

the PRACTICAL FARMER

SPRING 2022



In This Issue:

**Building Resilience for People,
Farms and Wildlife**

Our Role on the Landscape

**Are Small Direct-Market Farms
in Financial Trouble?**





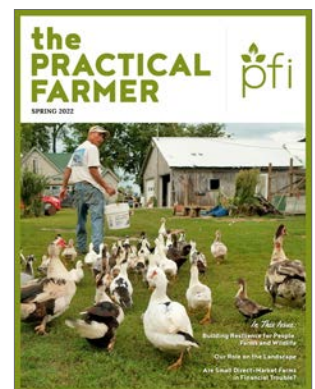
The sun rises over the Shey family farm near Algona, Iowa. Jane Shey speaks about her experience being a landowner and working with her tenants to restore the land using cover crops on pages 22-23.

FEATURES

- 6 SUSTAINABLE AG ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**
Farming to Engage People and Land
For over 25 years, Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf have helped lead and grow the local foods movement in north-central Iowa
- 10 HABITAT**
Building Resilience for People, Farms and Wildlife
Angela Smith is using native habitat to build resilience and adapt her farm – and the critters who call it home – to a changing climate
- 12 ANNUAL CONFERENCE PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS**
- 16 HORTICULTURE**
Are Small Direct-Market Farms in Financial Trouble?
A former farmer responds to the stark findings of a Pasa Sustainable Agriculture report.
- 18 FIELD CROPS**
Asking Those Who Knew
Retired ISU professor Matt Liebman made a career out of listening to and learning from farmers.
- 22 COVER CROPS**
Our Role on the Landscape
Landowner Jane Shey connects with tenants to restore the land.
- 24 FARMER STORIES**
Connection Through Story
Read five PFI members' experiences of water's healing, harrowing and humorous potential. The stories were first delivered live during our 2022 annual conference.
- 32 LIVESTOCK**
Working Together for a Hopeful Future
Beginning farmers Beth Hoffman and John Hogeland are working to build a farm that sustains people, nature and communities.
- 34 BEGINNING FARMERS**
SIP Class of 2023
Meet the newest class of participants in PFI's Savings Incentive Program.
- 36 STRATEGIC PLAN**
From Three to 10 to 30
Learn about PFI's organizational restructure, and our evolution to continue creating farm and landscape change.

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTE**
- 38 MEMBER BOOK REVIEW**
"Bet The Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America"
– Reviewed by Susan Kasal Young
- 39 PFI NEWS**
- 40 CALENDAR**
- 41 NEW MEMBERS**
- 43 JOIN PFI**



ON THE COVER: Phrakhounmany "Air" Philavanh leads a group of hungry ducks across his farm in Milo, Iowa. He shares a story about his childhood in Laos on page 26.



WHAT WE DO

Practical Farmers of Iowa was founded in 1985 as an organization for farmers. We use farmer-led investigation and information sharing to help farmers practice an agriculture that benefits both the land and people.

OUR MISSION

Practical Farmers of Iowa's mission is equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.

OUR VISION

An Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

OUR VALUES

Welcoming everyone

Farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge

Curiosity, creativity, collaboration and community

Resilient farms now and for future generations

Stewardship of land and resources

THE PRACTICAL FARMER

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership to help keep farmers and friends of farmers in touch with one another through informative articles on relevant farming topics, current on-farm research, upcoming events and other news of interest.

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Back issues are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, articles may be reprinted or adapted if credit is given. Clippings and notice are appreciated.



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From Adversity to Opportunity With the Help of Friends

Change Is Hard

Change and adversity are intertwined. Sometimes hardship begets change, such as health issues, loss of income, climate change or, ahem, a pandemic. But sometimes the change is purposeful and forward-looking.

How can we set ourselves up for a better future state? Regardless, it is often impossible to tell what came first, the adversity or the change. And the cycle of change and adversity repeats itself again and again. Even when we intend to change, change is hard. It forces us from our familiar and is accompanied with difficult conversations and decisions. While it can be human nature to shy away from these discomforts, they help us to be drivers for change, rather than passengers that are simply reactive to it.

I had the pleasure of attending a training that the Iowa Food Systems Coalition put on recently titled "Reimagining Our Food System." This training asked some honest and solutions-based questions about how we work together to create a healthy food system that is accessible for everyone.

During this training, we were asked to reflect on how we act when we are confronted with discomfort. We learned that sometimes we shut down. Or, we can try to minimize the discomfort without working through it, which means that the discomfort is left unaddressed.

But if we lean in to the uneasiness, we can work through it. When we have uncomfortable conversations, it's important that we acknowledge we're human, and that discomfort is taxing. It's also important to not take responsibility for things we can't change, to know our circle of influence and focus on changing what we can.

Change Is Less Hard With a Support Network

Having some stability in your life helps us with change. For me, as many of you, that stability comes from my PFI network. While this network has grown, it has remained an unwavering source of support and creativity for many of us.



February Food Fun at the PFI Office: In a spirit of food festivity (and friendly competition), PFI staff had a bit of February fun celebrating a Midwestern culinary tradition: the fluff salad. Pictured here are the winners, from left to right: Lydia English, with her lemon-raspberry Jello "fluff"; Ryan Hansen, an AmeriCorps member, with his "grey forest fluff (aka poor person's black forest cake)"; Suzi Howk, with her "green stuff" lime Jello-based dish full of minced veggies; and Sally Worley, with her "creamy pineapple fluff."

Vic Madsen, long-time PFI member, board member and farmer near Audubon, Iowa, watched our annual conference via livestream. He said: "I saw happy, talented people speaking from the heart. It doesn't get any better than that. Someone told me many years ago that PFI is a safe place. To me, that means a place where people can be themselves without worrying about how others will judge them. How the safe-place attitude comes about is far above me. It probably starts with friendly, caring people who are not judgmental and people who are not self-promoting. Whatever makes it work, we need to keep doing it."

Early PFI members, like Vic, set the tone for this welcoming network, where we "get along, but don't go along." We have been able to keep this space one where we can freely share our mosaic of ideas and farm systems with each other. This is so important for us in our individual and shared efforts.

This community, where people can be themselves – and can ask candid questions about aspirations and challenges – is a change-enabler. Done with purpose, in collaboration and with a plan, change is an opportunity. Practical Farmers of Iowa is not immune to change. In fact, as we grow, change is inevitable. But as you'll see on

pages 36-37, we are approaching the need to update our staff structure with intention and a sense of purpose so we are well-positioned for success, impact and growth.

We just finished up our winter season of events. At the Beginning Farmer Summit, participants in one networking group were asked to talk with one other and describe a community they belong to and what makes them feel part of that community. Here are a couple of reflections shared with the group:

David Arnold, Marshalltown, Iowa: "My community brings mutual curiosity and mutual hope for success for everyone in it."

Nancy Brannaman, Lisbon, Iowa: "We have shared values, including around caring for the land. And we realize that caring for the land can heal other hurts in our lives."

Thanks to all of you who joined us in community, and learning, to together work toward an Iowa with diverse farms, healthy food and vibrant communities. Together, we are changing the world.

Sally Worley

Farming to Engage People and Land

For over 25 years, Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf have helped lead and grow the local foods movement in north-central Iowa

By Tamsyn Jones

When lifetime PFI members Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf started their diversified vegetable farm near Kanawha, Iowa, in the mid-1990s, they had no idea they'd become part of the leading edge of Iowa's nascent local foods movement. Their goal was to make a positive contribution to agriculture in their community, and to connect people to land, food and each other.

Leaders and "Compassionate Activists"

More than 20 years later, the couple has been instrumental in efforts to strengthen north-central Iowa's regional food system through their farm, One Step at a Time Gardens, and their ongoing work to push the local foods conversation, raise the profile of local farms and connect more people to locally raised food.

"Getting into farming," Jan says, "was an opportunity for Tim and I to put our skills together and make an impact on rural economic development."

Today, One Step at a Time Gardens is a 132-acre diversified farm comprising cash-rented row crop land, vegetable fields, fruit and tree plantings and extensive habitat plantings, restored prairie and wetlands. For over 20 years, Jan and Tim operated a community supported agriculture operation that, at its peak, supplied fresh produce to 150 families in north-central Iowa and Des Moines.

In 2011, Jan helped to found Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, which connects and educates in support of the local food system. In 2014, a Healthy Harvest of North Iowa project launched North Iowa Fresh, which grew into a regional food hub. And though retired from farming, Jan is currently working with the Iowa Food Systems Coalition to craft a statewide plan for Iowa's local and regional food systems.

Jan and Tim have shown leadership in other ways too. They have conducted on-farm research with PFI and others; shared their knowledge at PFI field days and mentored numerous beginning and aspiring farmers. From 2006-2014, Tim served on Practical Farmers' board of directors, including as board president, and both Jan and Tim have served on various committees for PFI.



“Getting into farming was a way for Tim and I to put our skills together and make an impact on rural economic development.”

- JAN LIBBEY

For these efforts, Jan and Tim were honored with PFI's 2022 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award, which recognizes an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food. The award was presented virtually during PFI's 2022 annual conference in Ames, Iowa.

“This award is a great honor, and we are quite humbled,” Tim says. “This award lifts up leaders that reflect the PFI vision. We think we’ve just been doing our part – so we are awed and appreciative of this recognition.”

“Jan and Tim have shown a true commitment to sustainable agriculture,” says Irene Frantzen, a lifetime member of PFI and past award recipient who, with her husband, Tom, nominated Jan and Tim for the award.

“They have been pillars in our PFI family, great mentors to others and they care deeply about the land and water, a healthy environment and people in general. They exemplify true leadership and compassionate activism.”

Finding Purpose in Positive Action

Looking back, it's hard to imagine Iowa's local food scene without Jan and Tim. But the couple's journey to farming and the center of north-central Iowa's local foods movement was not something they could have predicted. Both nature lovers at heart, they moved in 1990 to the Kanawha land they built their farm on, attracted by its natural beauty – rolling hills formed by the last glacier; proximity to East Twin Lake



(Above): Tim Landgraf and Jan Libbey stand by the sign with their farm name and motto. “That’s what this work is all about,” Jan says, “one step at a time working toward a more sustainable relationship with the land, and with each other.” (Opposite) Jan and Tim pose by their PFI on-farm research sign. The sign’s logo, which dates to PFI’s early days, reveals the couple’s long-time membership status.

Wildlife Management Area, a 490-acre natural glacial lake, wetland and woodland complex; and an abundance of birds and wildlife.

Tim had been working full-time as an engineer at Eaton Corporation, and Jan was working with the Wright County Conservation Board as an environmental educator. They had been living in Belmond, Iowa, a town of around 2,500 people about 10 miles away. “When we moved to this farm, it was to move out of the metropolis of Belmond,” Tim quips. “We wanted some space and elbow room.”

Around the same time, the nascent local foods movement in Iowa was starting to take root. Both Jan and Tim were interested in ways to connect people to the land, and the idea of doing so through food resonated with them. Seeking to make a positive contribution to north-central Iowa's agricultural scene, they joined PFI in 1994 and started exploring ways to raise food for the community. In 1995, the state's first three CSAs launched – including Magic Beanstalk CSA, started by Jan's friend Shelly Gradwell, then a graduate student at Iowa State University.

The following year, in collaboration with PFI and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Shelly co-hosted a day-long CSA workshop. Jan and Tim had heard of

CSAs in the early 1990s, but hadn't known of any examples in Iowa. The workshop ignited a sense of possibility and purpose.

Growing Connections, One Step at a Time

They already raised a large garden for personal use and were selling some produce at farmers markets. Tim had grown up on a diversified farm near Odebolt, Iowa, and he learned from his mother about what was involved with tending a big garden and raising many different kinds of plants.

Jan, an Iowan by birth, moved with her family to big cities in several states before returning to Des Moines at age 11. This neighborhood – located on a quiet, dead-end street across from a large city park – fueled a budding love of the outdoors.

“A CSA seemed like a good way to engage people and land connections, more than just going to the farmers market,” Jan says. “I had zippo gardening experience, so Tim was my teacher.”

In 1996, the couple launched their CSA with six members the first year and 12 the second. They started small intentionally – and their farm name was chosen partly as a reminder about the importance of patience.

(Continued on page 8 →)



(Above): Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf discuss their high tunnel production practices at a PFI field day they hosted on their farm in 2016. (Opposite) Jan and Tim pose with a bounty of lettuce and kale in one of their high tunnels.

The name came to Jan one night in the mid-1990s as she watched their daughter Jess, then a toddler, take deliberate steps to reach the sink. The couple had been working to establish their business through farmers markets but hadn't yet started the CSA, and Jan recalls her impatience with their progress.

"Jess must have been about three. We had a little stepstool in the bathroom and she was stepping up to reach the sink," she says. "And then it just clicked. All sorts of things fit together. I felt we weren't getting there fast enough. I wasn't satisfied and needed a reminder to be patient. On a broader, more philosophical basis, that's what this work is all about – one step at a time working toward a more sustainable relationship with the land, and with each other."

After the modest start, Jan and Tim quickly scaled up. Tim was still working full-time off the farm. Jan had earlier left her job with the county to care for their two children – son Andrew, now 32, and Jess, now 30 – and she handled most of the farm marketing, in addition to her involvement with emergent local food initiatives. By 2002, they were at a point where Tim felt he could leave his corporate job and farm full-time.

"We ramped up fairly quickly from that point, the idea being that we were going to double in size to make up for that loss of income," Tim says. "When we doubled, we started doing a couple of drop sites in Des Moines."

“ This state needs places to support natural habitat, and we are perfectly positioned for this farm to be a neighbor to East Twin Lake. ”

- TIM LANDGRAF

They expanded into Des Moines in 2003, which added a four-hour roundtrip drive to Des Moines and back – though Jan and Tim both look back fondly on those trips. "When I was doing that drive, I wasn't doing anything but driving," Tim says. "I didn't have to worry about what people were doing. I didn't have to worry about crops. I got to sit in air conditioning – wow, it was excellent."

Around this time, Jan and Tim were simultaneously working on habitat restoration projects on the farm, including a 2-acre wetland restoration completed in 2001 and another 15-acre wetland established in 2007 (all told, they've added more than 40 acres of habitat since moving to the farm). They were also deeply involved in north-central Iowa's burgeoning local foods movement.

Increasing Local Foods Advocacy

Jan had already been involved with Iowa Network for Community Agriculture, a group she connected with soon after attending the 1995 CSA workshop. In 2011,

she helped found Healthy Harvest of North Iowa as one among several regional food system groups developing across the state.

"Healthy Harvest focuses on the producer base," Tim says. "There are three legs to that base: producers, buyers and retail buyers. For all those legs, Healthy Harvest was trying to heighten awareness."

The non-profit's work started to accelerate in 2012, and Healthy Harvest saw the need and opportunity to expand its work on behalf of a vibrant local-food economy from awareness to access – getting local foods into more people's hands. In 2014, a project to explore producer collaboration and reach intermediary markets opened the door for what would become North Iowa Fresh, a regional food hub that first focused on aggregating local food products to distribute wholesale, then directly to consumers. It wasn't long before Tim also got involved.

"Healthy Harvest was helping grow the connections and conversation in rural north-central Iowa," Jan says. "There's a strong connection between Health Harvest and North Iowa Fresh."

Transitioning From Farming

2014 also marked a transition for the couple. "We were at a point of wanting to cut back [our farm work]," Tim says. "Just the physical toll on us, and to a certain extent, the weather was more frustrating than it had been in terms of getting crops in at the right time and meeting schedules."

At its peak, their CSA had around 150 members, and they raised over 50 different vegetables and herbs on 9 acres and in two high tunnels. They also raised about 950 pastured chickens each summer that they integrated into their crop rotation. But as they embarked on this next phase, they started strategically scaling down. They ended their Des Moines route in 2013, and in 2018, made the decision to wind down their CSA. To ensure their customers still had access to locally raised food, Jan and Tim suggested customers purchase four weeks of shares with North Iowa Fresh, which was launching its own delivery route.

"We turned everything over to North Iowa Fresh," Tim says. "We gave them our delivery list. NIF handled produce, delivery, communications."

In 2019, as part of their planned transition from farming, Jan and Tim grew early-season crops for North Iowa Fresh, supplying the bulk of what went into CSA

boxes for six weeks in the spring, as well as some late-season crops. They also supported NIF with active management roles like bookkeeping for Tim and administrative tasks for Jan.

In 2021, however, after assessing North Iowa Fresh's financial performance before and during the pandemic, the NIF management team found themselves facing another major transition. The group had determined the sales needed to sustain the operation, and sales weren't increasing fast enough to achieve the goal.

"Tim has done enough of the numbers to know what sales numbers need to be," Jan says. "Other places are seeing great increases in demand, but we are a tough market in north-central Iowa. We're spread out over a large geographic area because of the population base. There were vulnerabilities across a number of factors."

With the facts in hand, Jan and Tim, along with the other producers involved, decided it was time to let NIF go. As chance would have it, however, NIF's story didn't end there. Just as the decision was made to close, Jan and Tim learned from NIF's broker that PFI member Tony Thompson, who operates Prudent Produce in Elkhart, Iowa, was looking to expand. They approached him about adding a north-central Iowa satellite territory and taking over North Iowa Fresh's route, and Tony agreed. "We're pretty excited about that," Tim says. "It keeps our customers having an opportunity to keep getting fresh produce boxes."

Jan agrees: "It's pretty phenomenal. And Tony's not looking just at the communities we serve, but possibly Fort Dodge, Iowa City and on down."

Continuing the Local Foods Conversation

With the dissolution of North Iowa Fresh and the subsequent easing of demands on their time, Jan and Tim have been planning for the future of their land. As always, their decision-making has been rooted in practical and strategic considerations.

Neither of their children has expressed interest in farming. Nor have any of the aspiring farmers Jan and Tim have mentored over the years. Their son, Andrew, lives in Lititz, Pennsylvania, where he works as a test engineer for Case New Holland. Their daughter, Jessica, lives in Minneapolis and works in human resources for Minnesota Speaker Company, which designs industrial speakers for everything from airplanes to ventilators. The lack of a farm successor has



“ When we started, we didn't have a clear sense of where this local foods work could go. ”

- JAN LIBBEY

led Jan and Tim back to what originally drew them to the land: its special ecological attributes and their love of nature.

"Our kids are not living here, so it doesn't look like being a food farm is the most logical or best use of this ground," Tim says. "This state needs places to support natural habitat, and we are perfectly positioned for this farm to be a neighbor to East Twin Lake. So that's where we're moving and looking – some sort of conservation easement."

Over the past few years, the couple has gradually taken out of production many of the fields they once used to grow produce for their CSA. In line with their conservation goals, much of that land they've put into pollinator habitat. "We have one field left that we'll keep for vegetables for us," Tim says, adding they'll probably still do a bit of growing for wholesale.

"We're going to garden for ourselves for the first time in about 26 years," Jan says, adding with a note of glee, "and we'll get the first-quality produce. The farmers always get the seconds."

They're also looking forward to spending time with their granddaughter – their first grandchild – who was born to Jessica and her wife, Katrina, in January. Jan and Tim

actually accepted their Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award virtually from Minnesota, just a day after welcoming the newest generation to the family.

Reflecting on the quarter-century of their lives at the leading edge of Iowa's local foods movement, both Jan and Tim see their farming journey as part of a broader conversation they chanced to encounter in its early stages – and as a natural extension of their interests in stewardship, community well-being and working for positive change.

"It's been a very formative 25 years," Jan says. "We've been traveling on with the movement in Iowa. We got in very early in that conversation and we've been very active with it. But this has been a national conversation. When you start to think about movements like that, you think of phases of awareness. Once you get enough awareness, you start to see how all the pieces of the system come together.

"When we started, we didn't have a clear sense of where this local foods work could go. Today, there's growing awareness around environmental and food system issues. COVID has been a shock to the system – and it's a very interesting time to be pushing that conversation forward." ■



BUILDING RESILIENCE

for People, Farms and Wildlife

Angela Smith is using native habitat to build resilience and adapt her farm – and the critters who call it home – to a changing climate

Experiencing Climate Change

Angela Smith and her husband, Erik, moved to Oronoco, Minnesota, in the heart of the Driftless Area, in 2013. Together they own and operate Middle Fork Farm, a diversified fruit and vegetable farm, on the banks of the Middle Fork Zumbro River in Olmstead County, on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Wahepton people.

In the almost 10 years since they moved to the farm, the couple has experienced five significant flood events, punctuated by a catastrophic June 2019 flood that decimated their crops. In 2021, they suffered from the prolonged drought that impacted much of the Upper Midwest, including most of Iowa and southern Minnesota. In addition to having to water crops by hand, Angela's crops were more susceptible to pests and disease. Then, in December 2021, unseasonal tornado-producing storms ripped through the area, leaving a trail of damage in their wake.

“To me,” Angela says, “these are clearly impacts of climate change.”

Extreme weather cannot always be attributed to climate change, but research from climate scientists support Angela's observations. According to the National Climate Assessment, the Driftless Area – along with most of the Upper Midwest – is set to experience higher temperatures, increased precipitation in the fall, winter and spring months and decreased precipitation in the summer months.

Climate change will also make these patterns more unpredictable. Storms are expected to bring heavier bouts of rain and snow in fewer, more intense precipitation events. The result: increasingly common but inconsistent severe weather events, including floods and droughts – just as Angela has experienced over the last 10 years at Middle Fork Farm.

Small Farms, Big Impacts

Because climate change is a global phenomenon, it can be daunting for farmers experiencing its impacts on their farms to think about how to make a difference. Angela says it helps to know that steps she takes to build resilience on her



Angela Smith and her son.

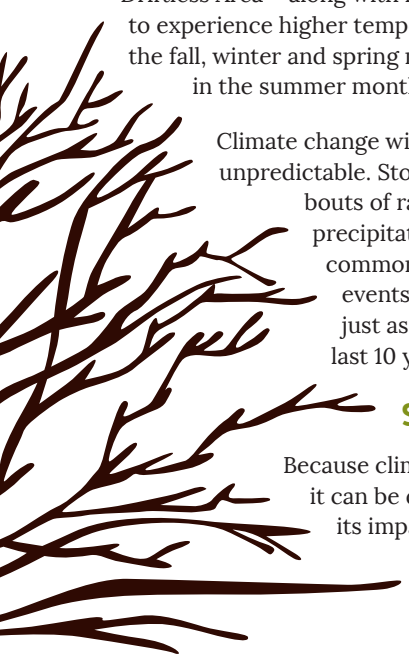
farm can have positive effects more broadly, beyond the boundaries of her land. Habitat plantings on small farms, for instance, can be vital refuges for a range of species that benefit the wider landscape.

“Small changes can accumulate into big impacts,” she says. “There's a bunch of big environmental issues out there, and I can contribute to solving them on my little farm.”

Using a systems approach to look at her farm and land, Angela says she thinks about food as well as biodiversity declines, climate change, water pollution and other bigger landscape challenges. While she knows she can't solve these big issues on her own, they do impact the farm – and her farm is a piece of the bigger system.

“We have to look at the whole farm – the health and community in the soil, the health of the landscape surrounding the farm,” Angela explains. “The health of the ecosystem directly impacts the health of the farm, and vice versa.”

Still, it's not always easy to see a path forward, especially when the challenges are large and varied. Angela's advice? Think carefully about what you want to do, figure out what you need to make it happen and don't be afraid to ask for help. She points out that





A previously restored prairie at Middle Fork Farm.

there's a whole community of fellow farmers and conservation professionals who have a wealth of knowledge and, occasionally, funding to help achieve goals on the farm.

"The community is well-connected," she says. "Worst that happens is that you get in touch with someone who doesn't know or can't help, but they probably know someone."

Following her own advice, Angela has connected with several agencies and organizations that have helped her towards one of her ultimate goals: restoring and reconstructing as much native habitat on her farm as possible.

Taking Action

"I'm crazy about native plants and native ecosystems," Angela says. "Throughout the drought, the native plants were still thriving and birds and insects were still there, all without help from me."

Angela's observations on her farm resonate with a growing body of science. According to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, adding more habitat that is both diverse and better connected on the landscape is key to ensuring that pollinators and other insects can adapt to changing climate conditions.

Angela has used a variety of programs and resources on the farm to restore native plant communities. Notably, she's worked with her local Natural Resources Conservation Service office and received funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to plant native shrubs for pollinators.

"We got in touch with the NRCS office and they were kind enough to come out and look at the farm and listen to what we were interested in doing," Angela says. "We learned about the EQIP



Prescribed burning at Middle Fork Farm.

program for pollinators, got that funding and were able to plant a bunch of native flowering shrubs."

One of Angela's most important sources for support has been Xerces Society. Angela says that staff from Xerces helped consult on the shrub plantings and are also assisting with a remnant prairie restoration in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Most recently, Angela is working with Xerces to reseed an area of her farm to a highly diverse native prairie mix.

The funding for that project comes from the Wildlife Conservation Society's Climate Adaptation Fund and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation through a grant partnership between Xerces, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

"The newest project is on a south-facing hillside just north of our farm production fields," Angela explains. "It was nothing but weeds and was very difficult to mow and manage because of the slope."

The project is actually Angela's second attempt to restore that particular hillside – the first attempt, also funded by EQIP, was set back by the drought. Angela and Xerces are hoping to redo, repair and improve the restoration this go-around by making it even more diverse, a key strategy for making native plantings climate-smart.

Angela says she's particularly excited about this project because Xerces let her take the lead on the restoration. Leaning on Xerces staff for advice and resources, she has taken the initiative on tasks like site prep, plant selection and seeding – knowledge and skills that will empower her to tackle future restoration projects.

"That's been really valuable for me," Angela says. "Now I feel like I really understand how things happens and that I can do it on my own land moving forward."

This past winter, Angela and crew broadcast a 110-species native seed mix into the snow. The melting snow and the spring's freeze-thaw cycle will scarify the seeds and work them in the soil. Angela will have to spend several years managing the planting to make sure it establishes properly, including early and frequent mowing to control annual weeds. But Angela is patient; she says she's excited for the diversity of native plants – and the pollinators and wildlife they support – that will have a new home on the farm.

"I close my eyes and I imagine a world with lots of habitat – flowers on the edge of the farm fields, less insect and songbird food deserts than we currently have, a vibrant landscape." ■

» Photos : ANNUAL CONFERENCE



1) Attendees from Global Greens Farm in West Des Moines pose for a photo at the PFI booth. Front row from left: Yvette Urakoze, Tika Bhandari, Ran Gurung, Scolastica Nilingiyimana, Ezinoel Shwirima (kneeling) and Oscar Zebedee; Back row from left: Zac Couture, Deepak Acharya, Firmin Ntakimazi, Abraham Ter.

2) Jen Filipiak catches up with a fellow attendee.

3) Margaret Smith chats with attendees by the Albert Lea Seed exhibitor table.

4) Shelley Buffalo (right) catches up with Steffen Mirsky and Rochelle Wiedenhoef.

5) Stefan Gailans facilitates audience Q&A during the “All About Legumes” session featuring speaker Katherine Muller, who presented virtually from Cornell University due to USDA COVID-19 travel restrictions.



1) Farmhouse Catering from Nevada, Iowa, provided the “All-Iowa Lunch” on Saturday, featuring locally sourced ham, cream, butter, potatoes, root vegetables and mixed greens.

2) Flex tines and finger weeders are on display in the exhibit hall.

3) Laura Jackson reviews her notes before giving her keynote address on Friday evening.

4) Erlene Fopma of Lynville, Iowa, browses the silent auction of “PFI Experiences,” which raised \$1,295 for PFI. Thank you to the “PFI Experience” donors and bidders!

5) Farmers DaQuay Campbell (left) and Shaffer Ridgeway speak to an engaged audience about their experiences and perspectives on being Black farmers in Iowa and how it has impacted them and their families.

6) Kiley Fleming of Iowa Mediation Services leads a session titled “Communicating with Family about Farmland Ownership.”

- 1) Jerome Taylor, Luke Johnson and another attendee chat at the Farm Power Implements booth.
- 2) Maggie Norton and Ruth McCabe enthusiastically embrace and pose between sessions.
- 3) Jill Beebout of Blue Gate Farm warms up the crowd as emcee of PFI Storytelling, presented Saturday afternoon.

- 4) Robert Harvey spots the camera and gives a wave while visiting in the exhibit hall.
- 5) Christine Zrostlik snaps an instant photo of Paul Hoffman in a cheeky (and beard-y) face mask.
- 6) From left to right, Cait Caughey, Jazz Marr and Stephanie Finklea find a spot in the sunshine with other attendees before sessions begin on Friday.



- 1) Arlyn Kaufmann of Weldon, Iowa, helps twins Eden and Elijah put on their "Don't Farm Naked" stickers.
- 2) Debra Boekholder manages the walk-in registration counter early Saturday morning.
- 3) Kephias Mphande (left) chats with a fellow attendee while the crowd spreads out during the lunch break on Saturday.
- 4) Cindy McCollough (right) chats with another attendee in the exhibit hall.

- 5) Martha McFarland of Hawkeye Buffalo Ranch preps for a selfie with the radish and the turnip (Nathan Anderson and Lance Klessig).
- 6) Laura Jackson gives her keynote address titled "The Past, Present & Future Iowa Landscape: Studying The Horizon."



Are Small Direct-Market Farms in Financial Trouble?

A former farmer responds to the stark findings of a Pasa Sustainable Agriculture report



Rick Hartmann

What is the financial picture for direct-market vegetable farmers? This is the fundamental question of a 2021 report by Pasa Sustainable Agriculture (Pasa), entitled “Financial Benchmarks for Direct-Market Vegetable Farms.”

The report’s conclusions are bleak: The farmers surveyed are not making enough money.

The report’s authors reached that conclusion after organizing and analyzing financial data from 39 unique farms in the mid-Atlantic region over one to three years (2017-2019). Some farms participated multiple years, and all had a for-profit motive and “significant” farm revenue from direct-market channels (CSA, farmers markets, direct wholesale, etc.).

As a former direct-market vegetable farmer for about 20 years, I don’t feel the results are that unexpected – or cause for undue concern. The benchmarks on which the Pasa study reported are broken into groupings by acres farmed, and all stem from basic financial data – revenue, expenses, profit. Examples of benchmarks in the report include profit and revenue for just the vegetable enterprises, and for the farm business as a whole.

My favorite ratio is there: net income-to-revenue, which offers good insight into management efficiency. For those more inclined to look deeper into the financial state of affairs of these farms, there are plenty of other benchmarks, such as returns to farmer labor and debt-to-asset ratios.

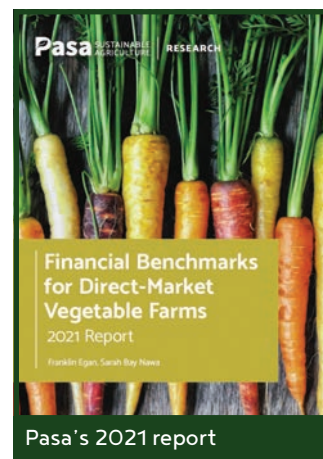
Many Types of Small Market Farms

Small direct-market farms are popular ventures, not just for young idealists, but for career farmers and those starting second careers as well. Growth of these farms can be seen in U.S. Department of Agriculture census records. In 2013-2014, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach published a statewide directory that included 33 CSA farms. This year, the website Local Harvest lists 131. We also see this trend in our common experiences, such as grocery chains highlighting local produce, popular media enchantment with local foods and even the composition of attendees and topics at the PFI annual conferences over last 20 years.

Pasa’s most notable conclusion, and one that encapsulates the report’s tone, is that “most direct-market vegetable farmers are not earning a middle-class income.” The various financial ratios support this assertion, and in fact, they found only about 25% of the farms studied earned above median household income (about \$56,000 per year). The majority of the farms had less than half of this income.

This finding so concerned the authors, it prompted them to call for implementing public programs that support higher incomes, including those that would “focus on equitably increasing farmland access, improving market opportunities, encouraging workforce development, reducing financial risk and rewarding conservation best practices.”

Have we been promoting farming operations that arguably benefit society but relegating those very farmers to inadequate living standards? The answer may not be so clear-cut. While the authors look toward “persistent structural challenges in the agricultural industry” leading to lower-than-average income, it may be worth doing some benchmarking of our own. Let’s take a step back and view the landscape of small businesses in the U.S.



Lessons From U.S. Small Business Data

The Federal Reserve Banks keep track of small business finances, and although their focus is credit, their data collection and survey reports are a great source of related information. In 2017, the first year of the Pasa study, the banks reported 55% of non-employer firms in the U.S. did not make any profit. This is not a small group of business owners. It includes over 25 million businesses – 81% of all U.S. small businesses that year. For small businesses with employees, 43% did not make any profit. About 40% of non-employer firms had revenue less than \$25,000. Looking more broadly, it appears that small direct-market farm businesses may actually be doing better than their non-farm small business counterparts.

Farm income below median household income may not necessarily mean the total household income is less than the median. It is unclear in this study what part of household income the farmers want, or are currently receiving from the farm. We participated in a similar, albeit smaller, two-year financial benchmark study conducted by Liz Kolbe, then PFI's horticulture coordinator, covering the years 2013-14. That study of 12 small Iowa farms pondered similar questions and, for the most part, had similar results.

However, that study asked what portion of household income the farmers wanted or needed from the farm operation. Only about a quarter said all their income. To be fair, most sought a significant portion, even if not the entire amount. Almost 20 years ago, Michael Duffy and Erin Tegtmeier reported for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture on characteristics of CSAs in the Upper Midwest. They found CSA income comprised only about half of total household income.

Unfortunately, they also found these households had much lower income than the average households from the nine states encompassed in their study. An interesting characteristic reported of these farms was that over half felt their economic return too low, and yet almost all were satisfied or very satisfied with their farm operation and planned to continue.

Profit Isn't the Whole Story

Farmers know whether they are making a living, and if they are on par with state or national income averages. We built our farms for many reasons besides profit parity – particularly for reasons centered around our social and ecological values. It is a way of life we choose. We do, of course, also want to

make a decent living. When I began farming, my main mentor was considered a groundbreaker in vegetable farming in central Iowa. She was a good farmer, highly regarded, loved her work, had a “profit motive,” but never made much money. That wasn't her intention and she was open about it.

As farmers, what we need to know – what is so useful about this report, and why we participate in these benchmark studies – is to see how we rank and what is possible. The Pasa report recognized how important it was for farmers to meet and openly discuss finances. What efficiencies have others achieved that we can achieve? Knowing that there are small market vegetable farms having net income ratios greater than 40%, or several with per acre revenue of \$20,000 or greater, confirms we can make decent money. In this report, we know that 25% of the farmers included did make at least a median household income.

Tapping Successful Market Farms as Role Models

I'm of the opinion that organizations supporting direct-market vegetable farmers could, in their work and outreach, better use farmers who are proven to be financially successful. These farmers have good systems management and other business skills that benchmark themselves high against their peer group. These farms need to be toured. The farmers running them need invitations to speak at events – they have valuable things to say, and they should be paid well for their insight and time.

Financially successful farmers are underused precisely because of their success. These are exactly the kind of farmers that go to fewer events, apply for fewer grants and participate in fewer studies – they are too busy running their businesses well. Too often during my career as a direct-market farmer, I saw the opposite manager showcased. It was not uncommon for unsuccessful farmers – both in production and finances – to be featured prominently in local food venues merely because they enjoyed participating, were generally available and were often likable, even charismatic.

In the Pasa report, farms in business over 10 years increased their income to decent levels and had a significantly higher net worth than the average Pennsylvanian. This seems very encouraging, and again, also reflects the experience on my farm. We never exceeded the average Iowa household income. But we had enough money that around the five- to seven-year mark, we no longer felt financially insecure. We completely paid off our farm in year 11. At that point, our main concerns were

really eating well, serving our customers and improving our natural resources.

Profit Picture Changes With Farming Stages

When we began growing vegetables, it took several years to even make a profit. We also had saved money and accumulated ample relevant experience before we bought the farm. It was hard, sometimes brutal work. We also worked off-farm jobs the first few years. Some early years we never attended a movie or ate at a nice restaurant. Gradually, however, our efforts paid off. We gained equity in the farm, we were able to make strategic investments to improve our efficiency and we evolved our farm management so that we had stable, sufficient income.

During our tenure as vegetable farmers, many direct-market farms came and went. Some were undercapitalized, some lacked agronomic knowledge and experience, some lacked basic business skills. We saw good farmers with low marketing skills struggle (including ourselves) and poor farmers with good marketing skills succeed (at least financially). Some expanded too fast. Some were too small to overcome the fixed expenses of the farm and provide enough extra to be the main household income. It doesn't seem reasonable to expect all small farms (or any particular type of business) to make a median household income at all stages of their development.

Programs, policies and money have limited benefits when compared to time, experience, consistency and good business skills. Like any small business, some people will be well suited to it and others will not. A decent portion will persevere and prosper through hard work, some luck and constant evaluation and improvement in their farm business.

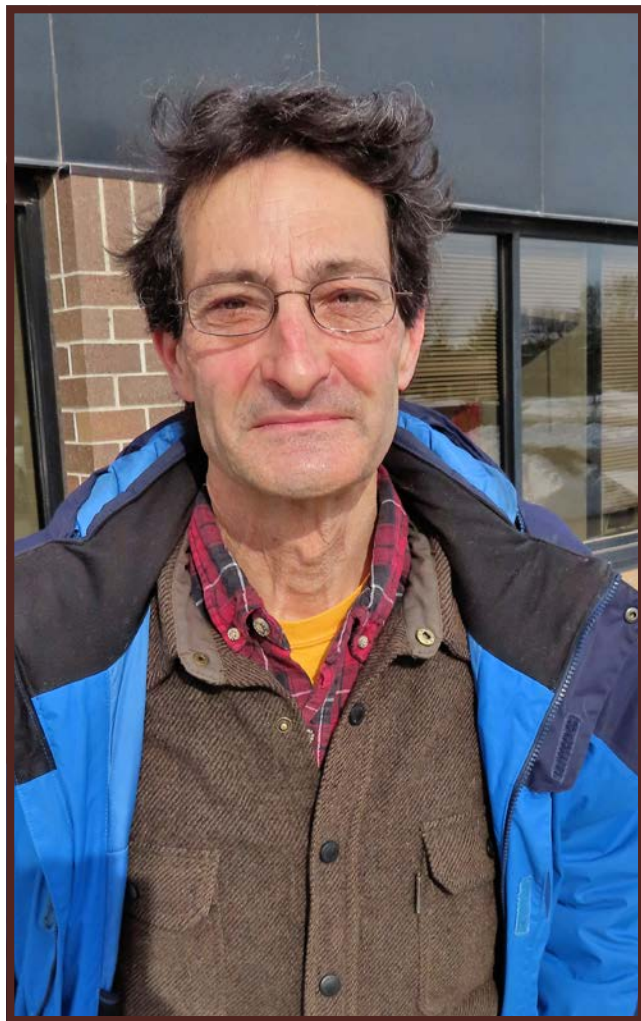
It may be that the best assistance we can offer beginning farmers is to provide them with honest feedback on the viability of their business plans, communicate realistic expectations and help them learn from the best examples of successful direct-market vegetable farmers. We know these exemplars exist because we can see them in the Pasa report, quietly and successfully exceeding all the benchmarks. ■

Rick and his wife, Stacy, are PFI members who managed a small direct-market vegetable farm for about 20 years, 15 near Minburn, Iowa. They thought it would be a good idea to turn an abandoned acreage into a prosperous, model small farm because everyone kept telling them it couldn't be done.

Asking Those Who Knew

By Stefan Gailans

**Retired ISU professor
Matt Liebman made a career
out of listening to and
learning from farmers**



Matt Liebman has always had a close connection to PFI – he was aware of the organization before he even moved to Iowa. Even so, it’s striking to see just how much his research interests have overlapped those of PFI farmers over the course of his career.

When the two of us spoke in early February 2022, Matt had recently retired from the Department of Agronomy at Iowa State University, where he had been a faculty member since 1998 and served as the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture since 2007. Throughout his tenure at ISU, Matt’s research, teaching and outreach work focused on ways to use ecological processes to create farming systems that are productive, profitable, resilient and environmentally sound – concerns that overlap considerably with the interests of PFI members.

It was clear during our conversation that Matt, who is also a lifetime PFI member from Ames, Iowa, had been reflecting on this overlap: “Looking at early issues of the Practical Farmer, going back to 1988, it’s shocking how similar both the questions and the answers were then to what they are now,” he says. “Questions about optimal crop rotations, stewarding natural resources, habitat for wildlife – that stuff was being asked by PFI farmers and others back in the 1980s.”

Trusting Farmers as Experts

Since arriving at ISU in 1998, Matt’s research topics included integrated crop-livestock systems, weed ecology, soil quality, prairie and wildlife habitat. You’ll find many of these subjects at the forefront of PFI field days, meetings, conferences and farminars, and in the pages of this magazine today. Through the years, Matt has been generous with his time and knowledge, frequently speaking to or writing for PFI audiences. Wasting no time since retiring, he also recently joined PFI’s board of directors.

“Matt always held farmers in the highest regard,” says Gina Nichols, former graduate student of Matt’s who now works as an assistant research professor at the Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University. “He loved going to the field, and his work was always motivated by a desire for things to be better.”

Matt says this motivation stems from experiences he had early in his career working with farmers from California to Maine. While he enjoyed the science of tuning cropping systems to yield better with lower environmental impact, he also came to enjoy the people as much as the subject matter.

“Farmers are very good observers and they have a lot of practical knowledge about what works and what doesn’t,” he says. “One of my brothers always said: ‘If you want to find out the answer to a question, ask somebody who knows.’” That’s exactly what Matt did throughout his research and teaching career.

Before Matt came to ISU, he worked at the University of Maine, just outside Bangor, on the southern end of a region called the Maine Highlands. While there, he regularly took his students to visit with local farmers; consequently, his work included crops like potatoes, barley and dry beans. When he moved to Iowa and had to decide what to focus his work on, he knew where to begin – and whom to look to for guidance.



(Above): Matt Liebman speaks to a group of farmers visiting the ISU Marsden Farm near Boone, Iowa, during a field tour in 2003. **(Opposite)** Matt during a visit to the Practical Farmers office in February 2022.

“Farmers are very good observers and they have a lot of practical knowledge about what works and what doesn’t.”

– Matt Liebman

“The first year I moved to Iowa, I didn’t do any experiments,” Matt says. “I spent about a day a week at Dick and Sharon Thompson’s farm. I would sit in the tractor with Dick while he was doing farm work and listen to him describe what he did in terms of crop and livestock management.”

Dick and Sharon, of course, are the co-founders of Practical Farmers of Iowa who laid the groundwork for the organization’s on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange. Matt had been aware of PFI long before he came to Iowa, having read about about the organization in Rodale Institute’s *New Farm Magazine* in the 1980s. Matt was also familiar with the Thompsons, having met them and other PFI farmers when he traveled to the Midwest for sustainable agriculture meetings.

“My interest was at the level of land management and how you take care of the land that’s being used in such large quantities,” Matt says. “Most of the land for crop production in Iowa is for corn and soybeans, and I wanted to be relevant to those systems. [The Thompsons and PFI] seemed like a reasonable place to start.”

A Trial Is Born

“Dick was really interested in weeds,” Matt says. The Thompsons’ cropping system included corn, soybeans, oats and alfalfa; composted cattle manure and some purchased fertilizer; ridge-till cultivation; and limited use of herbicides for weed control. “Tracking the weed seed bank over the different phases of the Thompsons’ rotation was just eye-opening for me,” Matt says. “And Dick wondered why weeds would sort of magically disappear after the alfalfa crop.”

With their mutual curiosity in mind, Matt designed a set of experimental treatments that mimicked what Dick and Sharon were doing on their farm to see how crop diversity affected weed dynamics. This became known as the Marsden Farm experiment, because the plots were located on an ISU research farm near Boone bearing that name. What started out as “a simple experiment about weeds,” as Matt affectionately describes it, turned into a renowned body of work that continues to impact students, fellow researchers and farmers.

Since the experiment began in 2001, Matt and many colleagues have elucidated numerous benefits of diversified cropping systems compared to the typical corn-soybean system. The diversified systems experience less weed pressure, and thus rely less on herbicides for weed control.

(Continued on page 20 →)



(Left): Matt Liebman, Adam Davis and Dave Sundberg show off the elutriator in the ISU greenhouse in the early 2000s. The elutriator was used to wash away soil from cores collected in the field, leaving behind weed seeds. Why all the trouble? “Weeds are a problem for both conventional and organic farmers in virtually every field in every year,” Matt says. “So it seemed like a really great place to focus my attention.” **(Right)** Matt receives PFI’s 2013 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award (shovel for a trophy!), presented to him by PFI staffer Sarah Carlson at the January 2013 PFI annual conference.

“I believe the most important thing I learned from [Matt] was how to listen to and interact with farmers as experts.” – Adam Davis

Superior physical and microbiological soil properties render purchased fertilizers nearly superfluous. Ultimately, diversified systems pencil out better financially thanks to higher corn and soybean yields and less energy use than the corn-soybean system.

Matt credits the consistent and repeatable results to the experiment’s longevity. “A lot of the phenomena associated with cropping systems is driven by what happens in the soil, and things that happen in the soil happen slowly, maybe five to 10 years,” Matt says. “So once an experiment is in place for a few years, that allows you to ask questions like, ‘Why? What are the mechanisms that drive crop performance or weed populations?’”

Particularly noteworthy to some was the discovery that insects and rodents were more prevalent in the diversified systems that contained oats and alfalfa, and that they were eating weed seeds.

Former PFI farming systems coordinator, Rick Exner, who worked closely with Dick Thompson and many other PFI farmers on on-farm research for 20 years, was among those who were particularly taken with this finding. “[The Marsden Farm] trials taught us things we hadn’t known,” Rick says. “Understanding the role of winter seed predation by rodents was an important weed management asset of reduced-till systems that we hadn’t connected the dots on until Matt’s systems trial.”

Rick adds, “Matt was also an important link for students studying sustainable agriculture at ISU to become acquainted with the Thompson farm and philosophy.” Because the Thompson farm was just over 5 miles north of the Marsden Farm, Matt and colleagues held field days in conjunction with the Thompsons; together they connected farmers, researchers and students to exchange

information and experience. One of those students was Adam Davis, who now heads the Department of Crop Sciences at the University of Illinois. “Matt has many rich talents as a scientist,” Adam says, “but I believe the most important thing I learned from him was how to listen to and interact with farmers as experts.”

Belief in a “Two-Way Street”

That respect for farmers and their experiences is part of what Matt calls a “two-way street between the researcher and farming community.” He says: “Both have something to offer one another. Researchers can provide farmers with useful information, but farmers provide ideas for researchers to investigate.” While it’s clear how much he valued farmer knowledge during his career, it’s equally clear that farmers also value him.

“Matt is a rare combination of great scientist who is able to explain the science to the average farmer,” says Paul Mugge, an organic farmer from Sutherland in northwest Iowa whose farm Matt would often visit. “Every time I went to the MOSES conference [in La Crosse, Wisconsin], I expected to see Matt there so I could pick his brain. I count Matt as a friend, and I greatly respect him and thank him for his contributions to a better future for all of Iowa and its people.”

A few years after the Marsden Farm experiment began, Matt joined several ISU scientists spanning numerous disciplines to start STRIPS (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips), another long-term agroecological experiment. Among many other things, the research team has found that strategically converting 10% of a crop field to strips of native prairie can significantly reduce soil erosion, improve the quality of water leaving the field and provide an abundance of habitat for birds and beneficial insects.

The results have attracted the attention of scientists, students, conservationists and farmers alike – the practice continues to be evaluated on four ISU research farms and over 30 commercial farms across 14 states (some of them PFI farms), and in 2018, prairie strips



(Above): Matt Liebman pays tribute to the memory of the late Dick Thompson at the PFI Cooperators' Meeting in December 2013. Matt became familiar with the Thompson farm in the 1980s through Rodale Institute's *New Farm Magazine*. When he arrived in Iowa in 1998, conversations with Dick influenced the Marsden Farm cropping systems experiment that began in 2001 and continues to this day. **(Below):** Matt, a dedicated gardener, poses in his family's backyard garden beside a crop of chili peppers he was especially pleased with, in Ames, Iowa, in late summer 2009.

“ Matt is a rare combination of great scientist who is able to explain the science to the average farmer I count Matt as a friend, and I greatly respect him and thank him for his contributions to a better future for all of Iowa and its people.” – Paul Mugge

were added as a practice eligible for financial support through the federal Conservation Reserve Program.

“Farming is a living tradition,” Matt says. “If you want to keep the types of practices that are necessary for good stewardship in the forefront, you have to at least have a small group of people who are practicing them. [Thanks to PFI], you don’t have to reinvent or find in some archive a description of what a good farming system would look like.”

He adds: “You can actually go out and talk to real farmers who have made these principles operational, and we understand scientifically what the mechanisms are in terms of biology, chemistry and physics, that allow good outcomes to occur. If and when we get to the point where we can do this on a broader scale, at least we have somewhere to start to scale up from.”

“PFI has been one of the best aspects of being in Iowa. It’s a very supportive community. The Iowa landscape and watersheds are still challenged by the same kinds of problems as when the organization began, but there are more farmers in PFI. There are more farmers testing and finding these practices so that, if and when it becomes possible to implement them on a broader scale, that can move forward.”

Why did Matt’s research align with PFI interests? The answer, at least to me, is pretty clear: Because he listened – and because he chose to be relevant.

Before we parted ways after our conversation, Matt shared, “The first thing Dick Thompson asked me when I got to Iowa was, ‘Are you going to stay?’” Lucky for us all – whether we be farmers, colleagues, citizens or, as in my case, former students – he did. ■



More Info

Matt presented an overview of the Marsden Farm experiment in a webinar hosted by Iowa Learning Farms in March 2021 titled “Cropping System Diversification Is a Path to Greater Sustainability.”

See a recording at iowalearningfarms.org/video/march-10-2021-matt-liebman

Our Role on the Landscape

Farm manager Jane Shey connects with tenants to restore the land

Jane Shey is no stranger to complex conversations and long-term goals involving agriculture. For over 30 years, she has worked in federal and global ag policy, research and consulting. But after returning to Iowa at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she is more earnestly working on a complex agricultural project closer to home: cultivating her role as advisor to her mother on their family's farm.

Returning to the Land

Jane grew up on the family farm near Algona, Iowa, where they raised crops including hay, oats, beans and corn, along with cattle and horses for 4-H. Once Jane left for college, her path back to the farm was non-linear, but never strayed far from agriculture.

After attending nearby Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, she studied in Belgium and worked as a consultant to industry trade associations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Agency for International Development. From her policy background, she is most proud of her role in helping to get money to farmers during the 1980s farm crisis and in drafting the Farmers Bill of Rights.

Jane returned to the family farm after the death of her father, Jerry Shey, in 2019. While she's still active in policy consulting, she also helps her mother, Jean Shey, manage about 1,600 acres, of which Jean is the majority owner. In this role, Jane works with the farm's five tenants to implement soil health and conservation practices. A large part of this is building relationships with the tenants. "I'm still trying to learn and understand where they're coming from," Jane says.

Starting Where They Are

So far, two tenants use cover crops, which is a priority for Jane – she wants the land covered to protect the soil and prevent further topsoil erosion. Like many farmers getting started with cover crops, Jane's tenants primarily use cereal rye. Because cover crops are



“ There has got to be a back-and-forth between the landowner and the tenant about each other's goals, how they come together and how we can help each other reach our goals. ”

- JANE SHEY

uncommon in her area, Jane says the practice attracted the attention of some locals. "It wasn't the pretty black rows everyone is used to," she says. By mid-summer, however, Jane heard the tone change as people saw the quality of her soybeans. "Maybe it's an advantage I have, moving back here after being gone for 30 years. I don't really care what anyone thinks, so my goal is to be the talk of the coffee shop."

This year, they're also trying a new strategy: planting soybeans into living rye, a practice known as planting "green." When possible, Jane also works with her tenants to adopt other practices. "One tenant is using cover crops, no-till, strip till – and I am working with him on relay cropping soybeans," Jane says. The tenant crop-shares a 10-acre experimental plot with Jane, and together they plan to test the relay cropping this year. In the future, they also plan to test adding oats to the rotation. Cover crops are few and far between in northwest Iowa, so having one tenant as a resource with whom to work out the details is not lost on Jane.

"There's a lot of things I would like to try, but I don't have any equipment," Jane says. "So I have to work with my tenants and see what their comfort level is."

Part of her approach to working with tenants is fostering a more reciprocal relationship. Jane says she is happy to share her ideas with the farmers and partner with them – both financially and in shared learning – to build confidence in her ideas. "PFI is a resource I turn to for cover crop-specific information I

can use to inform my decisions," she says, noting that she often shares PFI materials with her farmers and provides background knowledge on new practices when possible. "I try to not only say I hope we can do this, but I am also trying to give them resources to figure out new practices like cover crops or no-till for themselves."

Leading by Example

To make her farmland stewardship goals a reality, Jane knows she shares responsibility with her tenants. "Landowners have to be willing to bear some of the risk," Jane says. The newest tenant has started to incorporate a rye cover crop onto a portion of the 160 acres he rents. He and Jane worked together to create a plan that included cover crops while reducing the financial risk.

The agreement stated that Jane would pay for the cover crop seed and application on 80 acres. On the remaining 80 acres, the young farmer would use conventional methods he was familiar with. "We paid for the application and the seed, and in my mind that's the way to say that we're going to share some risk with you," Jane says. "He cash-rents the land, so all other expenses are his."

The farmer received the added benefit of getting a \$5 per acre discount off his crop

(Above): Jane Shey, left, and her mother, Jean Shey. (Opposite): Clockwise from top left: One of Jane Shey's farm tenants seeds cover crops, which are a priority for Jane to protect the soil and prevent further topsoil erosion; Jean Shey feeding chickens; A view of Jane Shey.

insurance as a part of a state cover crop incentive program. Jane believes that setting a new tenant up with cost-share resources will help ensure cover crops are feasible for him to do on his own in the near future. She also believes that crafting attainable goals with the farmers allows for tangible change to happen on the land. "For 2022, I hope to encourage this farmer to get oats on the full 160 acres he farms in August," Jane says, "so he achieves a good stand before the frost kills it."

On the surface, exchanges between landowners and tenants are business transactions, but for Jane they are also opportunities for a partnership.

She says: "There has got to be a back-and-forth between the landowner and the tenant about each other's goals, how they come together and how we can help each other reach our goals." Although not common now, as more landowners adopt this approach, a new normal may be on the horizon.

Managing Land for Soil Health and Biodiversity

Jane also sees her role as that of land steward. She recalls the crop and wildlife diversity that existed on her farm when she was a child – "butterflies of every kind, meadowlarks, riding horses through pasture." These memories fuel her hopes of restoring soil health and biodiversity through on-farm practices – and this goal is the primary aim of her land management.

"When I was growing up, we had pasture, hay, oats, beans and corn, and now it's just a corn-bean rotation," she says. "If you spent time to think about or write down what you don't see anymore, you realize what we have lost by giving up that biodiversity."

She also thinks it's possible for landowners to adopt conservation practices in a financially feasible way. She encourages landowners to view the topsoil as an investment account, and to approach soil as an asset that landowners could be more involved in preserving and adding value to.



"I think there is a way that landowners can protect and improve the soil and make it work financially, without taking everything out of the soil," she says. "If you had an investment account that dropped 5% every year, in a couple of years you would be switching your advisers."

For instance, to help finance efforts to bring back some of that diversity, Jane takes advantage of federal conservation programs. Currently, of the 1,600 acres she manages with her mother, 300 acres are in various Natural Resources Conservation Service programs. Restoring crop diversity is another focus. In addition to expanding use of cover crops, bringing oats back into the farm's rotation is one of Jane's goals. A small-grain rotation that includes oats and clover keeps more roots in the ground

through the winter and creates more opportunity for different cover crop strategies.

Jane has no shortage of ideas. From her diverse experiences and exposure to many types of agriculture, she is interested in how rotational grazing, grass-fed beef, pastured poultry, pollinator habitat and crops like edible beans might work on the farm. Ultimately, Jane's views are shaped by her understanding that she's only a temporary steward of the land.

"It's not about ownership," she says. "It's about trying to do something different and steer away from following the status quo. It's about building relationships, figuring out who you can work with – and knowing you only occupy the space for a while." ■

Farmer Stories

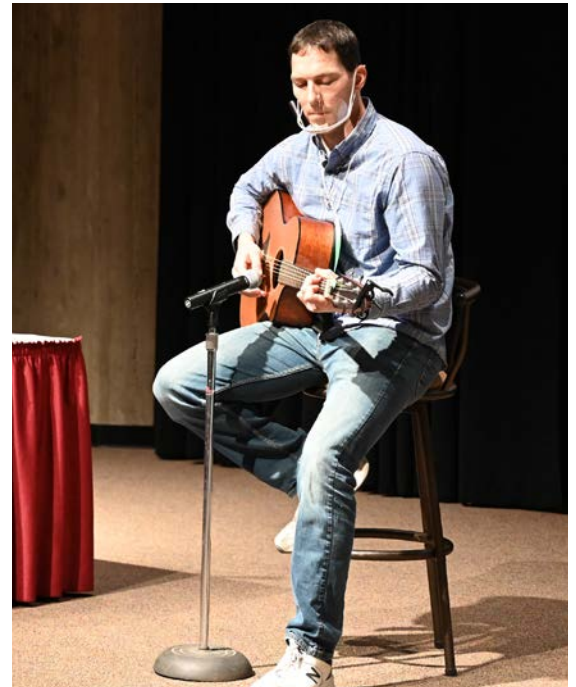
Following lunch, you shimmy past a couple legs and bags to an unoccupied seat. The gentle thrum of guitar chords softens and stops as five PFI members grasp the mic in turn. A row ahead, two friends turn to give each other a knowing glance. From the corner of your eye, you see a hand rise to meet a damp cheek. Behind you, there is a muffled gasp just before a burst of laughter. And every 10 minutes, your hands rise and contribute to a wave of applause that cascades down the terrace of auditorium seats to thank a gratified storyteller.

Introduced virtually in 2021, PFI's farmer storytelling feature was so well received, we brought it back for our 2022 annual conference. The event embodies a fundamental aspect of PFI culture: sharing experiences to learn, connect and expand our horizons.

The theme of this year's storytelling event was water. While water is essential to all of us, farmers have a distinct respect for the influence it wields over the success of a season and their livelihoods. Five members – Levi Lyle, Air Philavanh, Cathy Lafrenz and sisters Maja and Carmen Black – shared memories demonstrating water's healing, harrowing and humorous potential.

Live music, played by Levi, greeted attendees entering the auditorium. Jill Beebout, a 2021 storyteller who operates Blue Gate Farm in Chariton, Iowa, returned as emcee to welcome and guide the audience through the performances. The event was livestreamed so those unable to attend the in-person event could watch from home – including this year's storytelling coach, Mary Swander.

For those who missed the event, or wish to experience these moving and evocative stories again, we are sharing them on the following pages. The stories are largely preserved as orally presented, with light edits for style and clarity.



Left: Levi Lyle with his wife, Jill, and children Olivia, Elyse, Emerson and Ivy. **Right:** Levi performs his music during the storytelling session at PFI's 2022 annual conference.

Levi Lyle

Wounds of a Navy SEAL: A Farm Story



When I moved back to the farm more than a decade ago, I resolved to find where I fit among a farmscape of industrial agriculture. I was observing more frequent gully washers, an expression for hard rain, and the beginning of a new normal of severe weather. The following experience unfolds during that process of trying to figure out how I fit onto the farm.

Following a June hailstorm that whipped and tattered the leaves of the corn, my father and I went out to the field to meet the crop insurance adjuster. Crop insurance works like this: If the severity of the bullet-sized holes in the corn result in yield loss, the insurance adjuster writes up a report and the farmer gets a check in the mail for the profits that he would've received. As the insurance adjuster pulled up in his car that day, he got out. What I noticed was that he was about my age, average-size build, nothing particular – until he came walking across the road towards us. At that time, I saw he had a limp in his walk.

During introductions, I recalled two things. One, he had children about the same age as my children, and two, he was a veteran. We started out into the field. We came to the headland rows, and first we had to cross the perpendicular headland rows. He struggled to lift his leg up over that first row. He grimaced in discomfort. I thought to my myself, “Oh boy, this is going to be uncomfortable for him.” By the time we got to row 24 and there was nothing but the long, straight rows ahead of us, it would be much easier for him now. I sensed he was relieved. I was thinking to myself, “Is being a crop insurance adjuster really the right job for this person?” It's then that I got up the nerve to ask, “Is your injury related to your military service?” He told me a remarkable story that would help shift and shape the way I think of my place on the farm.

He said: “I was working for the state patrol doing a routine traffic stop, writing a ticket. Speeding ticket, of all things, when I was struck by a passing automobile. I was hurt badly, landing about 20 feet from the scene. A semitruck driver passing by saw this as an opportunity to steal a state patrolman's handgun. He came over and was trying to pull the gun from my holster. I was fading in and out of consciousness and I was in a struggle with him. Meanwhile, another passerby in his semitruck saw what was happening and he understood that a state patrolman's 40-caliber is worth a lot of money on the black market. He came down from his big rig. He was 6-foot-6 and 300 pounds. He came over and picked up that no-good, fill-in-your-expletive. Up, up into the sky he went like a bird. I was relieved. I shattered my leg, but I would be okay. And the best part was this angel of a man, my hero, came to see me in hospital and I got to thank him.”

By now we were only a little ways out into the cornfield because we were walking

slowly due to his disabled leg. I didn't know what to say. It didn't matter, though, because he rolled right onto his next story. “During basic training, after a three-day sleep deprivation test, the sergeant called me into his office. He wanted me to apply to SEAL school. I turned to him: ‘Navy SEAL?’ One year later, I was in Colombia doing undercover drug cartel intelligence. My job was to take down the bad guys or die trying. I was shot multiple times.” We were a little farther out into the cornfield now and I was thinking this man has suffered trauma. I had been a school guidance counselor previously, so I understood sometimes the best thing you can do is just to listen.

Here we were at the most beautiful place in the world, the middle of an Iowa cornfield in mid-June. The tranquility of the open space, the breeze whispering through the ears of corn. I knew it was my job at that moment to listen. If there wouldn't have been any people out there in the field to hear his story, I'm sure he would've been telling his story to the ears of corn. He continued: “I was wired. I got found out and things went very badly for me. I was shot in the neck, the hip, the shoulder. One in my belly just missed my spine. Navy SEALs carry plugs made of cotton. You push them into the wound and they expand. They are amazing because they get you back into the fight.”

By now we were nearing a low area of the cornfield. I could hear water trickling from a nearby tile into the creek. This is where gullies notoriously fester in this field. Heaps of woven wire fences are in those gullies, reclaimed by the earth. I had spent my childhood tearing out those woven wire fences so we could farm fencerow to fencerow. Now, in a tangle of sagebrush and birch that wound their way up through those rusty woven wire fences, up into the sky into a canopy, songbirds were singing. These rolls of rusty woven wire fence plug wounds. And being an insurance adjuster was the perfect job for this person. I understand now where I fit on the farm. I see the farmland as the ancestral Mother Earth, Gaia: the importance of the lunar cycles, the changing of the seasons, protecting the land from those gully washers during the steady growth of corn all through the summer, like the unreprising care of a mother. ■

Levi Lyle and his family farm near Keota, Iowa, raising organic corn and soybeans as well as aronia berries, tart cherries and various other fruits. Levi's Indigenous Fruit Enterprises (LIFE) seeks to facilitate the profitability and sustainability of small farms. Previously an organic inspector, Levi now consults farmers transitioning to certified organic production. He is also a podcaster and author of two books, available at www.levilyle.com.

Phrakhounmany

“Air” Philavanh



Waiting For Rain

Childhood reflections on the rhythms of life by the Mekong River in Laos

I live here in Milo, Iowa, south of Des Moines, but I came from Laos. My hometown in Laos is close to the Mekong River.

I could see the river every day, all year long. In winter though, the water level goes down as the river dries and the sandbars come up. The river, and the sandbar in the middle, is the border between Laos and Thailand. I remember I was around 10 years old, a young boy looking for good fun. One morning, when I didn't have school, I sat on a bench along the river. I looked out at the river and saw the sandbar. "Hey, some good fun is coming." Me and my friend got together, brought our soccer ball and inner tube, walked down to the river and swam across.

More friends were at the Thailand border. They came down to the sandbar, too. Every winter, we had a good time on the river with Thailand friends. We played soccer, everything together. When we got tired, sometimes we stayed the night in Thailand, sometimes we came back home.

When I went down to the beach, I brought my dog. His name was Lulu and he always followed me to the sand beach to play soccer. But one night, my dog didn't come home with me. He went to the other side, to Thailand. I wondered what happened to him.

The time went by. In March or April, it was getting warmer – hotter and hotter every day. Oh, people found something to do to cool down. They call it Pi Mai Lao or Songkran – the Lao New Year. All over town, people put perfume and flowers in water. Everyone throws water on each other to cool off, cool down and have a good time. We believe the water flushes out bad things, washes bad luck away from the old year. We throw the water on the Buddha statues to wish for some good thing, good luck for our life next year.



Photo courtesy of Boun Oum Douangphrachanh



Seasouk Souvannaphongsay, "Red and Gold Temple Under Blue Sky," 2017, via pexels.com

At night, we meet together at the temple with the monks. We light candles and walk around the temple three times. We pray and wish for good things for our friends, for family, good times and good food. Some wish for a boyfriend or girlfriend, but I was too young.

In May and June, if rain doesn't come yet and the weather continues to get hotter, everyone in the town gets together for Boun Bang Fai, the firecracker festival, to ask God for rain. "Hey, water, come down!" People need rain. They believe if they make a firecracker shoot up to the sky, they can ask for rain from God. All day long, [people] shoot firecrackers until it gets dark.

If they shoot a firecracker and it doesn't go up to the sky, that means someone didn't do a good job. Whoever made the firecracker [that didn't go up], they are thrown in the mud for fun, as punishment. When they get out from the muddy pond, they smell like a stinky water buffalo and start chasing people around. Everyone laughs along. Next year, they'll do a better job. But whoever makes the firecracker go highest, they're good – the higher the better luck, and the more rain you'll get. We hope we get more rain. We need rain for the farmers.

The rain starts to come down. By late June or July, rain is falling all over, day and night, and farmers are so happy. Everyone enjoys the new, fresh rain. All farmers in Laos get ready: They pack their tools, they get their water buffalo, crew and all equipment for farming. The water buffalo are very important and we keep dogs to protect them. Farmers use water buffalo as a big machine – as a tractor, because we didn't have tractors. We didn't have John Deere. They use a water buffalo to pull the plow and turn up the soil. When the water buffalo finishes work, they let it roll around in the muddy pond to protect it from bugs.

I look at my grandpa's big rice field. I didn't have any fields, but my grandpa, he had a big one. Everyone has a job except for me. I'm a kid, so they don't have any work for me. "Thank you," I think, that they leave me alone so I can have more good times.

Me and my friend get something to cut bamboo cane for a fishing pole and we try to catch some fish in the flooded fields. When we didn't have luck, no fish. Instead, we push each other down to the water for fun. When we walk home, sometimes we see the wild hogs come out and we try to catch and ride them. If we fall, we fall over into the water flooded all over. So we don't get hurt much, but sometimes it still hurt my back.

In August and September, the work in the field slows. The water moves down to the Mekong River, the fields start to dry out and people are done with their farms. Farming season is finishing and we wait for the rice harvest. When the water goes back to the river, that means no more sandbar for soccer.



Pixabay, "Two Water Buffalos," 2017, via pexels.com

The main thing is to celebrate and thank God for the big dragon and water.

We thank God for giving us water to farm – not only in Laos, but Thailand people too. They come down to the Mekong to have fun together. They make a long boat from a single tree, a racing canoe for Boun Suang Heua, the boat racing festival. We believe the river has a guardian dragon or big snake, the naga. The boat races are meant as thanks for bringing us the rain: Thank you to the gods for the water. We thank the big dragon or big snake for survival, and celebrate for fun. All comes from the water – all the benefits from water to our life.

One farmer can get food, can get a crop each year. So it goes, over and over again. Every year, we go around that cycle. Sometimes, I wondered what happened with my dog. He may have found a good family, a new girlfriend, something beautiful. I missed him sometimes but I had a good time, playing soccer again with my friends. ■

Phrakhounmany "Air" Philavanh farms on 11 acres near Milo, Iowa, raising a diversity of livestock and crops. Air immigrated to Iowa from Laos in 1984 and started farming in 2010. He loves to share what he's learned with other immigrant communities in Iowa, his neighbors and his family and friends in Laos. Applying lessons from his grandpa, whom he calls "a guiding energy in his heart," Air aims to re-create a simple Laotian farm to showcase history and farmer ingenuity.



Photo courtesy of Boun Oum Douangphrachanh

Cathy Lafrenz

Healing Grief Through Salt, Flowers and Friendships



The author of “Out of Africa,” Karen Blixen, said the cure for everything is saltwater: sweat, tears or the sea. Now, I live on the east coast of Iowa. So the only thing I’ve got is a big muddy river. My story is about sweat and tears. Meatloaf would’ve said two out of three ain’t bad.

In the summer of 2019, Lori and her daughter, Betsy, drove from Waukesha, Wisconsin, to visit Miss Effie’s. It was Betsy’s 16th birthday, and the only thing she wanted was a Quad City birthday party. She wanted Whitey’s Ice Cream. She wanted Hungry Hobo Sandwiches and she wanted to visit Miss Effie’s. Now, they had been regular customers at Miss Effie’s in the past years. They would swing in the swoopy swing. They would chase my ducks. They would play with my kittens and Lori would pick buckets full of flowers to take home. It was a great way for a mom to relax out in the country on a hot summer day.

Betsy even had her sixth birthday party on the farm. Lori and her sister, Michelle, took my cornzebo, which is an old corn crib. And they filled it full of crepe paper flowers. They had vintage table clothes. They had antique dishes. It was the perfect little girl’s garden party. The little girls go parading through my garden, all dressed up in their Sunday best with great big hats, full of flowers and ribbons. And they had a wonderful time. Except, it was 98 degrees with humidity to match. The ice cream melted, the frosting got sticky on the cupcakes and those little girls wilted like the flowers in my garden. But it must have been memorable because Betsy wanted to come back in 2019 to celebrate her 16th birthday. As she danced through the garden, she declared this was truly her happy place.

My husband Cliff was working in the garden that day, actually prepping for a PFI field day out on the farm, and he was weeding and weeding and weeding. Betsy pranced over to him and said, “Can I have my senior pictures taken here?” He turned and he



Cathy Lafrenz and her late husband, Cliff.

said, "Of course you can," because that's one of the things we do. Lori and Betsy filled their car full of ice cream, full of sub sandwiches and buckets full of flowers and headed up to Wisconsin, again having had a wonderful day on the farm.

Our lives, Cliff and I, were going to change drastically within just a couple of weeks. I woke in the middle of the night to hear Cliff gasping for air. I rushed him to the ER. We spent four days in the hospital and after several different diagnosis, they said, "This is pneumonia". Cliff came home with pneumonia and a new apparatus for the garden, an oxygen tank. The next three months were spent at doctor's appointments, one after another after another.

We went through the entire alphabet of tests. The CT scans, the MRIs, the PET scans and the X-rays and finally, 3½ months later, we discovered that Cliff had lung cancer. He went downhill really, really fast. We ended up at the University of Iowa hospital and on Jan. 1, the oncologist asked, "We're going to throw a Hail Mary pass. Are you willing to try to catch it?" And we said yes. They started an extremely aggressive form of chemotherapy that none of the other doctors thought was a good idea. Cliff did amazing. On March 6, we went in, had a CT scan and the oncologist said, "The tumors are shrinking. The plaque-like cancer deposit on the lung is going away. You might be making a recovery. This is looking really good."

Twelve days later, though, Cliff spiked a fever of 103 and I had to rush to Iowa City by ambulance. He had pneumonia again. First we tried one antibiotic and then another, and then another. Five antibiotics later, nothing was working. They put him in palliative care and then they announced that it was time for hospice. And when they tell you that the person you love more than anything in the world is dying, you try to cram every conversation that you planned for the next 20 years into those very few days. We talked about our goals, talked about our memories. We talked about how much we loved each other. And we talked about the farm.

Cliff was my head groundskeeper. He was the man that took every silly idea I ever had and not only made it work, he made it better. I was crying and I said, "I can't do this farm without you." Cliff replied, "You have to. There's a 16-year-old girl in Wisconsin that wants to have her senior pictures taken." Cliff died on April 2, at the beginning of COVID. I was sent home brokenhearted to an empty house and quarantined because I had spent the last 15 days at the hospital and nobody knew what COVID was spreading and how it was going. So there was no funeral. There was no visitation. I couldn't even go to his burial. And I would say I felt alone. I was alone. But I was surrounded with the sweat of my community.

Matt and Alyssa, flower farmers from Davenport, created spreadsheets of all of my gardens and had people sign up to clean them. My friend, Rebecca, took half of my chickens. Bob,

my beekeeper, built a compost bin system for me and created the potting shed that was only in my husband's mind, and built it for me. The Vegan Cookbook Club came out and planted all of my plugs and spread pallets full of mulch for me. John, Jim and Doug, friends from our wine club, built the greenhouse for me. And when I asked, "Why are you doing this for me?" they said, "We love Cliff as much as you do."

I had ordered plugs for zinnias because I realized I wasn't going to be able to seed anything. But I got bumped out of the zinnia order that year. Now you can't be a flower farmer in Iowa without having zinnias. So I put a call out on Facebook and I said, "Hey, anybody have any zinnias for me?" Seven flower farmers bought trays of zinnias for me. I had every shape, every size and every color of zinnias that is ever out there. It was fantastic.

But there was one gal that knew I needed a kick in the ass to get out of bed every day. And my dear friend, Connie, said, "Flowers will get you through this." She had another problem. She sold to florists that year. With no weddings or funerals, she had flowers and no customers. I had customers but no flowers. So we went together and formed a loose partnership that did bouquets together and sold them. We did a CSA together, sold them. We taught classes and we've got tricks up our sleeve for this year that people won't believe.



I made it through 2020. I made it through 2021 and I will make it through 2022. And Betsy, you want to know about Betsy? On a very hot day in August 2021, Betsy drove out from Waukesha, Wisconsin, and had her senior picture taken on my farm. And there was saltwater, lots and lots of saltwater. ■

Cathy Lafrenz founded Miss Effie's Country Flowers and Garden Stuff in 2002. Miss Effie's was Iowa's first U-pick flower farm, now featuring more than 90 varieties of flowers. The farm also boasts a Summer Kitchen shop, and eggs from 20 breeds of chickens. Miss Effie's is a partner site of Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area.

Maja & Carmen Black



A Derecho Story: Comedy, Coffee and Community

Maja: Aug. 10, 2020, it was hot, it was dry and there was no sign of rain in the forecast. Carmen and I found ourselves standing on the side of the gravel road, staring down into the ditch where three or four of our own lambs had escaped their electro netting, crawled under a barbed wire fence and were happily grazing in a patch of poison ivy.

Carmen: Of course, it happened to be a Monday, and Mondays are some of our busiest days on the farm. It's the day we deliver our community supported agriculture shares. We harvest a huge variety of vegetables and get them into the walk-in cooler as quickly as possible so we can get them organized and delivered to the customers, all in one day.

On this Monday, we left the rest of our crew harvesting vegetables, after the neighbor called us, to go deal with these lambs. And the lambs not only were in the ditch, they were pretty far from a gate on either side. We decided that the fastest way to get them back where they needed to go was to herd them back through the hole they came out of, then crawl through the poison ivy underneath the fence and get them back into the electric net. I told Maja, "I am going to have to shower before we go to the CSA delivery, after this poison ivy." We get the lambs into the fence. We fix the energizer and we hop in the truck to go back to our farm.

Maja: And we thought that was the worst thing that was going to happen to us that day.

Carmen: In the five minutes it took us to get back to the farm, we learned on the radio that there was a strong storm in Grinnell with winds up to 70 miles an hour headed towards us.

Maja: It was going 70, down 80.

Carmen: We knew we had about an hour to prepare. When we got back to the farm, the rest of the crew had finished harvesting and were in our packing shed, getting everything organized for the delivery. We jumped into action to prepare for the storm.

I jumped right on a tractor. We'd received a load of round bales a couple days before and I didn't want them to get rained on. So I'm moving round bales into the barn.

Maja: And I headed out to our two high tunnel greenhouses to try to close them down and prepare for this apparent storm that was heading our way. As I headed out to the greenhouses, I looked back to the west and the sight of the dark wall cloud already racing towards us really kicked my butt into gear.

Carmen: I had two bales left when the storm hit, and I could tell by the speed at which my eyes filled with dust that this was going to be worse than we had expected.

Maja: And I had almost finished wiggle-wiring our high tunnels shut when the storm struck and blew my hat off my head. I sheltered behind the high tunnel for a second, but realized I couldn't stay there hiding behind a building that may in fact blow away. So I took off and hightailed it back to our packing shed.

Carmen: Maja and I met in the packing shed, where the rest of the crew was furiously trying to continue packing the CSA share. I was like, "I think we should stop." And then I realized we had forgotten the goats in a bad location for the storm. In our panic, all four of us ran back out into the storm to get the goats.



Maja: Four girls, seven goats, two dogs, all desperately sprinting in a single-file line into the wind and water. We ditched the goats in the barn and ran up to our house, where we stood dripping in the living room, not the basement, watching the trees fall down just outside the window.

Carmen: After the storm passed, we realized there was no way we could get to town and deliver the CSA share. And we couldn't even communicate with anyone. We didn't know it at the time, but a cell phone tower had gone down. Instead, we set to work, trying to make sure our livestock was all okay. We had livestock in five places, and we patched up some fences and made sure everyone would be okay for the night, and hoped the electricity would come back on in the morning.

Maja: Day two.

Carmen: I woke up and the still heat in my room let me know the electricity had not come back on. And I also immediately realized that I had developed a really horrible case of poison ivy in my left armpit from crawling under a fence in the ditch and forgetting to shower.

Maja: That morning, I attempted to grind the coffee beans for our critical morning coffee by putting them in a zip-lock bag and smashing them with a brick.

Carmen: After drinking our weak coffee, we packed up all of the vegetables we'd harvested the day before. And some friends an hour north of us had gotten their electricity back, allowing us to load up the trucks and bring all of our vegetables to a functional walk-in cooler. This was a little bit challenging with my armpit ivy, but I made it work. On the way back, we stopped at the one gas station with gasoline and waited in a pretty long line to get gasoline to power a generator our mom had.

Maja: The generator was at our mom's house, which is about 5 miles down the road. We thought it would be better to run the generator from our farm so we could water all of our livestock, which were distributed around the property. We loaded it up, brought it back to the farm and quickly realized we didn't have a critical adapter piece to hook it up to our own well pump. So we had to schlep it back to our mom's place. And we began the process of watering all of our livestock using a 50-gallon drum in the back of our side-by-side utility vehicle.

Carmen: This wasn't all bad. As we were driving around our neighborhood several times a day, we ran into a lot of other neighbors driving around the neighborhood with buckets of water in the backs of their trucks. We hadn't seen people in a while because of COVID, and we were really busy. So we caught up and were even able to charge our cell phones.

Maja: Day three.

Carmen: A friend called who had heard about the storm. He was going to be passing through the area and asked if we needed anything. I was able to give him the exact adapter part we needed. After visiting four or five stores, he bought the last adapter in Kearney, Nebraska.

Maja: Day four.

Carmen: Our friend arrived with the adapter and we called the neighbor, who is good at electricity, who came right over. Got the generator hardwired into the well pump. And we had water.

Maja: Over the past couple of days of talking to our neighbors on the road, we had developed a pretty good sense of a lot of other people that were having trouble producing water for their livestock. We sent off some text messages and quickly became the neighborhood watering hole. It was also on day four that we realized we could plug the coffee grinder into the generator while it was running and make a better pot of coffee.



Carmen: It was really nice to have stronger coffee on this day because this was also our next CSA delivery day. We were able to harvest, pack and deliver CSA shares without electricity or refrigeration, which was a real milestone for us.

Maja: Day seven...

Maja and Carmen: The power came back on!

Carmen: And we still had a lot of work to do, but very slowly things started to go back to normal.

Maja: To be honest, we still have piles of wood sitting around from the derecho. But ultimately, we learned a couple of things. One, our neighborhood community is actually a lot stronger altogether than any one of us is by ourselves. And you really do get all the gossip when you're the neighborhood watering hole.

Carmen: But probably most importantly, we learned that you should always shower after crawling through a ditch. Even if you don't have electricity. ■

Sisters, Maja and Carmen Black, own and operate SunDog Farm and Local Harvest CSA near Solon, Iowa. On the diversified operation they raise vegetables for 200 families and graze a small flock of sheep. They also conduct on-farm research through the Cooperators' Program. Carmen is a current PFI board member.

*Farmer Stories photos continued on page 45.

Working Together for a Hopeful Future

Beginning farmers Beth Hoffman and John Hogeland are working to build a farm that sustains people, nature and communities

PFI members Beth Hoffman and John Hogeland, of Whippoorwill Creek Farm, are beginning farmers in Monroe County, Iowa.

The pair has been involved in PFI beginning farmer programming, field days, the annual conference and the Cooperator's Meeting. Passionate about sustainable agriculture and food systems, Beth and John left San Francisco in 2019 for John's family farm. Now, they are working to apply the lessons they've learned to build a sustainable farm that adds diversity to the landscape.



“ Socially, we want the farm to be a place where we can bring a lot of people together. ”

- BETH HOFFMAN

The Backstory

Whippoorwill Creek Farm is rich in history. The land holds the story of a once diversified agriculture landscape and how it changed in tandem with the ebbs and flows of agricultural policy, values and broader societal change. Now, the land offers a glimpse of how that diversified landscape can be restored as a new generation of farmers seeks to rebuild the links between farm, ecosystem and community.

John Hogeland grew up there, watching his dad farm multiple enterprises: pastured pork, cattle, corn, soybeans and the

occasional small-grain crop. Around fifth grade, his dad became part of MoCo 10, one of the first hog concentrated animal feeding operations in Iowa, and the farm changed.

“I saw how damaging it was in a lot of different ways,” John says. “It was hard on the pigs, hard on my dad, hard on his health and really hard on the local economy because up to that point, all of our neighbors raised a few pigs.”

In search of something better, John left the farm, moving first to Wyoming, then to San Francisco. He attended culinary school and worked as a chef, a wine buyer and then a butcher, all roles where he found himself consistently surrounded by an array of fresh produce and high-quality meats. In San Francisco, he met Beth. Beth Hoffman was born in Queens, New York, and grew up in New Jersey. She studied anthropology in college and journalism in graduate school at University of California, Berkeley. Her love of cultures, intertwined with food and racial equity issues in the food system, propelled her to report on food as a journalist.

“Race and economic issues are critical ways to think about the food system,” Beth says.

While their paths differed, Beth's and John's experiences ultimately developed into a passion for agricultural equity and fostered

a deeper relationship with food and the communities it creates. These are values they brought back to the farm in Iowa.

Returning to the Farm

John and Beth currently raise grass-finished beef and have added goats to also help with brush management on the farm. But farming is not easy, as Beth outlined in her book “Bet the Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America.” Today, the couple continues to strive to better the landscape by mimicking natural systems. For them, community support is a necessity for beginning farmers to succeed and for future aspiring farmers to gain entry to the profession.

“There's very limited access. The people who have farms stay on farms,” Beth says. “Those are the families who get to farm. And a lot of families out there don't get the opportunity to be in rural communities, to be outside of cities.”

While consolidated operations can more easily rely on subsidies and take greater risks, farms operating outside of this norm do not benefit from the same safety net. Because of this disparity, Beth says, the pair is working hard to bring other people onto Whippoorwill Creek Farm with them.





(Above): Cattle graze on grass their whole lives at Whippoorwill Creek Farm, operated by Beth Hoffman and John Hogeland near Lovillia, Iowa. **(Opposite) Top:** Beth Hoffman and John Hogeland pose with their puppy, Snooks. **Bottom:** John Hogeland trims a tree at Whippoorwill Creek Farm.

The Vision

This experience of trying to start a farm – and to do so sustainably – has inspired Beth and John’s long-term vision for the farm. They are working to build the farm into an environmentally, financially and socially sustainable business. They argue this change is most needed in Iowa, where “most farms consist of corn and soybeans planted in a landscape that once supported greater ecological diversity,” as well as many diverse farming enterprises. “This is where theories about how we can diversify crops and to attract new farmers need to be played out,” Beth says. “This is where the change needs to happen.”

As part of their longer-term farm goals, the couple hopes to have many farmers on their land working alongside each other on their own enterprises, raising a variety of crops and livestock and welcoming in the next generation of beginning farmers. “Socially, we want the farm to be a place that attracts people to work together,” Beth says. “The

landscape benefits when a multitude of different species and practices can take place on it.”

As part of this vision, Beth and John want their land to someday enable beginning farmers to remain independent, make their own decisions and not feel compelled to sacrifice ownership in the system for financial survival, as John’s father experienced with his hogs.

“We’re privileged to be able to farm this land,” Beth says. “We’re not using it all and it could be much better utilized by having more people here. In fact, most farms have the capacity to have more people doing more things on them.”

For Beth, sustainable farming is about building a holistic unity between the farm and the broader context – between the individual people, the knowledge and practices and the community. “Let’s band together and support each other,” she says. “Not in going out of business and watching

our land sell to the highest bidder. But in working together to stay in business.”

As John and Beth work towards their long-term farm goals, they are buoyed by the vision of vibrant communities that are full of people, rooted in healthy landscapes and have busy town squares, funded schools and small farms.

Such a vision is possible, they say, “when we live and work for it” – and it’s this vision they left San Francisco to pursue. ■

Learn More

• In 2021, Beth Hoffman published “Bet the Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America,” which chronicles the transition she and John made from urban-based careers on the West Coast to starting a farm in rural Iowa, the struggles they encountered and the broader challenges of starting a farm today.

Read beginning farmer Susan Kasal Young’s review of this book on page 38.

The Savings Incentive Program *Class of 2023*

The Savings Incentive Program is a two-year program that pairs beginning and aspiring farmers with experienced farmer mentors; provides targeted learning and peer networking opportunities; and offers business planning support and guidance. This year we are welcoming nine farmers from across the state of Iowa. They come with a variety of farm businesses ranging from vegetables to direct-marketed meat and wool. Three farmers are joining from the Global Greens Incubator Farm program run by Lutheran Services in Iowa.

Throughout the program, participants will invest up to \$2,400 into their farm savings account. In these two years, they will be working to build their network through farmer-led events and mentoring opportunities. When they leave the program, they will have a business plan to help guide their farm business decisions. After successfully completing the program, Practical Farmers of Iowa matches their savings dollar for dollar, up to \$2,400, to use toward the purchase of a farm asset.

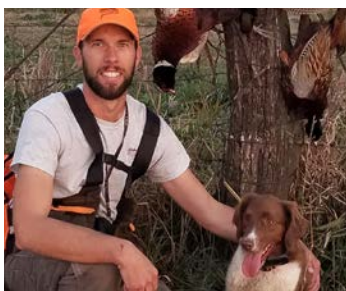
For more information on the program, and to learn more about the farmers, visit practicalfarmers.org/savings-incentive-program.



Emma Barber and Jeremy Wilhelm Rhubarb Botanicals | Springville, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

Farming is a way to provide nourishment to our community, whether that be through growing vibrant healing herbs, raising nutritious pasture-grazed meat or bringing beauty and joy through an arrangement of flowers. With regenerative practices and attentive stewardship, we aim to increase resilience within our local ecosystem and promote the health of our environment. We hope that our farm and the products we offer will inspire others to connect with and care for the natural world around them.



Emery Davis

Solon, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I would like to be an example of how production agriculture can be conservation-driven while being profitable. I find farming to be very interesting, and it's fun to look at farming from an entrepreneurial standpoint.



Minani Esta and Renovat D.

Esta's Farm | Des Moines, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I have been farming since I was 8 years old with my family back in Africa. Farming has always been in my life and it has always been a source of income to support my family. I like that farming provides us with food to eat and supports others by providing them with fresh food.



Hakizimana Francois and Niyonzima Roza

Izere's (Believe in God) Farmers Group | Des Moines, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

Because we want to provide organic products to the community while being able to provide financially for our family.



Phenias Ndiho and Scolastica Nilingymana

Ubumwe (Unity) Farm | Des Moines, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

We would like to make farming our professional career because we love farming. All of our life, we have been farming.



Stennie Nelson

Tuuli Farm | Turin, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I love tangible outside work, with hands-on results that I can eat, wear, share – and being involved in the seasons, the processes of seeds and birth, compost and death, in connection and relationship with these processes. I'm fascinated by the possibilities of food and fiber production that are beneficial to biodiversity and wildlife habitat.



Amanda and Knuton Severson

Grand View Beef | Clarion, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

We love the lifestyle, and we desire to continue what the generations before us have created so that we might be able to pass it on to the next generation.



Steve Strasheim

Twisted River Farm | Mitchell, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I like the experience of growing and producing food for my community and the connections that brings.



Laura Tidrick

Mossycup Farms | Clear Lake, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

For the lifestyle, raising the highest quality food possible for our family and offering that same quality to others.

From Three to 10 to 30

PFI's evolution to continue creating farm and landscape change

Hiroshi Mikitani, founder of Rasputen, Japan's largest online marketplace, has a rule of three and 10. This means that "everything" breaks in a company every time you roughly triple in size.

When you're a one-person company, you do everything and boot-strap it together. But processes change when you move to a team of three, 10, 30, 100 and so forth. "Everything" includes communications systems, payroll, accounting, budgeting, customer support, onboarding, employee structures decision-making, processes, procedures and more.

I've been around the sun 14 cycles as a PFI staffer. I wasn't here when there were three staff, but it was close. When I started, PFI had four full-time staff members: Teresa Opheim, Gary Huber, Rick Exner and Cedar Johnson. Excitingly, Practical Farmers has hit that 30-staff mark, meaning we've gone through this tripling in growth almost twice during my PFI tenure.

This continued growth is with purpose: PFI's strategic plan, co-created with our membership, charges us to grow organizational capacity for long-term impact, so that PFI is well-positioned for success, impact and growth. Together, we want to bring our farmer-to-farmer network model to more people, accelerating farmer and landscape change, so we can achieve our vision: an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

With a lot of research (including good conversations with partner organizations like Brian Depew from Center for Rural Affairs, who referred us to Mikitani's rule of three and 10) we have re-envisioned our organizational design. Organizational design defines how we focus our attention and resources to achieve our mission. As is common, the model we have landed on is a hybrid, fusing together functional, network and team structures to best situate PFI to achieve our bold strategic goals.

What does this mean? **Functional** structure organizes our staff into departments by function, allowing employees to focus their efforts. When I started in 2007, it was quite effective for us to all be jacks of all trades, and to come to decisions by consensus. That approach certainly doesn't serve us well at our current organizational size. A functional structure will enable us to have clarity about our roles, hone our skills and have more impact.

But functional structure has a risk of reducing transparency and collaboration as we work. To remedy this, PFI staff will also convene as **teams** to increase cooperation while distributing decision-making and accountability toward our goals.

The **network** component of PFI's design is not new; it's PFI's crown jewel, what the organization was created from and for. PFI's network cannot be overstated or undervalued. Members lead our organization through guidance and participation.

We work extensively with partners to collaboratively meet our shared goals. Identifying PFI's network in our organizational design pays tribute to its importance, and helps us all understand why PFI has a track record of building resilient farms and communities – we are doing it with a broad base of people. Alone, we only can do a little. Together we accomplish a lot!

While we are a ways from the next organizational "breakage," per Mikitani's rule, we are excited to keep collaborating with all of you as we work toward that next threefold milestone (100 staff!!). Together, we will continue to grow with purpose in our quest to transform Iowa and beyond. ■



PFI's programs have new homes

You may notice many staff have new titles. That's because we've re-organized our programs into three areas - farmer-led education, research and farm viability. Long-time PFI staff member Sarah Carlson will oversee these new areas.



FARMER-LED EDUCATION

- Farmer-to-farmer education
- Network creation & facilitation



RESEARCH

- On-farm research
- Complementary research projects & tools



FARM VIABILITY

- Financial incentives & technical support
- Business & market development
- Policy solutions



Review of: “Bet The Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America”

“Bet The Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America,” by PFI member Beth Hoffman, is an in-depth look at the economic challenges of starting a farm through the eyes of a journalist who has recently transitioned into farming.

This topic spoke to me personally, since I also became a beginning farmer later in life. The book touches on questions I have also pondered, such as how do we create a self-sustaining, socially and environmentally sound business – and is it possible?

Beth wrote about food and agriculture for 25 years before making the leap into living the life she had previously only written about. In 2019, Beth and her husband, John Hogeland, moved from San Francisco to John’s family farmland in Iowa, onto a part of the farm that has been in John’s family since the late 1850s. She acknowledges the privilege of entering their new endeavor with a leg up: a healthy nest egg and direct access to generational family land. Many beginning farmers do not have these resources to fall back on, and often don’t have the same latitude when making business decisions.

Early on, we learn of John’s family history spanning five generations on the land, as well as the challenging conversations that come with transferring land and forging a new, unconventional path. Ultimately, the couple signed a lease with John’s father and created Whippoorwill Creek Farm on a 530-acre tract near Lovillia, in south-central Iowa, with plenty of land to improve.



Beth shares the challenges of transitioning the land to organic production. They encountered obstacles common to new (and experienced) farmers – purchasing the proper oat seed, using the right planting



methods, unpredictable weather and market uncertainties among them. Readers also learn about the difficult path farmers must navigate through government programs to access resources.

Beth and John start their grass-fed beef business by leasing cattle from John’s dad, and Beth shares how they must delve into the business of raising cattle for market. John’s background as a butcher equipped him with knowledge of the qualities of a fine cut of meat, but not for the challenges of marketing, processing and distributing that meat onto customers’ plates.

Beth later points out that the mechanization of farming historically has not only made farming more efficient but also enabled members of the farm family to seek work off the farm. She cites U.S. Department of Agriculture data indicating a high number of farms have at least one member engaged in off-farm jobs. In fact, until recently, my husband and I were in that category ourselves, with his “job in town” providing both health insurance and a steady income. While such benefits can provide greater stability, having more farmers on site allows for increased collaboration. It also offers the chance to strengthen infrastructure and perhaps scale up farm offerings to become more sustainable.

The book goes on to challenge some myths about farming in an effort to find solutions to the myriad trials farmers face. In doing so, Beth addresses the importance of maintaining one’s mental health, self-care and being more mindful of daily time allocations. While farming rarely lends itself

to being a 9-to-5 endeavor, I agree that it’s important to identify your farming goals and focus on moving towards them.

Beth and John also search for ways to remove the hurdle of land access for new farmers, including those who are Black, Indigenous, Latino or other farmers of color. She interviews lowans engaged in that process, learns there are barriers to climb beyond offering a piece of land and raises some important questions. For instance, how do we make those opportunities long-term or dismantle the other barriers to lasting success? How might farmers join or create cooperatives to benefit (rather than competing with) one another?

Beth also suggests we get involved at some level to drive policy changes and put more programs in place to help farmers get started. For example, farmers deserve affordable health care and greater access to high-speed internet. With fundamental improvements like these, our rural communities can become more vibrant, diverse and desirable places to live and work.

Beth’s research, coupled with her first-hand experience, takes readers on an exploration of the history of farming to better understand how we got where we are today. She doesn’t pretend to have solutions to the challenges we face but does give readers food for thought. Whether you are a farmer or an eater, I recommend this quick, thought-provoking read. “Bet The Farm” challenges us all to think about our roles in a more just and sustainable food system, many of which Practical Farmers of Iowa also promotes by facilitating conversations and creating diverse programming. ■

Susan Kasal Young and her husband, Rich Young, started Lucky Star Farm in 2011 on the outskirts of Iowa City, Iowa. The 20-acre farm includes pasture-raised eggs, turkeys for the holidays, Nigerian dwarf goats, occasional public goat yoga sessions and a small herd of llamas. In 2020, the Youngs completed a renovation of the 1950s-era milk house on their farm, converting it to a farm-stay Airbnb.

New Faces and Roles at PFI

Meet the newest additions to Practical Farmers' team

Taylor Hintch – Field Crops Education Coordinator



Taylor Hintch, of Fort Dodge, Iowa, joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in January 2022 as the field crops education coordinator. In this role, Taylor helps the farmer-led education department facilitate events and engage with farmers raising various field crops. She previously worked with PFI through Green Iowa AmeriCorps in the summer of 2019.

Taylor's first experience with agriculture was as a member of the Douglas Dreamers

4-H Club in Fort Dodge. But it was her affiliation with the World Food Prize after attending youth institutes and as a Wallace-Carver fellow that sparked her interest in sustainable agriculture. In 2019, Taylor earned her bachelor's degree from Iowa State University in global resource systems with concentrations in sustainability and horticulture. While at ISU, Taylor spent three years working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on organic maize research exploring the nutrient content of organic corn for livestock feed. In the summer of 2018, she worked with an organic zucchini research team at the University of Hohenheim in Stuttgart, Germany. She has

also worked in different youth education program roles, and most recently worked as a grower in a central Iowa wholesale greenhouse.

Taylor enjoys cooking, making new things or giving old things new life, gardening and spending quality time with her two cats, Max and Ollie. She would like to get back to her love of traveling as soon as possible. In addition to her time spent in Germany, Taylor visited England, Greece, Iceland, Ireland and the Netherlands. With all of her travels, Iowa is still Taylor's favorite place. ■

Kayla Koether – Senior Farm Viability Manager



Kayla Koether joined PFI in February 2022 as the senior farm viability manager. In this role, she leads the new farm viability team that tackles an array of emerging initiatives at PFI: providing personalized assistance to farmers to meet their farm goals; working with agricultural supply chain partners to grow key markets; and shaping the policies that encourage resilient farms to thrive.

A longtime PFI member, Kayla acquired her love for intensive rotational grazing on her family's fifth-generation farm in Clayton County, Iowa, where she also developed her passion for vibrant farms and rural communities. That passion led her to design an independent major studying international agriculture and rural development at Grinnell College.

Prior to joining PFI, Kayla was a food systems specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach in northeast Iowa, where she helped farmers and food hubs create robust business plans, build communities of peers and develop the

local food system. Kayla has been trained as a food business model optimization consultant by the Food Finance Institute at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has worked to help farmers invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy at the Winneshiek Energy District.

Kayla and her partner, Landon, continue to expand their own small herd of beef cattle. When she's not tending livestock or working on building projects, you can find Kayla reading, practicing yoga, traveling, horseback riding or hiking scenic trails in the Driftless Region. ■

Mike Roelf – Information Systems Manager



Michael Roelf joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in March 2022 as the new information systems manager. In this role, Mike will manage and improve PFI's IT platforms, equipping our staff with the digital tools we need to carry out our mission.

Michael was born and raised in Iowa City, Iowa. He has many memories of trips from

Iowa City to Cedar County, Iowa, visiting his family on farms near Tipton and Clarence. Michael and his wife, Rosemary, purchased part of her family farm in Johnson County, Iowa, where they have converted from row crops to vegetables and started a new farmer incubator.

Throughout this process, they used many PFI resources from and drew on the experiences of its members when acquiring land and planning how to use and conserve it. Prior to joining PFI, Mike spent 35 years working in information systems for

education, manufacturing and financial services companies.

When not working at PFI, or on the farm, he volunteers at Farm to Table and the Community Food Bank, and is a member of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors' Food Policy Council. For relaxation, he likes to spend time on a beach and fishing. ■

Suzi Howk Says Goodbye After 16 Years

Since the very first field day I attended in September 2006, on Susan Jutz's farm, I have known that Practical Farmers of Iowa was special. PFI's core values are based on listening to farmers, networking and engagement and offering encouragement to keep going through the good times and bad. Asking questions, curiosity and always learning have also always been core to PFI and its members, along with a base understanding of agriculture as working with nature rather than against it – as Dan Wilson says, seeing creation as a guide for farming systems.

I have spent my career thus far working to expand the mission at Practical Farmers of Iowa. Along the way, I have done a wide range of jobs: copying members in the news articles, planning youth camps and poultry research trials, keeping the bills



paid and working hard to make sure all financials at PFI are in order. Over time, we have built the organization from a budget of about \$400,000 per year to a budget of \$4.4 million for fiscal year 2022. I'm proud to say that Practical Farmers of Iowa is in a strong financial position!

After 13.5 years full-time at PFI (16 years if you count my internship), it is time for me to move on to other opportunities. I will be serving as a nonprofit CFO consultant with a fully remote company. Leaving PFI has been a very difficult decision to make, but this change will allow for increased flexibility and focus on my family.

I will cherish the relationships I have had the opportunity to build with all of you. Each farm I have visited, and all of the conversations, have shaped me into the person I am today. Thank you all for the work you do every day to provide nourishment and steward the land now and for future generations.

God Bless,
Suzi Howk

Calendar

Upcoming Events: APRIL - JUNE

Practical Farmers Events ↘

Note: Times are in CST. Full details about all events are available at practicalfarmers.org/events.

MAY

MAY 21: PFI + Golden Hills RC&D Livestock on the Land Screening
Host: Ellen Walsh-Rosmann | 7:30-10 p.m. | Harlan, Iowa | Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/events

JUNE

JUNE 3: Small Grains Shared Learning Call
Online | 12-1 p.m. | Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/events

Other Events ↘

Note: Times are in CST. Find more events at practicalfarmers.org/events.

APRIL

APRIL 21-MAY 19: Preparádomo Para Iniciar Tu Negocio Y Tomar Control De Tu Finanzas/Preparing to Start Your Business and Take Control of Your Finances
Columbus, NE | Learn more at cfa.org/preparandome-para-iniciar-tu-negocio-y-tomar-control-de-tu-finanzas-espanol-columbus-neb

APRIL 28: The Savanna Institute - WI Land + Water Webinars "Conservation and Benefits of Alley Cropping"
Online | Learn more at savannainstitute.org/event/webinars/2022-04-28

APRIL 30: The Gathering - Coming Together Around Local Food
Mason City, IA | Learn more at healthyharvestni.com/the-gathering

MAY

MAY 6: MOSES - Northwest Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) Regional Conservation Meet-Up
Amery, WI | Learn more at mosesorganic.org/community-calendar/#May

MAY 12: Xerces Society - What Bee is That? An Introduction to Commonly Encountered Bees of the US
Online | Learn more at xerces.org/events/oregon/what-bee-is-that-introduction-to-commonly-encountered-bees-of-us

MAY 14: Land Stewardship Project - Phil Specht Grassland Bird Sanctuary Event
McGregor, IA | All Day | Learn more at landstewardshipproject.org/upcoming-events | Contact Phil at mudd2sunflower@yahoo.com

JUNE

JUNE 20: 20th Annual SAFSF Forum - Commitment & Accountability
Kansas City, MO | Learn more at agandfoodfunders.org/2022-safsf-forum-commitment-accountability

Welcome, New Members!

DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Ashley Donkersloot – Sanborn
- Megan Kludt – Akron
- Brad Miller – Greenfield
- Ryan and Tarin Tiefenthaler – Carroll
- Matt White – Estherville

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH-CENTRAL

- Chad Britten – Zearing
- Brett Buchholz – Ames
- Maggie Buscher – Maxwell
- Larry Howard – St. Anthony
- Dianna Jordan – Ames
- Steven Landt – Union
- John Lengeling – Collins
- Dr. Marta Mainenti – Ames
- Bill Mather – Ledyard
- Fernando Miguez – Ames
- Gabrielle Myers – Ames
- Elizabeth Rieke – Nevada
- Dan Runner – Gilman
- Dave Runner – Gilman
- Kendall Schrock – Riceville
- Brody Vaske – Bancroft
- Ryan Vavroch – Elberon

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Michael Bollinger – Decorah
- Tom Brown Jr. – Cedar Rapids
- Elizabeth Cox Hollingsworth – Waterloo
- Zach Drape – Waverly
- Kya Farag – Mt. Vernon
- Josh Haerther – Atkins
- Dave Hermesen – Farley
- Scott Holthaus – Decorah
- JoAnn Kramer – Cedar Falls
- Ross Kurash – Fort Atkinson
- Shannon Moeller – Waverly
- Farmers and Robots, Ele Munjeli – Dubuque
- Stonebridge Ltd., Pamela Ryan – Cedar Falls
- Dustin Schirm – Garrison
- Marcel Sebetka – Norway
- Jeri Thornsberry – Waterloo

DISTRICT 4 - SOUTHWEST

- Zane Algreen – Albia
- Galen Becker – Cumberland
- Sandi Bergman – Dallas Center
- William & Cindy Brewbaker – Indianola

- Monday Chup – Runnells
- Gary Crozier – Harvey
- Dick Dalto – Lenox
- Mike Damon – Knoxville
- Chris Doud – Urbandale
- Joshua Engelbrecht – Ankeny
- Susan Espeland – Madrid
- Minani Esta – Des Moines
- Ndayahundwa Evance and Shwirima Ezinoel – Des Moines
- Steve Ferguson – Ankeny
- Kiara Fish – Waukee
- Kelly Flinn – Cumming
- Vernon Flinn – Cumming
- Nicholas Garaycochea – Missouri Valley
- Mallory Godfrey – Clive
- Duane Hilyard – Cumberland
- Larry King – Missouri Valley
- Logan King – Mondamin
- Keaton King – Mondamin
- Ryan King – Mondamin
- Aaron Kropf – Leon
- Clint Luellen – Minburn
- Tim Luellen – Minburn
- Scolastica Nilingiyimana – Des Moines
- Tom Pollock – Malvern
- Audra Rectenbaugh – Fontanelle
- Ryan Schmidt – Elkhart
- Dennis Schrodt – Prole
- Wendy Scullin – Indianola
- Midwest Soil Restore, Steve Shivvers – Prole
- Abraham Ter – Des Moines
- Yvette Urakoze – West Des Moines
- Donald Van Gilst – Newton
- Ben Van Roekel – Melrose
- Adam Veasman – Colfax
- Curt Vos – Sully
- Gabriel Vredenburg – Jamacia
- Josh Woods – Creston
- Stan Woody – Reasnor

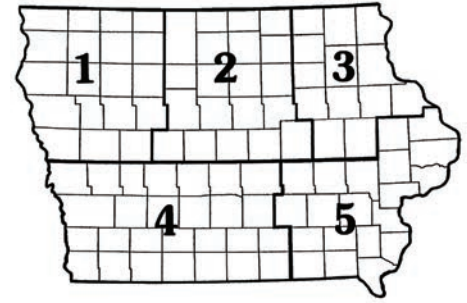
DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST

- Jeff Allen – Sperry
- Abigail Barten – Iowa City
- Robert Blount – Iowa City
- Peter Byler – Iowa City
- Claire Carlson – Coralville
- Kendel Clark – Tipton
- Paulette Delk – Fairfield
- Carl Drost – Oskaloosa

- Isaac Fiedler – Libertyville
- Andrew Fiedler – Libertyville
- Bethany Fischer – Tipton
- Fitzpatrick Forestry, LLC, Shawn Fitzpatrick – Solon
- Merle Gerdes – Monticello
- Gerald Hanson – Parnell
- Steve Harris – Grinnell
- Dwight Heitman – Marengo
- Don Hudepohl – Williamsburg
- Ryan Jenkins – Muscatine
- Andrew Kloppenburg – Brooklyn
- Stephanie McInnis – Davenport
- Miller Hybrids, Inc., Bob Miller – Kalona
- Matthew Niemann – Dewitt
- Keith Plate – Iowa City
- David Plate – Iowa City
- Jason Russell – Monticello
- Todd Schmitz – Crawfordsville
- Mark Steinke – Gibson
- Joanne Timm – Monticello
- Seth Todd – Columbus Junction
- Amanda Webber – West Branch
- Neil Wehr – Webster City
- Ashley Wenke – Montezuma

DISTRICT 6 - OUT OF STATE

- Diane Blas – Eagle River, AK
- Brent Kubiak – Macomb, IL
- Elton Mau – Arrowsmith, IL
- Jean McGuire – Peru, IL
- Jeffery Miller – Kirkland, IL
- Gabe Garbarino – Holland, MI
- Travis Carter – Jackson, MN
- Kristina DeLaundreau – St Paul, MN
- Mark Dittrich – St. Paul, MN
- Scott Haase – Blue Earth, MN
- Patrick Hendrickx – Menahga, MN
- Ruth Jovaag – Austin, MN
- Lance Klessig – Dakota, MN
- Jason Lorenz – Little Falls, MN
- Kirk Stapleton – Saint Louis Park, MN
- Mike Unruh – Winona, MN
- Mike Barmann – Maryville, MO
- Kody Karr – Monroe City, MO
- Jose Salas – Charlotte, NC
- Anthony Barreras – Blair, NE
- David Benes – Valparaiso, NE
- Darin Benes – Valparaiso, NE
- Don Benes – Valparaiso, NE
- Katie Bettin – Omaha, NE
- Steve Dvorak – North Bend, NE
- Stephanie Finklea – Lyons, NE
- Troy Fuelberth – Hardington, NE
- Herb Hasenkamp – Beemer, NE
- Adam Hemmer – Tarnov, NE
- Matt Hendl – Milford, NE
- Keith Henggeler – Schuyler, NE
- Buck Hoier – Herman, NE
- Jeremy Hosek – Lincoln, NE
- Noah Jacobson – Hickman, NE
- Katie Jantzen – Plymouth, NE
- Kelsey Jones – Winside, NE
- Tom Knopik – Fullerton, NE
- Gregory Knuth – Mead, NE
- Richard Larson – Creston, NE
- Kaye Lidolph – Columbus, NE
- Bill Meduna – Colon, NE
- Brent Melliger – Columbus, NE
- Gregg Melliger – Columbus, NE
- Eric Milton – Friend, NE
- Turner Moore – Unadilla, NE
- Martin Neal – Hickman, NE
- Dan Noble – Albion, NE
- Erika O'Brien – Meadow Grove, NE
- Junior Pfanstiel – McLean, NE
- Claudia Patricia Pinto – Omaha, NE
- Martha Pinto Castillo – Omaha, NE
- Tom Preister – Humphrey, NE
- Daniel Preister – Humphrey, NE
- Josh Rathman – Shelby, NE
- Mark Schott – Osceola, NE
- Paul Sheridan – Genoa, NE
- Adam Sherrerd – Omaha, NE
- Aaron Studebaker – Raymond, NE
- Becky Studebaker – Raymond, NE
- Robert Studebaker – Raymond, NE
- Decker Woods – Omaha, NE
- Jesse Glick – Howard, PA
- Andrew Adamski – Seymour, WI
- Zach Laughlin – Fond Du Lac, WI
- Mark Porter – Oregon, WI
- Ron Rabou – Albin, WY



Thank you

to our newest lifetime members!

**Paul
Hoffman**

- Earlville, IL

**Cory
Bennett**

- Galva, IA

**John
Blake**

- Waukon, IA

**Kristine and
Bret Lang**

- Brookings, SD

**Mary
Swander**

- Kalona, IA

**Suzan Erem
and Paul
Durrenberger**

- West Branch, IA

**Meghan Filbert
and Omar de
Kok-Mercado**

- Pilot Mound, IA

**Doug Alert
and Margaret
Smith**

- Hampton, IA

**Ted and
Linda
Krauskopf**

- Highland, IL

Lifetime membership is open to anyone, and confers the same benefits as regular membership – without any renewal notices! Learn more about this option at practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership.



Margaret Smith & Doug Alert



Cory Bennett



Ryan & Tarin Tiefenthaler



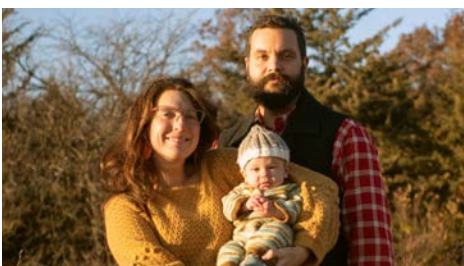
Mike Unruh



Lance & Chrissy Klessig



Ndayahundwa Evance



Meghan Filbert & Omar de Kok-Mercado



Mary Swander



Michael Bollinger

Join PFI

GROW YOUR FARM WITH PRACTICAL FARMERS. JOIN OR RENEW TODAY!

Want to join or renew online? Visit practicalfarmers.org/join-or-renew.

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____ County: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____ Email 2: _____

* For Farm or Household membership, please list names of all persons included. For Organization membership, you may list up to three contact persons.

JOIN OR RENEW

1. I AM JOINING OR RENEWING AS:

- Aspiring Farmer
- Beginning Farmer
- Farmer
- Friend of Farmer
(non-farmer who does not plan to farm)
- Farmland owner
(non-operator)

2. I AM JOINING AT THE LEVEL OF:

- Access - \$25
- Individual - \$50
- Farm or Household - \$60
- Organization - \$110
- Lifetime Member* - \$1,000
* See details at bit.ly/PFI-lifetime

3. PLEASE ADD MY FARM TO YOUR:

- Local Foods Directory

PLEASE ADD MY ORGANIZATION TO YOUR:

- Business Directory *(Organization members only)*

4. HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT PFI?

EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUP SIGN-UP

When you join our email discussion groups, you can network, build community and exchange ideas from anywhere, at any time. Sign up for as many groups as you'd like (and be sure to include your email address above)!

- Announcements
- Perspectives
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DONATION

For the sake of the long-term health and vitality of Practical Farmers of Iowa, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c)3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

I would like to make a one-time, tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

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

Or, make a recurring monthly or quarterly donation. This will be automatically charged to your credit card on the first day of each month or quarter.

- Yes, I would like to give \$ _____
- per month OR per quarter

PAYMENT

Membership Level\$ _____ per year for ____ year(s) = \$ _____

Additional Donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

- Check or money order is enclosed *(Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")*
- Credit card *(Visa, MasterCard or Discover only)*

Name on card _____ Number _____

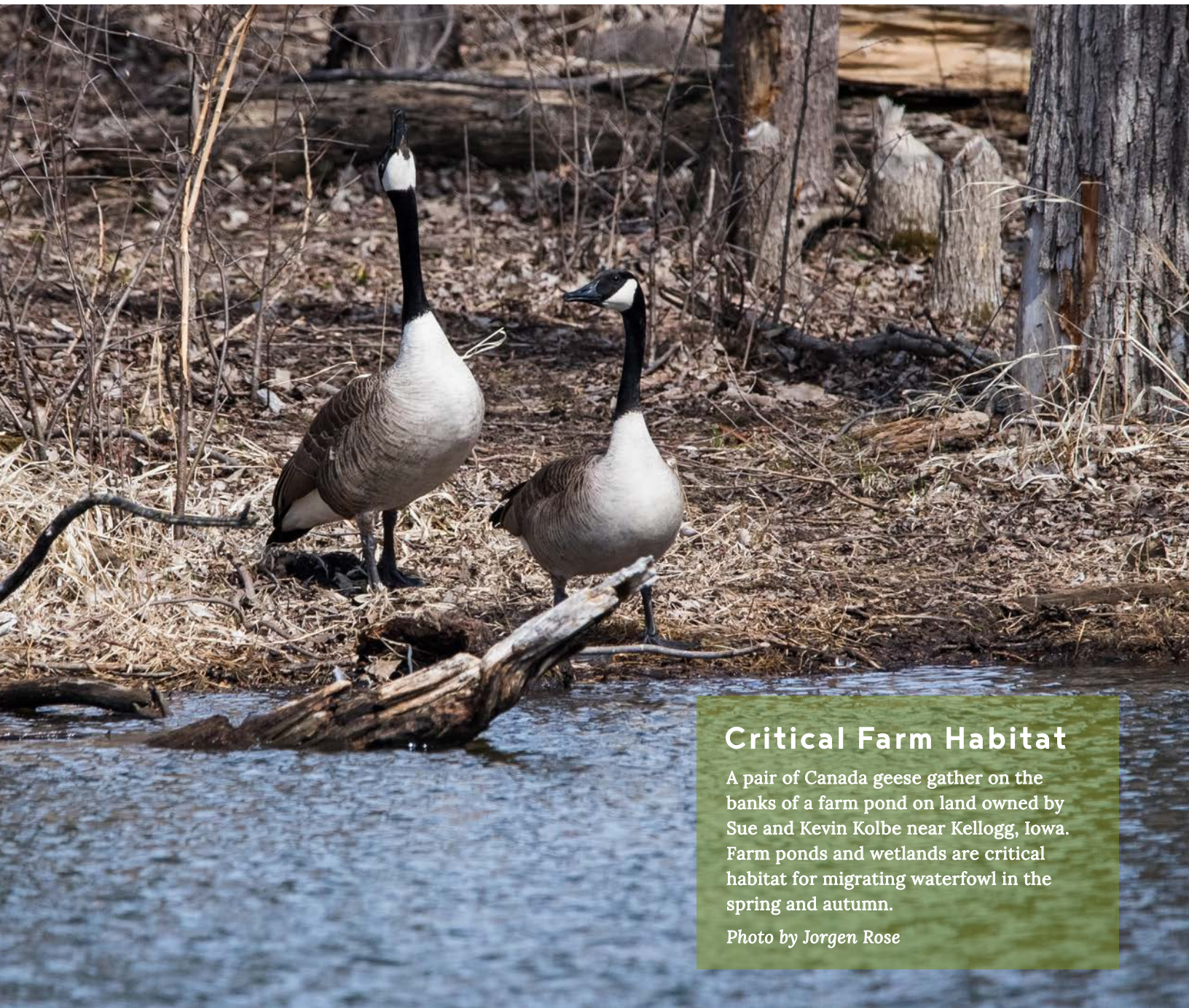
Exp. Date _____ CVC# (3 digits) _____ Please automatically charge this credit card annually for membership

Office Use Only: Check # _____ Check date _____ Total amount _____ Notes _____

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101
Ames, IA 50010

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



Critical Farm Habitat

A pair of Canada geese gather on the banks of a farm pond on land owned by Sue and Kevin Kolbe near Kellogg, Iowa. Farm ponds and wetlands are critical habitat for migrating waterfowl in the spring and autumn.

Photo by Jorgen Rose