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PRACTICAL FARMERS
of Iowa

Small
Grains
NEWS
July 2023

Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.



Neil Peterson farms near Fonda, Iowa, tending corn, soybeans, oats, hay and row crop ground converted to pasture for his 50 beef cattle. As a participant in **PFI's cooperators' program**, he is trialing four oat varieties- Saddle, Reins, South Dakota Buffalo and Minnesota Pearl- across 20 acres.

Exploring oat varieties: In early April, Neil no-till drilled oats into soybean stubble with 7.5 inches of spacing at a rate of 110 pounds per acre.

Relying on cattle manure spread last fall for fertility, he chose to limit the use of synthetic inputs for his oats this year in hopes of finding the variety that performs best without synthetic inputs. On Neil's farm, the Reins and Saddle varieties matured first. SD Buffalo and MN Pearl varieties matured later and were the tallest.

Harvest time: Despite slight variations in height and maturity, Neil decided to harvest all his oats at the same time, in late July, using a swather to dry the oat grain and straw out before combining. This year, his oat yield was

approximately 126 bushels per acre, which was higher than expected considering ongoing dry conditions and a definite improvement from last year. He plans to sell some of the grain as livestock feed and keep the rest for personal on-farm use as cover crop seed and cattle feed.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Check out PFI's new conservation cost-share



Are you interested in conservation practices for your farm that improve water quality, build soil health, address climate change and provide critical native habitat for wildlife?

We are excited to announce that [**PFI is now offering a new conservation cost-share!**](#)

Those who enroll can get technical and financial support for precision conservation, prairie strips, oxbow wetlands and pollinator habitat. [**Learn more and apply.**](#)

Launch your cover crop business with the accelerator program



Want to start or grow your cover crop seed or application business? Enroll in the [**cover crop business accelerator program.**](#)

With this one-year program, you'll receive personalized consulting on business growth; a capital investment payment of up to \$5,000; and incentive payments.

There are 15 spots available on a first-come, first-served basis. [**Learn more and apply.**](#)

Get your questions answered by other farmers in PFI's email discussion groups

[**PFI email discussion groups**](#) are a forum for members to get real-time advice from each other, share what is

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Jump in on discussions with other farmers about tools, techniques, markets, and more.

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happening in their area and even find new markets.

An example of a recent post on the field crops discussion list: *How long should you allow rye to sweat after harvest?*

Membership is required. If you aren't already a member, [join here](#). Then contact the office at (515) 232-5661 or email

debra.boekholder@practicalfarmer.org to be added to a group.

IN THE FIELD

Recent blog post: "Growing, Harvesting and Selling Rye as Cover Crop Seed"



During our June small grains shared learning call, **Chris Gaesser** shared the ins and outs of his experience with growing cereal rye for on-farm use to sell as seed and for distilling markets.

"One of the best pieces of advice that I've received for harvesting small grains is to wait a week from whenever you think it is ready. Don't even look at it. Then come back in a week and that's when it's actually ready," Chris says.

[Read the recap to learn more about his operation.](#)

Video: When and How to Harvest Small Grains

In this episode of Rotationally Raised, "Harvest: When and How?," PFI farmers talk small grains harvesting - whether to swath or direct combine; when the crops are ready; and how to adjust combine settings to ensure good quality and high test weight.



[Learn from experienced small grain farmers in this video!](#)

Additional resources:

- PFI blog: [“Field Day Recap: Small Grains Combine Clinic”](#)
- PFI Live from the Farm: [“Small-Grain Harvest and Post-Harvest Handling in the Little Sioux Valley”](#)
- University of Minnesota Extension resource: [“Small grains harvest and storage”](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

All times listed are central daylight time

Field Day: Converting Row Crops to Perennial Pasture



July 28 | 3-5 p.m. | Zumbrota, MN

Zach Knutson has used nurse crops and continuous cover crops like sorghum-sudangrass and winter cereal rye to transition ground from row crops to perennial pasture.

RSVP for his field day to learn how he’s evaluating forage quality and soil properties in each field.

Small Grains Shared Learning Call: Kernza Management and Market Opportunities



August 4 | Noon-1 p.m. | [Online](#)

Ben Penner farms in southeast Minnesota where he grows Kernza, heritage wheat, hybrid rye, and works with neighboring farmers to graze sheep on his Kernza crop.

Learn about how to get started with Kernza, tips for growth and management, how to harvest Kernza for grain, how it improves farm climate resiliency, and available market opportunities in our next shared learning call. **[Register today.](#)**

Free Virtual Workshop: "When Pesticide Drift Happens to You"



August 18 | 1–4:30 p.m. | [Online](#)

Join PFI for a workshop with **Rob Faux** and **Emily Marquez** from the Pesticide Action Network; **Karen Varley**, environmental lawyer; and **Mark Smith** from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

Learn about the process of pesticide drift investigation, litigation and compensation in Iowa during and after a drift event. [Register today.](#)

Aug. 7: Field Day – [Improving Water Quality and Soil Health with Cover Crops](#)

Hosted by: Mark & Jodi Peterson and Lane Peterson

10 a.m.-Noon | Craig, NE

Aug. 21: Field Day – [Growing, Processing and Marketing Popcorn in Iowa](#)

Hosted by: Jim & Debbie Fitkin, daughters Lora & Jennifer Fitkin and Jim's father, Wayne Fitkin

10 a.m.-Noon | Cedar Falls, IA

Friends of PFI events

Aug. 2: Webinar – [How to Build Soil Organic Matter in Organic Grain Systems](#)

Hosted by: Rodale Institute

1-2 p.m. | Online

Aug. 9: Field Day – [Emerging Crops for Soil Health](#)

Hosted by: Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

10 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | East Troy, WI

Aug. 4: Field Day - [Field to Flour: A Field Day for Value-Added Organic Producers](#)

Hosted by: Ross and Harold Wilken, Marbleseed, and Artisan Grain Collaborative

10 a.m.-4 p.m. | Danforth, IL

Aug. 17: Field Day – [UW-Madison Hemp Research Trials](#)

Hosted by: University of Wisconsin-Madison

9 a.m.-Noon | Arlington, WI

[More upcoming events](#)

Contact solveig.orngard@practicalfarmers.org to plan or promote an event.

STRAW POLL

What will you do with your small grain crop immediately after harvesting?

Answer the poll question below:

Store it in a wagon

Select

Store it in a bin

Select

Transport it directly to buyer

Select

Other

Select

Previous poll results:

Have you tried growing warm-season annuals for forage following a small grain crop?

- **I don't have livestock, so I don't need summer forage - 33.3%**
- Yes, this is a regular part of my rotations - 22.2%
- I have not tried yet, but hope to in the future - 22.2%
- I have in the past but am not currently doing so - 22.2%
- I do not plan on growing warm season annuals for forage - 0%

Send us your straw poll ideas! We want to know what YOU want to know. Reply to this email with your ideas for the next poll.

STAY CONNECTED



Looking for more? Contact us today!

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Chat with any of us by calling the PFI office at (515)232-5661.

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