eating spelt and fennel in various forms for healthier digestion. She also was interested in the mental health of women ("People can't heal if they can't forgive."), and the environment ("People are forgetting the land, and if we don't have the land, what else do we have?"). She was the Abbess of two Benedictine Monasteries in Germany, and a fascinat-

A high point for many at the Women's Gatherings has been the "Circle of Stories," and this year was no exception. Each woman in the group talked about "what sustains you" and about other important, meaningful events in her life. One of the points that many made is that sometimes what sustains you the most is also the most stressful for you! Family, friends, career can all be highly satisfying, but also difficult because we care so much.

Also heard at the Circle of Stories:

"I draw strength from being around strong women like you all."

"What sustains me is everything's always changing."

"You can't do it all, but you can still have your dreams."

"Life has a way of twisting and turning. It's all so big when you put it all together."

"What sustains me is two aspirin and a hot bath at the end of a long day."

"Something that sustains me without also taking anything away is a good book."

"These men just unravel like yarn when they hit their 50's, you look over there one day and all that's left is a pile of yarn."

"What sustains me is that spring is gonna come and the seeds are gonna grow."

"Be sure to put yourself on your own list of things to do."

Another favorite retreat time was the book circle which we held Sunday morning at Prairiewoods. We heard about books covering every subject, from "Play with your Food" by Joost Elffers, to "Dakota: a Spiritual Geography" by Kathleen Norris, to "Man-eating Bugs," to "Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to CSA" by Elizabeth Henderson, to a children's book

called "Hurry, Hurry, Mary Dear" by N.M. Bodecker. Other recommended books included the Harry Potter books, "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron, "Woodswoman" by Anne LeBastille, and "The Poisonwood Bible" by Barbara Kingsolver.

It's a great thing to be able to take the time to step back and slow down and talk to other women who care about things you care about. Jan Libbey summed it up for us with a poem she wrote during the weekend called "Going Home" -

I have set amidst the beauty of your deep penetrating eyes.

I have watched your graceful hands dance as your stories flowed.

Laughter rolled forth and embraced us all.

It was here - a sacred space - safe to be real - to you . . . to me.

I turn to leave and face the patterns of my daily life. Patterns not always so affirming, not always so comforting. None of you are there to remind me.

I pause - you all are doing the same.

Do we pack things away or do we carry this spirit home?

Those penetrating eyes, those graceful hands.

Next year's gathering is scheduled for February 17 and 18, again at Prairiewoods. Tentatively planned are a cooking demonstration, guided meditation, and talk about women's health and food issues. If there is interest, we might make the retreat a little longer. Folks are also welcome to plan a private retreat there before or after the gathering.

**PFI CAMP 2000
In Celebration of
Iowa Earth Year
2000**



Who? For PFI Youth, Families, and Friends! All ages welcome (under age 7 can attend with adult)

What? Our 6th Annual Camp! Join us to learn more about how to enhance our farms, gardens, prairies, waterways, and woodlands, backyards, and communities through habitat planting projects, field trips, and ecology studies. And participate in fun camp activities like horse-back riding, swimming, canoeing, rappelling, games, and crafts

When? June 7-10, 2000 for Campers Counselor Training begins June 6 for ages 14 +

Where? The YMCA Camp north of Boone

Why? This year, PFI Camp will be one of the events in the year-long, statewide "Iowa Earth Year 2000" celebration of the 30th anniversary of Earth Day.

Questions: Call Shelly at 515-294-0887.

Keep checking the PFI web site for updates - www.pfi@iastate.edu. Detailed brochures to be mailed in April!

PFI Membership Application and Renewal Form

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
County _____
State _____
Zip Code _____
Phone # (_____) _____

This is a _____ new membership
_____ renewal

Do you derive a significant part of your income directly from farming in Iowa?

_____ yes _____ no

Individual or family membership: \$20 for one year, \$50 for three years.

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

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

CORRESPONDENCE

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

District 1 (Northwest): Ken Wise, 2820 Wadsley Ave., Sac City, IA 50583-7637. (712) 662-7716.

Colin Wilson, PFI President, 5482 450th St., Paullina, 51046. (712) 448-2708. c.c.wilson@juno.com

District 2 (North Central): Ron Brunk, 12789 240th St., Eldora, IA 50627-7518. (515) 858-3239.

Mark Tjelmeland 12461 650th St. McCallsburg, IA. 50154-8026 (515) 434-2240.

District 3 (Northeast): Michael Natvig, 20074 Timber Ave., Cresco, IA 52136. (319) 569-8358.

Walt Ebert, 1273 120th St., Plainfield, IA 50666-9647. (319) 276-4444. wngbert@netins.net

District 4 (Southwest): Steve Williams, 2937 102nd St., Villisca, IA 50864-8525. (712) 826-2107. valview@netins.net

Donna Bauer, 1667 Hwy. 71, Audubon, IA 50025. (712) 563-4084 phone and fax, tdbbauer@juno.com

District 5 (Southeast): Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, PFI Vice President, 5025 120th St. NE, Solon, IA 52333. (319) 644-3052. zjfarm@ia.net
Dan Chadima, Broadmoor Farms, 1097 Echo Ave. NW, Fairfax, IA. 52228. (319) 363-9361, gdchadima@aol.com

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

Coordinators: Nan Bonfils, (515) 294-8512, nanb@iastate.edu, Rick Exner, (515) 294-5486, dnexner@iastate.edu, Room 2104, Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa, 50011.

Gary Huber, (515) 232-5649, ftf@isunet.net, Robert Karp, robertftf@isunet.net, Field to Family, 300 Main St., Suite 1, Ames 50010.



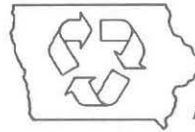
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