

the
Practical Farmer

A Newsletter of Practical Farmers of Iowa • Vol. 23, #1 • Winter 2008



Annual Conference Highlights 4-7

Bright Beginnings: More New Farmers 10-13

How to Lower Swine Death Loss 14-15

Custom Grazing Tips 18

PFI Board of Directors

Correspondence to the PFI directors is always welcome.

District 1 (Northwest)

Heather Johnson
3750 150th Ave.
Royal, IA 51357
(712)933-2686
hgjohn@royaltelco.net

Dan Wilson
4375 Pierce Ave.
Paullina, IA 51046
(712) 448-3870
dlwilson@iowatelecom.net

District 2 (North Central)

Nina Biensen, PFI Vice-President
2454 Binford Ave.
State Center, IA 50247
(641) 483-2292
biensen@marshallnet.com

Tim Landgraf, PFI Secretary
1465 120th St.
Kanawha, IA 50447
(641) 495-6367
libland@frontiernet.net

District 3 (Northeast)

Jeff Klinge
16609 Highway 13
Farmersburg, IA 52047
(563)536-2314
jeffkling@netins.net
Eric Franzenburg, PFI President
6925 19th Ave.
Van Horne, IA 52346
(319) 228-8758
eafran@netins.net

District 4 (Southwest)

Angela Tedesco
7260 NW 58th St.
Johnston, IA 50131
(515) 278-4522
atedesco@worldnet.att.net
Verlan Van Wyk, PFI Treasurer
PO Box 246
Sully, IA 50251
(641) 594-2998

District 5 (Southeast)

Ann Cromwell
3303 240th St.
Williamsburg, IA 52361
(319) 668-8248
anniowa@commspeed.net
Linda Grice
PO Box 86
South English, IA 52335
(319) 667-2350
agricol@netins.net

The Practical Farmer is published four times a year by Practical Farmers of Iowa at 300 Main St., Box 349, Ames, Iowa 50010; (515) 232-5661. A free subscription is provided to PFI supporters (see page 27). Sample copies and back issues are available.

Newsletter Editor: Sally Worley
Original Template: Michael Nash

The Practical Farmer and the PFI on-farm demonstrations are supported, in part, by Iowa State University Cooperative Extension and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

At-Large

Joyce Lock
725 54th St.
Des Moines, IA 50312
(515) 277-3615
stirjoy@aol.com

John Pesek
1801 20th St. Apt. F-11
Ames, IA 50010
(515) 294-2150
jpesek@iastate.edu

Advisory Board

Larry Kallem
12303 NW 158th Ave.
Madrid, IA 50156
(515) 795-2303

Dick Thompson
2035 190th St.
Boone, IA 50036
(515) 432-1560

PFI Staff

For general information and staff connections call (515) 232-5661; individual extensions are listed in parentheses after each name.

Teresa Opheim (102)
Executive Director
teresa@practicalfarmers.org

Gary Huber (103)
Niche Pork, Iowa Food Cooperative
gary@practicalfarmers.org

Jim Clark (107)
Iowa Food Cooperative, Fruit and Vegetable Clusters and Work Croup
jim@practicalfarmers.org

Cedar Johnson (101)
Membership, Youth, Next Generation
cedar@practicalfarmers.org

Sally Worley (104)
Communications
sally@practicalfarmers.org

Sarah Carlson (105)
Cover Crops, Open-pollinated Corn, Water Monitoring
sarah@practicalfarmers.org

Rick Exner, Consultant
Oat Rust, Organic Seed Treatment, Cooperator Assistance
rick@practicalfarmers.org

Tom German, Consultant
Grazing Clusters
(712)830-3281
tagerman@netllc.net

Contents

Letter from the Director 3

Annual Conference 4-7

Awards 8-9

Bright Beginnings 10-13

Niche Pork 14-16

Pork Producer Profile 17

Custom Grazing Tips 18

Program Updates 19

Farm to ISU 20

Members in the News 20

Next Generation Funding 21

Food Cooperative Update 21

Corn Breeding 22

New Research Publications 22

Board Member Profile 23

Camp 23

Calendar 24

New Members/ Sustain PFI 25

Merchandise 26

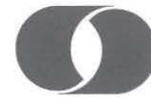
Join PFI 27

Cover: The Northeast Iowa grazing cluster braving the cold at a prairie walk at new PFI members Bill Pardee and Catherine Rawitt's farm near Decorah. See grazing update on page 19



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

Helping Iowans become their best.



LEOPOLD CENTER

www.practicalfarmers.org

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

"Your neighbors aren't just those across the fence from you," our Grazing Cluster organizer Tom German commented at a gathering this fall. "Neighbors are also those close to you in interests and beliefs."

I know what he means. I just saw 425 of you -- my neighbors -- at our annual conference in Des Moines. What a treat to have a record crowd and hear what you all have going on.

In our last issue, we featured some PFI members who have come back to join family farm operations. We are excited to offer programming to better serve this Next Generation—see page 21 for more details. This issue, we continue our coverage of beginning farmers with a piece on those farmers who have started farms on their own (page 10).

We have a staff reorganization to announce: Rick Exner starts a new role with PFI in February. He will be working in the downtown office on specific projects, such as trials on organic seed treatments and helping with the cooperators meeting. Our office at Iowa State University will close, but our relationship with ISU is stronger than ever. Rick has given so much to PFI, and we're glad we'll be continuing to draw on his expertise.

We welcome Sarah Carlson to our staff in January. Sarah will be working on a variety of projects, and that's good because she has the energy for it. Right now, she is looking for farmers who want to plant open pollinated corn and also those interested in cover crops (page 22).

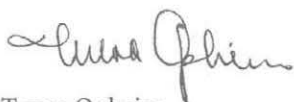
PFI is committed to on-farm research and demonstration—the seed treatment, corn, and cover crops projects are examples. We also are committed to recognizing the variety of partnerships we have with our members.

In the past, being a PFI cooperator meant participating in a randomized, replicated trial. We have now broadened that definition: "A PFI cooperator is a farmer working with PFI on a project designed to improve members' farms and lives. The cooperator must be willing to work with PFI to share project results with others."

Some categories of PFI Cooperator projects we will have for 2008:

- On-farm randomized and replicated trials
- Cost of production and other record keeping and analyses
- On-farm demonstration (involving farmers' keen observation and informal analyses)
- On-farm water quality and habitat monitoring

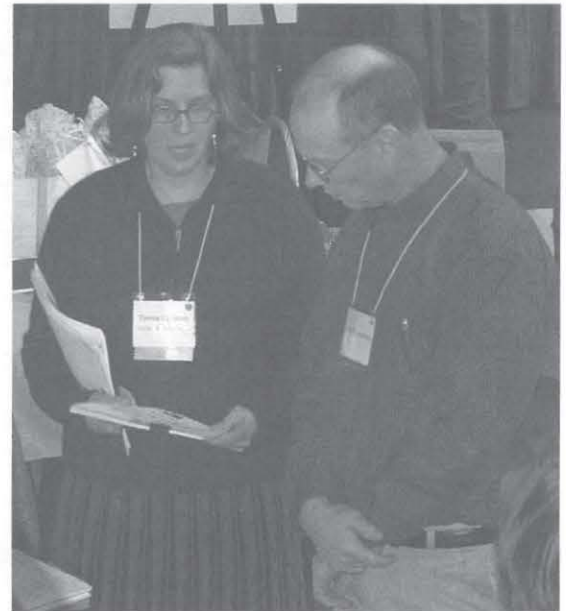
Finally: Congratulations to Kamyar Enshayan for winning PFI's 2008 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award. Kamyar has provided sparks for local foods projects in Cedar Falls-Waterloo, in Iowa and around the country. Thank goodness we have him!



Teresa Opheim
Executive Director

"Your neighbors aren't just those across the fence from you. Neighbors are also those close to you in interests and beliefs."

Tom German



Teresa goes over the conference agenda with PFI President Eric Franzenburg

PFI's Objectives for 2008

Board-approved -- and ready for action!

1. Help at least 250 farmers improve their profitability and environmental stewardship
2. Present PFI and its good work to at least 500,000 people
3. Offer members at least 90 opportunities to learn from each other
4. Provide at least 175 PFI members the opportunity to be Iowa's farmer leaders
5. Help at least 200 farm families or farmer/apprentice matches transition the next generation onto the farm more effectively
6. End fiscal year 2008 with a surplus

Record Numbers "Come to the Table"

425 people gathered around tables at PFI's 2008 Annual Conference, creating record attendance numbers. Over twenty workshops were offered, featuring many experts in sustainable agriculture and a diverse array of topics. Keynote speakers Saturday morning consisted of Richard de Wilde, Doug Gunnink, and Brent and Jeanne Hansen. These people are leaders in their industries, and shared some of their lessons learned with the masses at the conference. Grazing expert Jim Gerrish led a workshop on Friday and hosted a "coffee shop" for more intimate conversation Saturday. Many young farmers were in attendance, and there were several sessions geared toward their needs. Laura Krouse received Leopold Center's Spencer Award on Friday evening. Kamyar Enshayan accepted PFI's Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award Saturday during lunch. The ballroom was packed Friday for a screening of King Corn. Spectators had the privilege of watching the movie with Curt Ellis, co-star, and Aaron Woolf, director. Sponsors raised a record amount of over \$13,000 for the conference.

Thank you for your attendance and support!



Clockwise from top left: A busy exhibit hall; Walt Ebert gives tribute to his position on the board; Sean Skeehan and Jill Beebout ponder over the silent auction; Richard de Wilde in deep thought; Erin Davis of Wheatsfield Cooperative deep in conversation with a conference goer



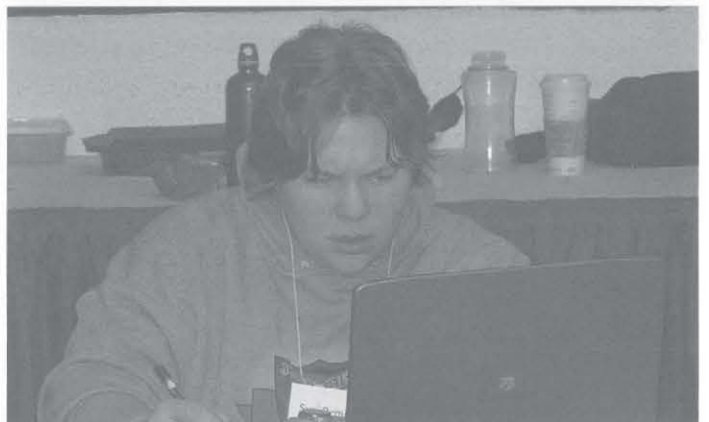
2008 Annual Conference

Clockwise from top left: Richard de Wilde talks with participants of the vegetable cluster; Jim Gerrish and Ron Dunphy discuss grazing; attendees cruise through the posters; Tammy Faux, Tim Daley, and Steve Beck-Brunk participate in some serious talking; Dick Thompson and Keith Turner enjoy conversation; Jerry DeWitt and Irene Frantzen chat

Conference photos courtesy of Rich Schuler



2008 Annual Conference

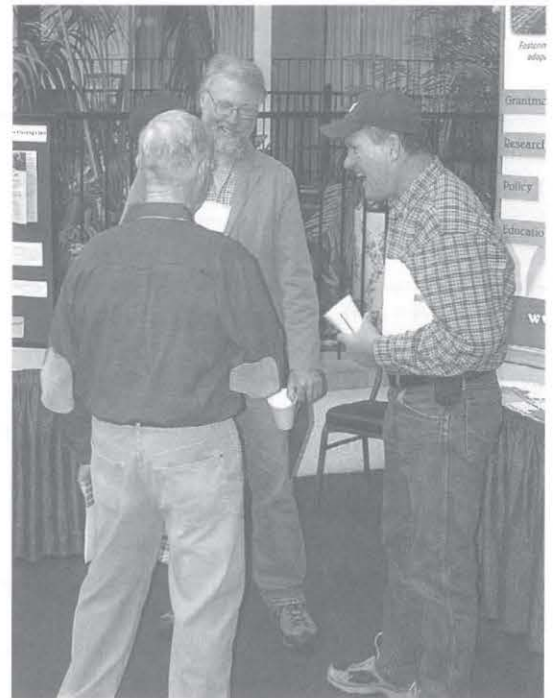


Clockwise from top left: Lance Gegner poses by his beautiful display; Greg Koether makes Kathy Koether, Curt Ellis, and Teresa Ophem laugh; picturesque egg basket from Rolling Prairie Acres at the silent auction; Heather Johnson talks with Suzanne Costello and Ken Wise; Suzi Bernhard conducts a quick investigation of Simone's Plain and Simple for a silent auction description; Jim Gerrish discusses grazing with a group at his "coffee shop"; Todd Churchill and Ken Henrichsen visit

2008 Annual Conference



Clockwise from top left: Jeanne Hansen, Doug Gunnink, and Brent Hansen listen in on the roundtable discussion on the opening panel; George Naylor and friends find something quite amusing; Laura DeCook and her farmer-in-training; Rachel Garst and Brad Riphagen share a laugh; Kamyar gives his acceptance speech for the Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award; Melanie Staver shows off one of the conference's youngest visitors, Sidney (the other youngest visitor, 7-week-old twin sister Avery, is napping in her stroller) to Cedar Johnson



PFI Members Awarded Food and Society Fellowships



Angie Tagtow



Curt Ellis

Angie Tagtow and Curt Ellis are fitting examples of the wonderful things PFI members accomplish. Both have been awarded Food and Society Policy Fellowships for 2008-2009 by The Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute. The fellowships last two years and provide recipients funding to inform the public about sustainable food systems and their link to good health, vibrant communities, and environmental stewardship.

"I am interested in sustainable food systems and the positive influences they can have on individual, community, and population health," stated Angie. Angie is concerned about access to healthy food,

especially among low-income families. "Because of our agriculture policy in the United States, we produce cheap food, but the inexpensive food is often of low quality. One of my missions is to research the evidence so we can say with confidence that these systems are more health-effective."

Angie is consultant and owner of Environmental Nutrition Solutions, whose mission is to establish healthier food systems that are sustainable, ecologically sound, socially acceptable and economically viable resulting in fresh, great tasting and nutrient rich foods. Angie started and is managing editor of the Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition. She has been a leader within the American Dietetic Association, Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group, Iowa Dietetic Association, and Society for Nutrition Education, and is a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa and the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture. Angie resides in Elkhart, Iowa.

Curt Ellis of Portland, Oregon shares many of Angie's convictions. "Food is the

way that we most fundamentally interact with the environment on a daily basis," said Curt. Curt has been touring the nation and recently finished an exclusive Iowa tour to promote his film King Corn. This documentary follows Curt and Ian Cheney on their quest to plant an acre of corn and follow the corn into the food system. The film illustrates the disconnect between current farm structure and healthy food systems. One of the things Curt plans to do during his fellowship is a follow-up documentary to King Corn that focuses on the environmental impact of raising a monoculture of corn.

Besides being a "corn star", Curt freelances for Edible Publications, writes for the culinate website, and is founder and manager of Wicked Delicate Films. Curt has created documentaries Two Buckets and The Greening of Southie along with King Corn co-star Ian Cheney. Curt is encouraged that "people in my generation are getting interested in farming again." He hopes to farm himself some day.

PFI member Sue Roberts is the director of the Food and Society Fellows program.

Laura Krouse Wins Spencer Award

PFI member Laura Krouse received the Spencer Award from The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture January 11th at PFI's annual conference.

Krouse owns and operates a 72-acre farm near Mount Vernon, where she teaches full-time at Cornell College. She also is the proprietor of a 104-year-old open-pollinated seed corn business and Abbe Hills Garden, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise that serves 120 families.

Krouse is the first small-market farmer to receive the award, established in 2002 to honor farmers, educators or researchers who have made a significant contribution toward the stability of mainstream family farms in Iowa. The award includes a \$1,000 stipend and is one of Iowa's largest awards in sustainable agriculture.

"This small farm offers enormous diversity, including a restored wetland and constructed pond used for crop irrigation," said Jerry DeWitt, director of the Leopold Center, located at Iowa State University. "Although CSAs do not represent a large part of agriculture at this time, they offer a viable alternative and help build awareness for local foods, which Laura has done through education in the classroom and among her neighbors both on and off the farm."

DeWitt said the selection committee also was impressed with her participation in research. In 2002, Krouse partnered with ISU

horticulture and agronomy professor Kathleen Delate on pest management trials for squash and heirloom vegetables destined for the organic baby food market. She is a member and supporter of Practical Farmers of Iowa, hosting numerous field days and participating in the ISU/PFI On-farm Research and Demonstration program.

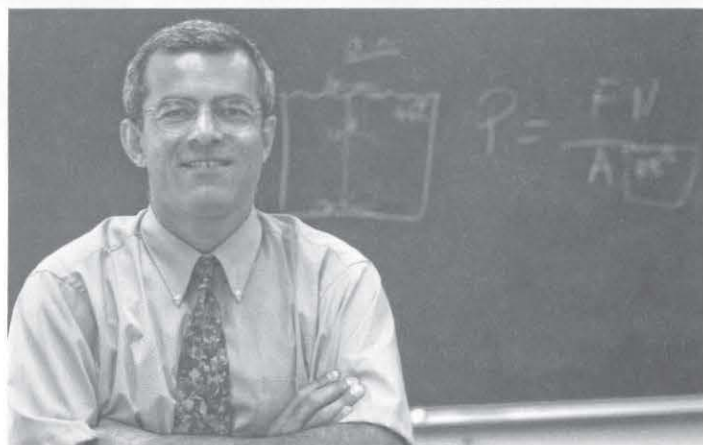
Active as an officer for the Linn County Soil and Water Conservation District, Krouse often speaks to groups about conservation, local foods and related topics. She has appeared on Iowa Public Television and the "Now with Bill Moyers" program to promote sustainable agriculture.



Laura Krouse

Kamyar Enshayan Receives PFI's Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award

Rich Pirog's Commemorative Speech at the PFI Annual Conference



Kamyar Enshayan

I've had the privilege of knowing and working with Kamyar since he first came to Iowa in 1993. We all think of Kamyar as a champion for local food systems- I refer to him as the "Godfather of institutional buying of local foods." He has contributed a tremendous amount indeed to our understanding of making local food systems work. Starting with his pioneering work of linking farmers to sell at UNI Dining Service, the now famous Rudy's Tacos, and Allen Hospital, Kamyar has had the foresight to document those local food purchases over time. Starting with a handful of institutions including Rudy's in 1998, he documented approximately \$100,000 in purchases. By 2006 he was documenting nearly \$900,000 in sales at more than 25 different institutions in Black Hawk and surrounding counties. I'm sure we're to see the 2007 numbers soon. And of course, there is Kamyar's leadership working with PFI to establish the Buy Fresh Buy Local program in Iowa. Kamyar's work in local foods is known and appreciated nationally, but his legacy to sustainable agriculture in this state goes beyond local foods.

He has led educational programs and campaigns to reduce home pesticide use, particularly those pesticides used on lawns and gardens. He has been outspoken about the wise use of energy resources, a champion for energy conservation, and the author of magazine articles, booklets, and editorials on decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels. Kamyar has jokingly talked about how we need to "recover from the fossil fuel happy hour".

One of the many reasons we all admire Kamyar is that he has walked his own talk in first and foremost - making a difference in his own backyard. He's done this in part by running for and being elected to the city

council in Cedar Falls. I've walked down the street with Kamyar in downtown Cedar Falls and in the halls at conferences across the country, and everyone knows, loves, and respects Kamyar. He has been an excellent role model for all of us on what it means to make your local community a better place to live.

Kamyar has deeply touched the lives of all the people he has worked with; from the farmers selling local foods to the students he hired to help carry out this local food work, to those of us working for non-profits, universities, state and city government, and private business. I'm sure we each have a Kamyar story to share on how he has made a difference in our lives. Although he is as passionate as one can be for the cause of sustainable agriculture, he has set a good example of balancing work and family, remaining a devoted husband and father.

Of Kamyar's many talents, one of the most astounding, and most endearing, is his ability to remain modest; always willing to help, always willing to stop and listen, always willing to praise others for their good work rather than tooting his own horn.

Kamyar is the first person not born in the United States to win this award. As PFI looks toward the future, a future where more of its farmer and non-farmer members may hail from nations across the globe, let's remember the standard that this man has set for service and leadership. All of us who have had the privilege of knowing him are now better persons because of it.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating Kamyar Enshayan for winning the PFI Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award.

I refer to him as the "Godfather of institutional buying of local foods."

Rich Pirog

Past Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award Winners

- ❖ 2007: Francis Thicke
- ❖ 2006: Paul Johnson
- ❖ 2005: Denise O'Brien
- ❖ 2004: George Beran
- ❖ 2003: Rich Pirog
- ❖ 2002: Rick Exner
- ❖ 2001: David Williams
- ❖ 2000: Mark Honeyman
- ❖ 1999: Jean Wallace Douglas
- ❖ 1998: Neil Hamilton
- ❖ 1997: Dennis Keeney
- ❖ 1996: Michael Duffy
- ❖ 1995: Dick and Sharon Thompson
- ❖ 1994: Richard Cruse
- ❖ 1993: Larry Kallem
- ❖ 1992: Jerry DeWitt
- ❖ 1991: John Pesek
- ❖ 1990: Alfred Blackmer

Bright Beginnings

by Sally Worley

As the number of farms in Iowa falls, the average size of an Iowa farm is increasing, and the mean age of farmers is on the rise. Iowa needs new farmers. Iowa needs farmers who are passionate about their practices and excited about their livelihood. Last newsletter PFI profiled farm families in which the next generation was coming home to farm. PFI asked to hear from new farmers who were starting out on their own. This is the story of six of those new farm families.



Justin, Melanie, and Milo Staver, before twins Sidney and Avery were born

Justin and Melanie Staver live outside of **Murray**. They farm on land that has been in Justin's family since 1886. Justin's dad quit farming and got an off-farm job in 1986 due to a weak farm economy. Melanie also grew up on a farm; her dad too gave up farming to pursue a more financially stable career in town.

Justin and Melanie started farming the spring of 2006. They are raising grass-fed beef as well as some row crops, and have plans to convert all of the land to grass.

What compelled Justin and Melanie to farm? They both

“There lacks the community that used to be present in the rural farming community. This is difficult as a beginning farmer.”

Justin Staver

like the farm lifestyle. They want to be their own bosses, and like raising cattle. They want to raise their family, Milo, two, and twin girls Sidney and Avery, born in November 2007, on the farm.

The Stavers were fortunate enough to have land in the family. Living twenty miles from the land is a challenge, and they hope to move closer to the farm. The learning curve is a challenge. “The more I learn, the less I know,” stated Justin.

Justin and Melanie hope to sell their first finished cattle fall of 2008, and are not yet sure how they will market it. Justin voiced another frustration: “There are no farmers to borrow tools from. When I was young there were twelve to fifteen farms within three miles. Now there are primarily two mega farms that have control of the neighboring land. There lacks the community that used to be present in the rural farming community. This is difficult as a beginning farmer.”

PFI has been beneficial for Justin and Melanie by connecting them to people who have provided them with expertise. They are excited about the grazing clusters they have been attending. They appreciate the resources for beginning farmers PFI publicized in the last newsletter. PFI could help by connecting new farmers with land.

Their outlook for a farming future: hopeful. The couple has sustainable values, and are determined to make it work.

Ryan and Janice Marquardt are so dedicated to a farming future that they visited sustainable agriculture innovator Joel Salatin on their honeymoon.

Ryan and Janice Marquardt are so dedicated to a farming future that they visited sustainable agriculture innovator Joel Salatin on their honeymoon. The stark difference between Joel's green field and his neighbor's brown land affirmed the value of sustainable farming for Ryan and Janice. The Marquardts began farming as **Wild Rose Pastures** on rented land near **Boone** in March 2007. They have since purchased their own land near Knoxville, where they plan to grow their farm. They are both finishing up master's degrees at Iowa State; Ryan in sustainable agriculture and Janice in mechanical engineering.

In 2007 Ryan and Janice sold pasture-raised chicken and turkeys. Why do they farm? “It is a fiscally sustaining job that is both mentally rewarding and physically challenging,” remarked Ryan. He does not believe he is cut out for the office life. Ryan plans to get part-time work until the farm income will sustain them.

Ryan and Janice find the market strong. They sold out their



Ryan and Janice Marquardt moving turkeys at dusk

first year, and feel the demand outweighs the supply. Their biggest challenge is the lack of state-inspected lockers in Central Iowa. Currently they are selling their birds custom processed, which requires them to sell live birds. They hope to sell ducks in the future, but there is not currently a state-inspected locker that will process them. Ryan and Janice affirm they have a lot to learn. Penny Brown-Huber's Grown Your Own Small Market Farm class certainly was a help for them. They have a business plan that opens their operation to eggs and pasture-raised beef in the future. The Marquardts plan to grow their farm slowly.

PFI has helped by connecting them to others in the farming community. Ryan and Janice have fliers at fellow PFI members Jeff and Jill Burkhardt's Picket Fence Creamery. PFI can be a huge asset to them by helping conquer the huge need for more processing stations in Iowa.

The Marquardts are very hopeful for a solid future in farming. The market is strong and so are their ideals.



Rick and Stacy Hartmann at Angela Tedesco's Field Day

Rick and Stacy Hartmann have grown vegetables full-time at **Small Potatoes Farm**, a certified organic farm near **Minburn**, for the last three years. Rick started farming part-time seven years ago on rented land. "Farming wasn't an accident. It was a conscious decision, Rick says." He has always been fascinated by plants, animals and food. Stacy feels that farming is "a worthwhile endeavor and a good lifestyle."

How do they make it work farming full-time? They do a great amount of planning and goal setting. They live a judicious lifestyle. Rick and Stacy took Penny Brown Huber's class. They created a business plan and a mission statement. Rick and Stacy created a table of organization that defines each of their jobs and responsibilities. Expectations are very clear on this farm. This is an idea they got from fellow PFI members Chris and Kim Blanchard, and it has served them very well. Rick and Stacy also say it helps that they are fond of each other, since they spend a lot of time together. Rick said, "One of the biggest problems I see is that people don't approach farming with a business sense. They rely too much on customers. If people just depend on goodwill and don't deliver a superior product, people will eventually leave."

The PFI listserv has been helpful for the Hartmanns. The PFI library that resides at their house is also a great resource. "Networking and member resources have been a real benefit to us," stated Rick. Their biggest challenge has been finding good, reliable seasonal labor. After failed attempts at hiring, they did secure an employee late May last year. Next year the labor hunt will be a renewed challenge. Suitable cover crops that fit their diverse system has been a challenge in the past. Rick explained solutions he has discovered through farm experimentation with confidence. Rick and Stacy find great help in the farming community surrounding them. Everybody knows the needs of neighboring farmers, and help out when they can.

"There are a lot of things we could do for more financial compensation. There is tremendous compensation for us in the type of life we live."

Stacy Hartmann

They think the future in agriculture looks really good for them. "There's much more demand for high quality, local products," said Rick. Rick and Stacy are very satisfied with their choice to farm. Stacy noted, "We are highly educated. There are a lot of things we could do for more financial compensation. There is tremendous compensation for us in the type of life we live. There are great opportunities for young people who are talented to have farms and be involved in farming. It is a choice people should really consider."

New Farmers

Matt and Kelli Miller operate **Sugar Creek Farm** near **Osage**. They have been direct marketing naturally-raised pork, beef, and chicken for five years. They both also hold full-time off-farm jobs and raise three active children. When their oldest daughter was five, she entered a bottle calf class at the county fair. This “lit a fire under Matt,” said Kelli, and they purchased their own bottle calves. Matt and Kelli both grew up on farms and wanted their kids to experience raising animals and farm life. They also wanted to know

““When we sit down and eat a meal, and it’s our meat and our vegetables, we’re pretty proud of that.”

Kelli Miller

farm. “It looked pretty good until grain and land prices started skyrocketing,” stated Matt. They are in a market position to grow, but the lack of available and affordable land is preventing expansion. “As long as we can continue to do this and have a little profit, we’ll continue,” said Kelli. If it wasn’t for their children, they probably would have never ventured into farming. However, they find it quite fulfilling. “When we sit down and eat a meal, and it’s our meat and our vegetables, we’re pretty proud of that.”



Ryan Jepsen poses with his favorite cow

what their family was eating. The Millers have diversified since inception and have grown a little each year.

Matt and Kelli have a strong market. They can’t keep up with customer demand, and sell all they produce. They would like to continue to grow, but land is a big obstacle. They own twelve acres, and had been renting twenty acres of hay land. The owner of the rented land repossessed the land to plant soybeans, so it is no longer available to them. Land prices around them range from \$5,000-\$7,000 per acre. They would be willing to rent pasture land again, but it is nonexistent around them.



The Miller Family sitting pretty at Christmas: Rafe, Matt, Madeline, Kelli, Olivia

The Millers have found PFI’s newsletter *Niche Pork News* very helpful. They enjoy attending PFI conferences, and have left each conference with practical information to try.

Matt and Kelli are not sure what the future holds for their

Ryan and Kristine Jepsen run **Grass Run Farm** near **Decorah** where they raise and direct market grass-fed beef. They recently moved back to Iowa from Wyoming to “chase a dream and raise a family,” said Ryan. In college, Ryan was originally a premed student. After a summer in Idaho with the Student Conservation Association, he decided outdoors was a better place to make a living than an office.

The Jepsens are building a structure that will be their house on the second level and working barn on the main level. They are doing this on the old homestead site that they purchased from his family. They plan to rent the adjoining pasture and hay ground. Ryan and Kristine participated in the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings program, and found it very useful.

The Jepsens find that marketing their product is a challenge because of the time it requires. Yet they believe direct marketing is currently the only way to make a profit. Ryan says their dream is “efficient, economy of scale markets for small farmers, where you don’t have to run 300 acres to try to make a living, and you don’t have to work 80 hours a week to try to make a living.” Ryan and Kristine are talking with others in the area about making lockers more accessible with better pricing by bringing their animals to the locker together.

The Jepsens are creative with their current marketing. Ryan and Kristine sold the local hamburger idea to T-Box, a Decorah restaurant. Customers have the option of buying a locally-raised hamburger for \$1 more. “This is a great way to market beef to

the average American,” said Ryan. Members of the Luther cross-country team are faithful customers. They think that Grass Run

“Local, niche-market meat, whether it be grass-fed, organic, or what- the wave is coming. I have faith that it will happen.”

Ryan Jepsen

Farm’s pastured beef is higher in iron than conventional beef, and purchase this beef weekly for grill-outs during cross country season.

Ryan claims, “PFI is the best group I’m a part of, hands down.” He thinks the grazing clusters are great, and that PFI focuses on functional programming. PFI could help the Jepsens by providing more marketing resources.

The Jepsens’ outlook: solid. “Local, niche-market meat, whether it be grass-fed, organic, or what- the wave is coming. I have faith that it will happen,” proclaimed Ryan.

Rob and Tammy Faux operate **Genuine Faux Farm** near **Tripoli**. They grow vegetables and raise some chickens and turkeys on five acres of land. Rob and Tammy first started selling vegetables several years ago at a farmers market because their obsessive gardening created such an abundance of harvest they couldn’t get rid of their goods. “The neighbors wouldn’t take any more of it,” said Tammy.

Rob and Tammy just finished their fourth growing season near Tripoli. The first year, they participated in the Waverly and Tripoli farmer’s markets. They saved all the money they earned from these markets in a jar, and saw that growing vegetables could be a profitable venture.

Rob and Tammy both hold PhDs. Tammy was teaching full-time at Wartburg, while Rob knew it may be some time before he landed a teaching position. Rob and Tammy decided raising vegetables would be a suitable supplemental income. They participated in Farm Beginnings and created a business plan. They liked the CSA model, and it has served them quite well. After three years of operating a CSA they have over a 90% retention rate. They have grown to 42 members, plan to cap membership at 60 members next year, and do not want to grow larger than 75 members.

Rob and Tammy want their CSA to keep the community feel that is strongly present. Members are devoted and have come to assist in emergencies. Rob and Tammy host monthly Tom Sawyer Days (“Come weed, it is SO fun!”), where members come volunteer on the farm and participate in a potluck after the work is done.

Rob and Tammy have been creative in their CSA design. Members pick up their bags at the Waverly Farmer’s Market. This allows members the opportunity to converse with other members as well as buy other items from the market. Members also make their own bags, which give them the ability to customize, and saves

Rob and Tammy time. “If they like red tomatoes they take red tomatoes. If they like heirloom tomatoes, they have the option to choose,” said Rob.

Their biggest challenge? Time! “We need help, but couldn’t afford to pay a full-time employee, although there is certainly enough work to have a full-time employee around,” said Rob. This venture started out as supplemental income while Rob secured a teaching job. Now teaching, Rob took the fall semester off to devote to the farm, and still needs help. They are possibly looking for an intern for next year.

PFI has been most helpful with connecting Rob and Tammy to other farmers. They enjoy the vegetable clustergroup they are a part of. Rob and Tammy would like to see PFI offer off-season field days.

Rob and Tammy think they have a future in farming. “Can we make enough to offset the strain of doing it and not work to exhaustion,” Rob asked, “while not worrying about paying all of our bills?” They have made financial goals to help them address this. Each year they feel that their practices and operations improve. They may have to adapt their marketing techniques as times change, but plan to continue farming.

These new farmers are energetic, value-driven, innovative, and instrumental in sustaining and growing Iowa’s local food system. PFI plans to continue the quest to recruit new farmers, by bringing the next generation back to the farm as well as connecting new farmers like these to resources that will help them succeed.



Rob and Tammy Faux take a break at Wartburg

“Can we make enough to offset the strain of doing it and not work to exhaustion, while not worrying about paying all of our bills?”

Rob Faux

Niche Pork Q & A with Gary Huber

What is niche pork?

Niche pork is pork with attributes that appeal to certain market segments, meaning people who want something different. These are known as niche markets. Examples are certified organic or humanely-raised. Also, the reason niche products are important is that otherwise farmers need to compete based on price, and that treadmill is what leads to bigger farms, towns without people, etc.

How does this study benefit niche pork farmers?

The study has two benefits. First, it will help the farmers involved

identify where they can make improvements to be more successful. Second, the information will help farmers to make wise choices about whether to be involved in raising niche hogs.

Where will you go from here?

We will continue the study to get data from 2007. We are also doing trainings to help farmers improve in areas such as lowering prewean death losses, getting sows bred, and lowering feed costs. We also want to continue to help farmers have profitable options for selling their niche hogs, and we are beginning to develop plans to help beginning farmers use niche pork production as an entry strategy.

2006 Costs, Returns, and Production Performance of Niche Pork Farms

By James Kliebenstein and David Stender, Iowa State University, and Gary Huber, Practical Farmers of Iowa

Funding support for this research came from National Research Initiative of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, grant number 2005-55618-15791).

Iowa State University received a grant to work with PFI and the University of Nebraska to conduct a project to help niche pork farmers use records to improve their operations. This article summarizes data on costs, returns, and production performance of 41 farrow-to-finish farms niche pork farms that completed 2006 records. Five were certified organic producers, four were purebred Berkshire producers, and 32 were "natural" pork producers, meaning their pigs were raised without antibiotics using bedded pens and outdoor access.

Information such as corn price, interest on capital, and the value of labor provided by the farm operator were standardized. For example, the corn price used was \$2.19 per bushel, which was the 2006 monthly average Iowa corn price. Interest on operating and fixed capital was 5%, and the value of labor was set at \$15.00 per hour.

Returns

Return data are provided in Table 1. Averages are included for all 41 farms, plus the top 15 and bottom 15 farms sorted by return to capital, unpaid labor and management per hundred pounds (cwt) produced.

Returns were quite different between top and bottom herds. Returns to capital, unpaid labor and management averaged \$10.08/cwt for all farms, but \$17.43 for top herds and \$2.17 for bottom herds. The average total return was \$17,740 for all farms, but almost \$30,000 for top herds and just below \$6,000 for bottom herds. The average return to labor for all farms was \$13.17 per hour, but \$22.66 for top herds and \$3.02 for bottom herds. Note that prices received for market hogs were similar: \$50.09/cwt for the top group compared to \$49.92/cwt for the bottom group. Thus, prices received had little impact on differences in returns.

Sorted by Return to Capital, Unpaid Labor and Management, \$/Cwt			
Item	Average	Top 15 Farms	Bottom 15 Farms
Number of Producers	41	15	15
Return to Capital, Unpaid Labor and Management per Farm	\$17,740	\$29,875	\$5,886
Return to Capital, Unpaid Labor and Management per Cwt.	\$10.08	\$17.43	\$2.17
Return per Hour for All Hours of Labor and Management	\$13.17	\$22.66	\$3.02
Average Price Received per Cwt. of Market Hogs Sold	\$49.97	\$50.09	\$49.92

Costs

Data on production costs are in Table 2, with the method of sorting the same as Table 1. The average total was \$52.05/cwt for all 41 farms. The average total operating cost (excluding labor) was \$35.79/cwt, with feed costs making up \$26.28 of this total and other operating costs making up \$9.51. Average fixed costs were \$3.54 per cwt, and average labor costs were \$12.72 per cwt. These numbers translate into average total costs of about \$140.00 per market hog produced.

Table 2 shows that the top farms had average total costs of \$46.05/cwt, while the bottom group averaged \$57.22. This is a difference of \$11.17, or about \$30 per hog produced. Average feed costs for the top farms were \$4.49/cwt below the bottom group (\$23.59 vs \$28.08), and other operating costs (excluding labor) for the top group were about half that of the bottom group (\$6.75 vs \$13.01). Fixed costs for top farms averaged \$3.12/cwt, while the average for the bottom farms was \$4.07. Interestingly, labor costs were lower for the bottom farms compared to the top farms (\$12.06 vs \$12.59), although this difference was small.

Cost Differences

Table 3 compares cost differences between top and bottom farms. Note that feed costs represented 40% of the difference, while other variable costs represented 56% of the difference. Thus, 96% of the total difference was in feed and other variable costs, which is important because these cash costs items are under the direct control of the farmer. Lowering these costs involves activities like adjusting feeders, developing proper rations, not overfeeding gestating sows, and making wise purchases of inputs like repairs, supplies, and health products.

Production Efficiency

Production efficiency data are in Table 4. The average number of sows was 91 for all farms, but 58 for the top herds and 130 for the bottom herds. Several explanations for these differences are possible. One is an observation from project staff that larger farms tend to farrow more continuously, which can lead to herd health issues. Another is that niche pork farms often have multiple enterprises, including crops and livestock, and farms with more sows may have shortages of labor to properly manage all the enterprises. This explanation appears supported by labor data in Table 4, which shows that total labor used per breeding female per year was almost five hours more for the top group than the bottom group (24.6 hours vs. 19.8 hours).

Table 4 shows total feed used averaged 413 lbs/cwt for all producers, but 374 for the top 15 herds and 425 for the bottom 15 herds. Thus, the top herds averaged 51 lbs/cwt less feed than the bottom herds. Supplement used per cwt ranged from 69 lbs for the top group to 93 lbs for the bottom group, or a difference of 24 lbs. These data suggest ample room exists for improving management of feed and supplement usage. And as noted above, total labor use per breeding female per year was the highest for the top group (24.6 hours) and the lowest for the bottom group (19.8 hours). However, the average labor use per cwt was very similar (.87 for top farms and .83 for bottom farms).

More production data are provided in Table 5. Birth to weaning death loss averaged 26.4% of pigs born alive for all farms, and 25.0% for the top group and 27.9% for the bottom group. Thus, about one of every four pigs born alive did not make it to

Item	Average	Top 15 Farms	Bottom 15 Farms
Number of Producers	41	15	15
Operating Costs per Cwt. Produced			
Feed Cost	\$26.28	\$23.59	\$28.08
Other Operating Cost (except labor)	\$9.51	\$6.75	\$13.01
A. Utilities and Fuel	\$2.26	\$1.58	\$3.03
B. Injectables, Vaccines, etc.	\$1.08	\$0.73	\$1.32
C. Maintenance, Repairs & Supplies	\$1.69	\$1.14	\$2.34
D. Misc. Machine Hire/Trucking	\$1.07	\$0.78	\$1.38
E. Capital Charge on Operating Costs	\$0.91	\$0.75	\$1.10
Total Operating Costs Per Cwt.	\$35.79	\$30.34	\$41.09
Fixed Costs per Cwt. Produced			
Depreciation, Taxes & Ins.	\$2.96	\$2.64	\$3.36
A. Equipment Depreciation	\$1.15	\$1.10	\$1.16
B. Housing Depreciation	\$1.28	\$1.23	\$1.46
C. Property Insurance & Taxes	\$0.50	\$0.33	\$0.65
Capital Charge on Fixed Investment	\$0.58	\$0.48	\$0.71
Total Fixed Costs Per Cwt. Produced	\$3.54	\$3.12	\$4.07
Cost of Labor (All) Per Cwt. Produced	\$12.72	\$12.59	\$12.06
Total Cost per Cwt. Produced	\$52.05	\$46.05	\$57.22

Item	Group			Percent of Difference
	Top 15	Bottom 15	Difference	
Operating Costs (feed and other)	\$30.34	\$41.09	+\$10.75	+96.2%
Fixed Costs	\$3.12	\$4.07	+\$0.95	+8.5%
Labor Costs	\$12.59	\$12.06	-\$0.53	-4.7%
Total Costs	\$46.05	\$57.22	+\$11.17	100.0%
Feed Costs	\$23.60	\$28.08	+\$4.50	40.2%
Other Operating Costs	\$6.75	\$13.01	+\$6.26	56.0%

Item	Average	Top Farms	Bottom Farms
Number of Producers	41	15	15
Average Breeding Female Inventory	91	58	130
Number of Market Hogs Sold	682	462	1076
Pounds of Feed Per Cwt. Produced	413	374	425
Pounds of Grain Per Cwt. Produced	331	303	335
Pounds of Supplement Per Cwt. Produced	79	69	93
Hours of Labor Used Per Cwt. Produced	0.87	0.87	0.83
Hours of Labor Used Per Breeding Female Per Year	21.4	24.6	19.8

Niche Pork

weaning, which represents a key area to focus on improvements. Pig death losses from weaning to market for the bottom group was about double that of the top group (11.5% vs. 5.8%).

Table 5 also shows that the top herds on average weaned one more pig per litter (7.2) than bottom herds (6.2). The top herds on average had 15 sows per boar, while bottom herds averaged 18 sows per boar. The top herds raised an average of 11.8 pigs per sow per year, while the bottom herds averaged 9.4, or a difference of 2.4 pigs less than the top group. One explanation for these low numbers is that baby pigs in these systems are typically weaned at six weeks of age, and so sows are not able to be bred back as quickly. Another is that some niche pork farms farrow seasonally in the spring and fall rather than year round.

Summary

These data show striking differences in many areas between the top 15 and bottom 15 herds. The areas with the largest differences are where there is the most potential for improvements. Educational programming that targets these areas is underway to help niche pork farmers make changes to improve their operations. As well, the project that collected the data summarized here is continuing so that information from 2007, which is a year with dramatically higher corn prices, will be available in the future.

For more information about these results, contact Dave Stender (712)225-6196 or dstender@iastate.edu or Gary Huber (515)232-5661 x103 or gary@practicalfarmers.org.

For the complete report of the records results, visit <http://www.practicalfarmers.org/programs/Niche-Pork.html>

Item	Average	Top Farms	Bottom Farms
Number of Producers	41	15	15
Pig Death Loss, Birth to Weaning (% of Farrowed Live)	26.4	25.0	27.9
Pig Death Loss, Weaning to Market (% of Weaned Pigs)	7.9	5.8	11.5
Breeding Herd Death Loss (% of Breeding Herd Maintained)	5.6	4.8	4.1
Pounds of Pork Produced per Breeding Female Per Year	2575	2989	2449
Number of Breeding Females per Boar	17	15	18
Number of Pigs Weaned Per Litter	6.7	7.2	6.2
Pigs per Sow Per Year	10.1	11.8	9.4

Strategies for Swine Herd Health: A Closed Herd

by Rick Exner

Winter is often a difficult time in alternative pork production, with animals penned up together and under stress from the weather. But health problems can crop up in any season, and sometimes they don't go away. The recently released *Managing for Herd Health in Alternative Swine Systems* (www.pfi.iastate.edu/pigs.aspx) covers several reasons for chronic disease issues and how management can cause or resolve those issues. One of the biggest "light bulbs" to go on in sustainable hog farmers' minds in the past five years is the practice called "closed herd." According to the herd health guide: "If you can manage it, this strategy is one of the best ways to stop a run of herd health problems."

The pig is the primary source of all infections, so closing your herd to outside introductions is one way to minimize introducing disease. PRRS (Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome)

is a recent reminder that disease can get into your system by many routes. That includes animals you bring onto the farm – gilts, boars, and feeder pigs. That is the reason a number of alternative swine farmers are going to a "closed herd" in which animals do not routinely enter the system. This isn't to say multi-site systems are a bad idea; you just need to define what is "in the system" and what is outside it.

How do you maintain and improve your genetics in a closed herd? Artificial insemination (AI) is an indispensable tool. AI gives you access to almost any genetics you want to utilize. You can even breed some animals for production and others for maternal characteristics that you want to add to your breeding herd.



While there are things to know about AI, it is not rocket science. True, it may mean you spend more time observing your sows and gilts. Most farmers moving to a closed herd consider this an acceptable investment for the increased breeding control and biosecurity. Be sure you purchase semen that is certified free of PRRS.

Keys to Lower Pre-Wean Death Losses

A number that has caused concerns in the 2006 data from niche pork farms is an average pre-wean mortality rate of 26%. Given that bedded free-stall pens are typical in niche pork farms, crushing is an obvious issue. Other issues are scours and poor milking sows.

What can be done to lower the average death loss rates? We asked PFI members Phil Kramer and his dad, Martin, this question. Phil is a Niman Ranch field agent, and Martin has been raising pigs since 1975 near Algona.

Martin has had success in keeping his baby pigs alive, with death losses at around 15%. Why do Martin's pigs have a higher survival rate? There are several reasons:

First, Martin cleans his buildings thoroughly between farrowings to lower the risk of scours. Second, he makes sure his sows and pigs are well tended, especially in the first few days after birth. "I make a

comfortable place for sows and pigs," he said, "it is important to keep them warm enough in winter and cool enough in summer."

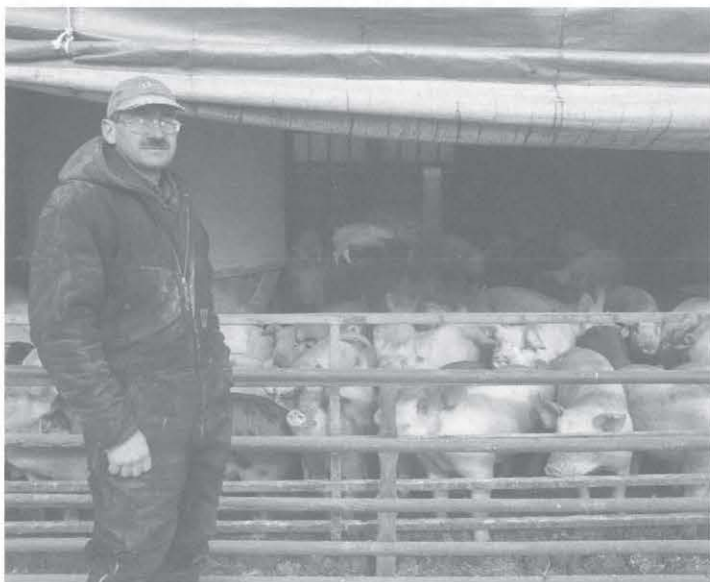
To do this, Martin has hot water pipes in the floor where he wants baby pigs to lay for winter litters. During the summer he uses box fans regulated by thermostats to blow air over sows to keep them cool. He said the fans keep the sows from being restless, thus preventing crushing. Martin also has crush rails in farrowing pens to further prevent crushing.

Another key is wisely selecting replacement gilts. "The breeding stock you keep back makes a difference," says Martin. Phil concurred, "Too many niche farmers just pull their replacement gilts out of the finisher with little to no reason other than they need gilts."

Phil continued, "Selection should start when pigs are young. Look at the sow's

litter size and her mothering ability (how careful she is around her pigs). Look at the gilts in litters with good mothers. Are they the bigger ones, and do they have good underlines? Then mark them for future reference (ear-notches or ear-tags), and when you select replacement gilts, use this reference to choose gilts from good sows with good litters."

The importance of selection is substantiated from data from Dr. Yushi Li, a researcher with the University of Minnesota. Dr. Li found that 12% of the sows in her bedded pen farrowing research had no piglet mortality, while 25% had 40% mortality. She also found that sows with 20% mortality in initial farrowings tended to have about 20% mortality in subsequent farrowings. These data reinforce Phil's advice, "The best way that I can see to improve mothering ability is selection, selection, selection."



Martin Kramer standing by hoop building at his farm



Inside one of Martin's farrowing pens

Linking Land and Livestock

Tips for successful custom grazing arrangements

Question: What do the following trends have in common?

- ❖ Young producers want to graze but lack capital to build their operations.
- ❖ Prices for beef cattle and feed are up.
- ❖ Conservation Reserve Program contracts are expiring and many pastures may be planted to corn.
- ❖ Our farmer population is aging.
- ❖ There is a rise in absentee landowners and land owned for recreation.

Answer: Together they make this a good time to link land and cow owners with other livestock operators in custom grazing arrangements.

Practical Farmers of Iowa recently collaborated with Joe Sellers, of Iowa State University Extension and a PFI member, to complete a Custom Grazing Survey of 50 operations in Iowa and Northern Missouri. Leopold Center funds were used to hire Carl Neifert, a retired livestock specialist for ISU Extension to conduct the survey.

The survey included a wide range in the size, scale and scope of operations. Some were cow-calf operations with a year-round feeding component, others cow-calf operations with summer feeding only, and a third where calves or yearlings were stocked just for the summer grazing season.

As part of the survey, the researchers asked:

“What are the issues to cover in custom-grazing leases, the pitfalls to avoid, and the conditions to address?”

Here are the graziers' comments:

Know your client. The integrity of the cattle owner is extremely important. Check out the owner's credentials, credit history, prior clients and references.

Know the cattle. Know their weight and conditions of coming in, disposition, health status and breeding/genetics. Do not accept sale barn cattle.

Have a written agreement. Thoroughly cover who does what and who pays for what. This should include supplemental feeding and care (or cattle removal) during drought conditions, arrival and removal dates, health supplies and treatments, dates of payment, and all potential cattle grazing inputs.

Match the carrying capacity of the pasture to the cattle and grazing season. Don't overestimate your pasture's production. Using higher-productive pastures in a well-fertilized, rotational system can yield more carrying capacity.

Protect your income interest by filing notice under Uniform Commercial Code.

Establish a prompt payment schedule and obtain the final payment before cattle are removed.

Communicate with the owner regularly to establish a trusting relationship. Keep the cattle owner informed about good and bad events. Nobody likes a surprise.

Make sure you cover all your costs, including extra labor to handle/process cattle and realistic feed costs. Include all your fixed and variable costs.

Consider surcharges or incentive payments as a reward for better management or for extra labor. For example, higher rates need to be charged when more “added-value” management is provided in a specialized program for grass-fed beef.

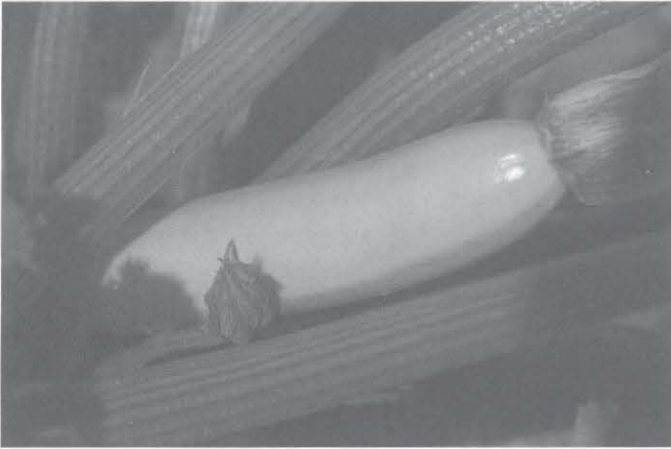
To view the survey results, including the fees received for grazing arrangements and services included in grazing contracts, download the three easy-to-read factsheets, at the Iowa Beef Center:

www.iowabeefcenter.org

Thank you to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture for supporting this project.



Joe Sellers speaks to a group amid pasture at the DeCook Ranch near Lovilia.



Fruit and Vegetable Clusters Launched

PFI has recently added fruit and vegetable clusters to its repertoire, and we're not talking about a new value-added food product. These clusters are groups of Iowa fruit and vegetable growers who have joined together to discuss and resolve issues of common need and concern.

Funded with a one year grant from the Ceres Foundation, the project is part of PFI's effort to broaden its work with horticultural crops. Interest is strong—45 people completed surveys and signed up to participate. The three clusters are geographically distributed

in Ames, Cedar Rapids, and the Linden / Winterset area.

Funding for the project will enable PFI staff to facilitate at least four meetings during the winter for each cluster. The PFI facilitator is available to serve as an informational researcher and resource person. Primarily, the objective is for the cluster group itself to work together as much as possible to find solutions. Each group has met once with lively and productive discussion, and valuable networking resulting. Each cluster has started to bond as a group, and discuss specific methods of working together. Examples include collaborative efforts to partner on a CSA, with each participant specializing in certain crops; sharing the use of mutually-purchased equipment, land or greenhouse space; and going together on a bulk order of seeds.

There is a limited amount of seed money to be used as determined by each cluster. Possibilities include hiring a knowledgeable specialist to speak to the group, paying the fees of cluster members to attend a relevant conference, or purchasing equipment the cluster identifies as a strong need. The list of possible topics for further focus is plentiful, including CSA's, farmers' markets, season extending methods and techniques, equipment selection/use/repair, post-harvest handling, and efficiency of operation.

If you would like more information on the fruit and vegetable clusters, contact Jim Clark at (515)232-5661, ext. 107 or jim@practicalfarmers.org.



PFI Receives More Grazing Grant Money

Practical Farmers of Iowa has received another grant for its grazing work, this time from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The foundation is particularly interested in enhancing bird habitat while making grass-based production systems more profitable in Southern Iowa. The \$186,900 grant will fund additional grazing clusters, field days, education and outreach on grass-based production systems, and provides a subgrant to Iowa State University for monitoring bird habitat on public and private lands in the Grand River Grasslands of Southern Iowa. PFI member and ISU Professor David Engle will be in charge of the habitat monitoring, while PFI's Tom German and Sarah Carlson oversee the rest of the project.

Report on PFI's Grazing Clusters

- ❖ Fifty-four PFI members are participating in PFI's Grazing Clusters.
- ❖ Clusters have been formed for Northeast (Decorah), Southeast (Williamsburg), Northwest (Cherokee), Central (Ankeny) and South-central Iowa (Osceola).
- ❖ All five clusters have met at least once; two have met twice.
- ❖ The clusters are being ably led by grazier Tom German and participants decide the topics for discussion and how they will spend the cluster's seed money.
- ❖ The Northeast Iowa group has taken a pasture walk on Bill Pardee's farm and heard a talk from Ryan Herman about carbon trading.
- ❖ The Southeast group welcomed a talk by Karl Dallefield, who sells grass-fed beef to Thousand Hills Cattle Company.
- ❖ Some members will begin monitoring water quality on their grazing operation in early 2008: Lynn Rinderknecht, Autumn Ogden, Bruce Carney, Jerry Peckum, Greg Koether, and Laura DeCook.
- ❖ Two more clusters will be formed in Southern Iowa in early 2008 (see box on this page)
- ❖ If you would like to participate and haven't contacted us (or we failed to return your message), please contact Tom German, project coordinator: (712)830-3281.

Farm to ISU Program Launches

Consumer demand for local, sustainable and organic food is increasing. Luther College, Grinnell College, Central College, Drake University, and Iowa State University are all in various stages of implementing programs to increase their purchases of local products. ISU launched a Farm to ISU program in the spring of 2007 to progressively increase its purchase of local, sustainable and organic foods over the next five years. The university's ultimate goal is to purchase at least 35 percent of their \$6 million food budget locally. PFI, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Farmers Union and the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture have assisted ISU in planning and implementing this program.

This past October, long-time PFI members Vic and Cindy Madsen of Audubon sold more than \$1,000 of poultry meat to ISU. The product was consumed at residential dining centers, cafes, and restaurants across the ISU campus. The Madsen's poultry was also featured in several all-Iowa meals for special events.

One example of ISU promotional efforts is the placement of prominently displayed placards that identify the source of the food. The photo below shows a placard recognizing the apples grown by new Deal's Orchard, in Jefferson, Iowa. During this past fall ISU



purchased more than 50,000 apples from Deal's Orchard. This was the first time that Deal's Orchard has sold to ISU. "The Farm to ISU program has been wonderful for me," Jerry Deal stated. "I have nothing but positive things to say about it."

Some farmers have noted constraints that have prevented them from participating in the Farm to ISU program. In an informal survey conducted by the Iowa Farmers Union, a number of farmers noted that they did not participate due to not having a large enough amount of product. Others found purchasing requirements too strict, such as the requirement for the farmer to have insurance and use specific boxes for certain products. ISU Dining remains committed to their ultimate goal and has been working hard to overcome these barriers. They have simplified some of their purchasing requirements and have implemented several improvements suggested by farmers.

If you are interested in learning more about the Farm to ISU program, contact Sue DeBlicke at 515-294-2892.

Members in the News



There are literally too many members in the news to list all articles in this newsletter! This is an indication of how talented and newsworthy members of PFI are. For a complete list, visit our website, www.practicalfarmers.org. If you are a member in the news and we have not captured your story, please contact Sally at (515)232-5661 or sally@practicalfarmers.org. Here is a small sampling of members in the news from the past three months:

- ❖ Joyce Lock was featured in *The Des Moines Register* on 11/14/07 with her new board game, "Foodie Fight."
- ❖ Ron Rosmann's on-farm study was featured in *Organic Farming Research Foundation's Information Bulletin* Fall 2007.
- ❖ Rob and Tammy Faux of Genuine Faux Farm in northeast Iowa were featured in the *Energy Times* in November of 2007. Their CSA and sustainable mind-set served as an example of a popular alternative to chemical-based farming.
- ❖ Francis Thicke wrote an opinion letter that was published in *The Des Moines Register* 12/6/07 that argued against CAFO operations qualifying for conservation money.
- ❖ Helen Gunderson, Matt Liebman, and Marilyn Anderson discussed urban farming in *Ames Life and Times* 11/07.
- ❖ LaVon Griffieon shared her Thanksgiving tale of a mobile turkey in *The Des Moines Register* on 11/20/07
- ❖ Jean Caspers-Simmet, writer for *Agri News*, raved about her CSA share through Sunflower Fields Community Supported Agriculture run by Michael Nash and Solveig Hanson.
- ❖ Cornelia Flora made print in the opinion section of *The Des Moines Register* on 11/6/07. She gave her take on immigration.
- ❖ Jerry Peckumn discusses corn and environmental stewardship in *The Ames Tribune*, 12/18/07.
- ❖ Teresa Adams Tomka discusses mouth-watering soups in *The Des Moines Register* on 1/9/08.
- ❖ Dordt College makes *Agri News* on 12/13/07 with their crop variety trial results.
- ❖ Jude Becker's acorn-fed pork makes the news in *The Des Moines Register* 12/19/07.
- ❖ Tom Cory tells the story of his land in *The Des Moines Register* on 12/4/07.
- ❖ Barn Happy, a family restaurant owned by Kris and Tim Boettger, was in *Country News* on 11/8/07. The article featured some of their signature products and highlighted a sampling of local products this restaurant offers.

PFI Starts Next Generation Project

Practical Farmers of Iowa would like to see more young farmers successfully transition into farming!

According to the Center for Rural Affairs, the population of U.S. agriculture is poised to make a dramatic change - half of all current farmers are likely to retire in the next decade.

A number of you in the next generation are ready and eager to take on the job, but open cross generational communication is essential to a successful transition. Many PFI members are already working to transition the next generation onto the farm—a transition that has never been easy and has new challenges today.



The Beard family is transitioning the next generation onto the farm

We want you!

Do you have a son or daughter that you're bringing onto the operation? Or do you have someone outside the family that you would like to potentially take over the operation one day?

Thanks to funding from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the King Corn Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa will provide programming in 2008 and 2009 to train and mentor families and farmer/apprentice matches who are currently transitioning or looking for ways to transition someone in the next generation onto their farm.

What to look for:

We will create a learning community of cross generational matches that will receive training in the areas of communication, goal setting, and vision alignment in February and March 2008, and financial, business and estate planning in November 2008. The second year's trainings will be decided by the learning community. Also included in the programming are a listserv, conference calls, field days, annual conference sessions, and more.

These initial trainings are based on feedback we received from the 11 families interviewed in the Fall 2007 Practical Farmer. We found these themes in the interviewee's words that we will try to address:

❖ "You have to be sure to listen and be willing to look at things the younger generation suggests....Be open to looking at things differently."

❖ "The challenge is, is there an opportunity for the next generation?...Everything's getting so big to survive."

❖ "Make sure they're on the same page when they return from an agricultural college."

❖ "That's probably where we get into trouble. We don't take time to evaluate."

❖ "Figure out how to work together and not get angry with each other, and how to work out a business plan so nobody feels like they're getting a bad deal."

If you fit this description and are interested in participating in a learning community, please contact Cedar Johnson, (515)232-5661, cedar@practicalfarmers.org, as soon as possible. The first training session will be in February of 2008, so sign up soon!

Iowa Food Cooperative Update

Work on the Iowa Food Cooperative continues! We have information on what products consumers desire and what products farmers have available from over 250 people who want to participate. We have estimated potential sales of different products by examining Oklahoma Food Cooperative data. We are examining possible distribution sites for deliveries and pickups, with plans to start in the Des Moines metro area. We are working to adapt the inventory and ordering software used by the Oklahoma Food Coop so it fits our needs. A draft business plan has been completed, and plans are to launch the Iowa Food Cooperative this spring. If you are interested in participating (and you haven't already expressed your interest), please contact Jim Clark at jim@practicalfarmers.org or (515)232-5661 ext 107.

Breeding Corn for Sustainability: Another Year's Work

By Sarah Carlson

In fall of 2006, PFI introduced a new project involving Linda Pollak, a USDA-ARS corn breeder, Walter Goldstein with the Michael Fields Institute and several PFI cooperators who conducted on-farm yield trials. The major focus of the project continues to be three-fold:

- 1— Breed corn varieties with unique quality characteristics such as high methionine;
- 2— Breed corn with high yield adapted to agricultural systems using low inputs;
- 3— Breed corn varieties that do not accept GMO pollen.

Cooperators are needed for the open-pollinated corn project during the 2008 growing season. The following describes each type of project and the plan of work involved.

1— Strip trials (8 cooperators needed)

Objective: To test synthetic populations and high-methionine hybrids in large plots before release.

Plan of work: Cooperator will plant, maintain and harvest the crop through the growing season in a randomized, replicated design. Provide 1-2 pounds harvested seed of each variety to USDA-ARS for testing. 2-3 varieties

Dimension: Several acres

2— Seed increase

Objective: To increase a population in order to get seed amounts for USDA-ARS or Michael Fields so that farmers can: try it on their own farms, conduct strip trials, or produce for seed release. Provide 500 ears to USDA-ARS.

Plan of work: Cooperator will bulk plant, maintain and harvest one variety.

Dimension: one-half to one acre.

3— On-farm selection

Objective: To select varieties which are adapted to cooperators' farm environment

Plan of work: Cooperator will plant, maintain and harvest bulk plot; USDA-ARS will provide assistance on selection methods

Dimension: one half to one acre

4— Yield Trials (full)

Objective: To test yield and agronomic traits of populations and experimental hybrids from the USDA-ARS and Michael Fields breeding programs in replicated small plots.

Plan of work: Cooperator will prepare the field, rotary hoe, cultivate if possible, and monitor the crop through the growing season. USDA-ARS will plant, cultivate if necessary, collect data, and harvest the crop with a plot combine. Cooperator will keep the corn except for small samples for lab analysis collected by USDA-ARS.

Dimension: several acres



Please contact Sarah Carlson at sarah@practicalfarmers.org or (515)232-5661 if you are interested in participating.

Iowa State Extension releases bulletins based on PFI on-farm research

Two new Iowa State University Extension bulletins, SA-13 and SA-14 are in the Sustainable Agriculture series, which highlights farmer research. For two years PFI members, Gary and Nancy Guthrie (Nevada) treated the ears of their sweet corn with a mix of vegetable oil and Btk (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, var. *kurstaki*) to limit damage from corn earworm. *Protecting Sweet Corn from the Corn Earworm with Vegetable Oil and Btk*, SA-14 reports the effectiveness and economics of the practice based on their experiment. The bulletin can be downloaded for free from

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/SA14.pdf>.

For three years, PFI evaluated two approaches to fertilization side by side on six cooperator farms and two ISU research farms. SA-13, *Soil Fertility Management Strategies – Philosophies, Crop Response and Costs* reports the findings from this project. The purpose of the study was to find the near-term outcomes farmers can expect from using either of two contrasting approaches to soil fertility. The *sufficiency* fertility model asks whether there is *enough* fertility, while the *cation ratio* model looks

for a certain *balance* of nutrients. The bulletin explains how the project was carried out as well as the process used to reach conclusions. SA-13 is available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/SA13.pdf>. Fertility project cooperators included Dennis and Eve Abbas (Hampton), Doug Alert and Margaret Smith (Hampton), John Bokelman (Ventura), Bernie Havlovic (Lewis), Dave and Lisa Lubben (Monticello), Paul and Karen Mugge (Sutherland), and the New Melleray Abbey (Peosta).

Jeff Klinge Joins PFI Board of Directors

Jeff Klinge is a life-long farmer, who raises organic grass-fed cattle and organic grains. He is the 4th generation in his family of farmers. Jeff has been a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa since 1986, PFI's second year in existence. Jeff farms 305 acres of his own land, land that was farmed by his father, near Farmersburg. Jeff received organic certification in 1997. Even before this time he was an unconventional farmer: Jeff has marketed natural beef for twenty years, used extensive crop rotations for most of his farming career, and didn't use chemicals in small grains because it was "unnecessary and it cost money," Jeff claims.

Jeff conversion to organics was a survival technique to maintain a profitable livelihood without depending on an off-farm job. Jeff furthermore didn't like conventional agriculture trends, and had bad experiences while employed at a fertilizer plant. His transition to organic was easy because he had many principles and practices paralleling organics in place. "I'm surprised there aren't way more organic growers in Iowa because of all of the fertile land," Jeff contemplates.

Jeff raises a lot of small grains because of their viability: "If others realized there was profitability in small grains, more people would grow them; especially with Decorah land that is not as flat as central Iowa."



Jeff Klinge

Jeff feels like he has been in the sustainable agriculture community long enough that it is his turn to serve. "I got into sustainable and organics a lot because of PFI's influence. I owe them the work back," Jeff said.

Jeff has been quite active in the PFI community. He has participated in on-farm research and demonstration, comparing organic and conventional practices from a financial standpoint, and has created some strong data in favor of organics. Jeff is part of the grazing clusters, attends the annual conference, field days, pasture walks, and district meetings. Jeff and his local community of sustainable farmers are discussing solutions to the challenge they have faced finding certified and nearby processing lockers.

As a board member, Jeff would like to increase membership along with the number of Iowa farmers who farm as stewards. He believes ethanol and the surge of corn prices have put a wrench in connecting people with how to be sustainable on their farms. He wants to encourage sustainability because it is "the right way to farm, as well as profitable."

PFI welcomes two additional new board members, Ann Cromwell and Heather Johnson. Learn more about them in PFI's spring newsletter.

PFI Camp 2008

The Wonder Under Us

Do you like exploring Iowa's wild places? Come discover The Wonder Under Us! Learn how farmers are protecting Iowa's land. Show us how you would protect the land if it were yours.

Plus:

- ❖ Play in the creek
- ❖ Climb the wall
- ❖ Canoeing, archery, and much more!

Summer Camp

When: June 18-21, 2008

Where: Boone Y-Camp

Who: Ages 7-13, children 6 and under can attend with an adult

Youth Leadership Program

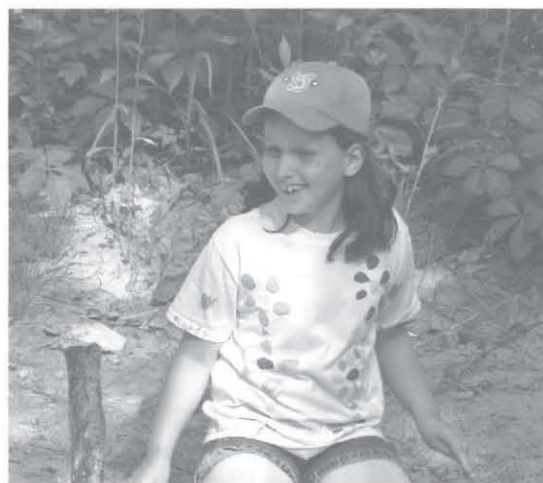
When: June 16-18, 2008

Where: Boone Y-Camp and Ledges State Park

Who: Youth ages 14-18, come camp with friends and learn leadership skills for Summer Camp and beyond!

PFI camp is a family camp for people of all ages. Children 6 and under attend camp free, and must be accompanied by an adult. Teen counselors participating in the Youth Leadership Program, June 16-18, also attend summer camp free.

For more information please contact Cedar Johnson, cedar@practicalfarmers.org, (515)232-5661.



Karly Tomlinson plays in the creek at the 2007 PFI Camp

See page 23 for Summer Camp information!

February

NPSAS 29th Annual Winter Conference, "Still Growing From the Ground Up," February 8-9, Best Western Seven Seas hotel, Mandan, ND. John Doran and Fred Kirschenmann give the keynote address. Diverse workshop lineup, organic and locally grown meals. For more information visit <http://www.npsas.org> or call (701)883-4304

2008 Cut Flower Growers School, February 9-10, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI. Learn from experienced growers about variety selection, planting and harvest methods, post-harvest handling, pest management, and direct marketing. To register, contact John Hendrickson, (608)265-3704 or jhendric@wisc.edu

The 16th Annual Wisconsin Grazing Conference, February 14-16, Holiday Inn, Stevens Point, WI. Workshops focusing on varying grazing topics, from grass-fed beef to dairy grazing. For more information, visit www.grassworks.org or contact Paul Nehring at (715)261-6009.

28th Annual Missouri Small Fruit and Vegetable Conference February 18-20, Clarion Inn and Conference Center, Springfield, Missouri. Farm tours, fruit, vegetable, and ornamental sessions. For more information, visit <http://www.mtngvr.missouristate.edu/commercial/conference.htm> or call (417)547-7533.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Convention "Expect the Unexpected!" February 18-20, Kalahari Resort Waterpark and Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI. Sessions and workshops look at latest trends in marketing and agritourism as well as production practices. Three-day bus tour precedes the conference. For more information, visit <http://www.nafdma.com> or call (413)529-0386.

Coming Home to Eat: OEFFA's 29th Annual Conference, February 16-17, Granville School, Granville, OH. Keynote speakers are Kamyar Enshayan and Joel Huesby. Conference features nearly 50 workshops, locally-sourced food, a kid's conference, trade show, and Saturday evening dance. For more information visit <http://www.oeffa.org> or call (614)421-2022.

19th Annual Organic Farming Conference, February 21-23, LaCrosse Center, LaCrosse, WI. 60 workshops, over 130 exhibitors, organic research symposium, organic meals, music, and networking. For more information visit www.mosesorganic.org or call (715)772-3153.

Mini-School Series for Community Supported Agriculture, February 23, Kalamazoo Public Library, Kalamazoo, MI. A day-long intensive mini-school covering topics specific for CSAs. For more information, visit <http://www.csafarms.org> or call (877)526-1441

2008 Shivers Memorial Lecture, "Family Farms in an Era of Global Uncertainty," February 24th, ISU Memorial Union, 7 p.m., Ames. Presented by John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics at the University of Missouri Columbia. The lecture is sponsored by the Leopold Center and the ISU Chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta Honorary Society for Agriculture. Contact: Mary Adams, (515)294-5832, madams@iastate.edu.

SPIN Cities: Farming Where We Live, February 28-29, The Mitchell Park Pavilion at the Domes, Milwaukee, WI. Developer of SPIN farming and urban farmer Wally Satzewich, and his partner Gail Vandersteen, discuss how to profitably farm in urban areas. Visit www.spinfarming.com or call Roxanne at (610)505-9189 for more information.

March

Mini-School Series for Community Supported Agriculture, March 8, Leslee Science Center, Ann Arbor, MI. A day-long intensive mini-school covering topics specific for CSAs. For more information, visit <http://www.csafarms.org> or call (877)526-1441

Leopold Center Marketing and Food Systems Initiative Workshop, March 11, Gateway Conference Center, Ames. Featuring presentations by projects currently funded by the Leopold Center and the Value Chain Partnerships project. On-line registration to be available soon. Contact: Beth Larabee, (515)294-8530, blarabee@iastate.edu.

Pork Niche Market Working Group Quarterly Meeting, March 12, Iowa Institute for Cooperatives, Ames. Contact Gary Huber, (515)232-5661, gary@practicalfarmers.org for more information.

Leopold Center Ecology Initiative Workshop, March 14, location to be announced. Watch for more details. Featuring presentations by projects currently funded by the Leopold Center. Contact: Jeri Neal, (515)294-5610, wink@iastate.edu

SARE 2008 National Conference—The New American Farm: Advancing the Frontier of Sustainable Agriculture, March 25-27, Westin Crown Center Hotel, Kansas City, MO. Marketing and production workshops, local farm tours, networking, grant opportunities outlined. For more information visit <http://www.sare.org/2008conference> or call (573)882-8320

Sustain the PFI Legacy

Remember Practical Farmers of Iowa in your will.



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

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

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

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

New PFI Members- Welcome!

District 1

Adam and Lucy Cameron, *Danbury*
Gene Ebert, *Washta*
Nancy Groves, *Cherokee*

District 2

Blue River Hybrids, Maury Johnson, *Kelley*
Vaughn Borchardt, *Fenton*
Lee and Lori Burras, *Ames*
Joe and Shannon Colletti, *Ames*
Wade Dooley and Jared McRill, *Albion*
Stefan Gailans, *Ames*
Tom and Cathy Kaspar, *Ames*
Alice McGary, *Ames*
Russell Mullen, *Ames*
Robert G. Riehm, *Ames*
Dan Schmidt, *Marshalltown*
Art Staniforth, *Ames*
Arion Thiboumery, *Ames*
Dan West, *Ames*
Wheatsfield Cooperative, Stacey Brown, *Ames*

District 3

Paul Baglyos, *Dubuque*
Eugene and Ryan Herman, *New Albin*
Barb Kraus, *Decorah*
David and Michele Miller, *Mount Vernon*
Bill Pardee and Catherine Rawitt, *Decorah*
UNI Local Food Project, Salome
Phillmann, *Cedar Falls*
James Ranum, *Waukon*
Dave and Paula Stevenson, *Waverly*
Ellen Walsh, *Elgin*
Joseph Ward, *Marion*

District 4

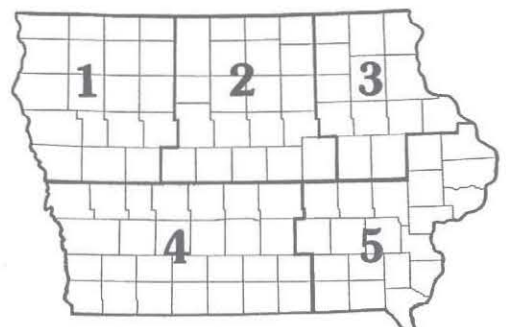
Mary Bernau, *Altoona*
Jerry Bogart, *Des Moines*
Brandon and Anne Marie Burnett, *Norwalk*
Brian and Julie Donaghy, *Martensdale*
John and Joe Geddes, *West Des Moines*
Sharon Krause, *Adair*
Arland Peterson, *Winterset*
Scott Remington, *Des Moines*
Linda Wormley and Isaac Garlington, *Newton*
Brian Zachary, *Creston*

District 5

Anne Coatar, *Iowa City*
Andrew Dunham, *Grinnell*
Chris Eichorn, *Williamsburg*
Eileen Fisher, *Solon*
Julie Hegmann, *Iowa City*
Samuel and Daniel Maibach, *Bloomfield*
Jeremy Saugstad, *Grinnell*

District 6 (Outside of Iowa)

Center for Rural Affairs, Traci Bruckner, *Lyons, NE*
Jim, Alison, and Lou Deutsch, *Arcadia, WI*
Fred Mattes, *Hastings, NE*



Merchandise

Be a proud PFI member!
Wear a PFI shirt, cap yourself with a PFI hat,
shop with a PFI tote bag...

Casual Cap—\$12
 Khaki, Velcro closure, “Healthy Food, Diverse Farms, Vibrant Communities” tagline printed on back.



_____ QTY _____ \$

Farmer Cap—\$8
 Summer style farmer cap with light denim cotton front and mesh back.



_____ QTY _____ \$

T-shirt—\$10
 Heavyweight, 6.1 oz
 100% cotton jersey in S, L–2XL.
 White with full-color Buy Fresh, Buy Local logo on front.



_____ QTY _____ SIZE _____ \$

Grocery Tote—\$10
 Natural color 100% cotton canvas tote with full color Buy Fresh, Buy Local logo. Perfect for grocery shopping, or taking to the farmers market.



_____ QTY _____ \$

Practical Farmers of Iowa
 PO Box 349
 Ames, IA 50010
 (515)232-5661
www.practicalfarmers.org



Notecards—\$6 for set of 8
 Colorful, picturesque photos of Iowa’s agricultural landscape by Jerry Dewitt

_____ QTY _____ \$

White PFI T-shirt, Size S–XL—\$15
 PFI logo on front with tagline on back



_____ QTY _____ \$

Colored PFI T-shirt, available in gray, orange, and safety green, Size S–XL—\$15



Scenic landscape with Practical Farmers of Iowa caption on front of shirt

_____ QTY _____ \$

Subtotal: _____

S & H:* _____

Total: _____

***Shipping and Handling: \$3 for the first item, \$1 for each additional item**

Payment

- Check Payable to:
Practical Farmers of Iowa
- Credit Card
 - Mastercard
 - Visa

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

Support Our Efforts ~ Sustain Our Work

This annual membership is a:

- new membership
- renewal

I am joining at the level of:

- Student—\$15
- Individual—\$25
- Farm or Household—\$35
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups)—\$50

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

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

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

Sustain PFI

For the sake of the long term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee.

I would like to make a tax deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

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

Individual or Farm or Organization Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Primary Phone (with area code): _____

Alternate Phone (with area code): _____

E-mail: _____

* For Farm/Household membership, please list names of persons included.

* For Organization membership, please list one or two contact persons.

Payment:

Total: \$ _____ = \$ _____ membership + \$ _____ donation + \$ _____ merchandise (from opposite page)

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

Credit Card Visa MasterCard

Card Number _____

Expiration Date _____ Signature _____

Our Vision for Iowa



Food that is celebrated
for its freshness
and flavor
and connection
to local farmers
to seasons
to hard work
and good stewardship



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



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



Practical Farmers of Iowa

P.O. Box 349
Ames, IA. 50010

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Waterloo, IA
Permit No. 901

Healthy Food, Diverse Farms, Vibrant Communities