

the PRACTICAL FARMER

WINTER 2023



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Farming From the Heart

Gains With Grains

A Prairie's Point of View







Max Chavez stands in front of his hot banana pepper field in Carlisle, Iowa, during a farm visit in July 2023. On page 14, Max shares his story about becoming a farmer in Iowa and his future farm business goals.

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PRACTICAL FARMERS of Iowa

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.

Magazine Editor: Tamsyn Jones

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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Growing From Strong Roots

PFI's founders were visionaries when they created an organization where farmers set priorities, teach each other and conduct their own research. This approach has empowered farmers to find solutions that work for them. For example, 78% of members surveyed reported changing farm practices as a result of farmer-led education and research. This is astounding!

This unique model has helped us expand our membership, our scope of work – and our budget. For fiscal year 2024 (which runs from Oct. 1, 2023 to Sept. 30, 2024), the board of directors approved our budget of \$11.9 million. This represents a 441% increase over our budget of \$2.2 million just five years ago.

Why has Practical Farmers focused so much on growth? We're listening to what you, our members and supporters, are telling us. When we embarked on our most recent strategic plan in 2020, you shared feedback in our member survey and in listening sessions. The key message we heard was "keep doing what you're doing, AND ..." With widespread support to keep our current programs and add more, we set out to do so. Our current strategic plan reflects this remit to "build on our strengths and explore new areas of growth."

Growth is exciting! It can also be scary and full of risk. Lifetime member Tom Frantzen suggested I read "How the Mighty Fall" by Jim Collins several years ago. The book cautions that pursuing more without restraint will prevent organizations from achieving excellence. Jim writes, "To neglect your core business while you leap after exciting new adventures is undisciplined." At PFI, we have taken care to grow with intention. Our founders deeply understood that a strong farmer-to-farmer network is core to equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities. As we grow our farmer-led education and research programs, we're not only preserving our roots, but also staying loyal to PFI's values.

Over the past decade, in response to feedback from members like you, we've also worked to answer questions like: How do we reduce barriers to help farmers make transformative change to our landscapes and communities? How do we bring more people into the PFI network, since we know it is so effective at driving change?

This led us to develop programs that focus on what we can do to help make farms more viable. Growing out of existing programs like our Savings Incentive Program and our cover crop cost-share, this farm viability work is all about business, technical and financial support for farmers. We want to make it easier for farmers to adopt a new practice or make a change.

A perfect example of how our offerings (farmer-led education, research and farm viability) bolster one another is our work on nitrogen. Since our founding, farmers have wondered if they



Tracy and Mic Skaar



The Skaar's field during their summer field day.

can use less nitrogen without hurting their bottom line. We explored this question at a PFI farmer-led field day in Hayward Minnesota, where farmers Tracy and Mic Skaar showcased their PFI research trial about planting soybeans into green rye cover crops. Tracy and Mic are also enrolled in our N Rate Risk Reduction Program, which removes some of the risk of testing lower nitrogen rates. The Skaars' experience is just one example of how our three departments synergize to help farmers answer questions.

So, while you see some new things at PFI, our roots are strong and growing.

Please enjoy another edition full of ideas and inspiration, from how Brad Sheely and his sons brought back livestock on page 8, to how a community worked together to preserve farmland on page 18, to a poetic take on what a prairie might say about its early years on page 6. We also share what we learned from you in our member survey on page 28.

I really hope to see you all in Des Moines for our annual conference.

Thanks for all you contribute to this amazing network,

Sally Wooley

A Prairie's Point of View

By Vanya North

If you've recently planted prairie, or are thinking you might, you're likely looking forward to tall spires of grass and vibrant blooms. You may be eager to restore habitat or stem erosion from your land.

But do you know what to expect? An infant prairie may look bare and brown, or short and stubby. How long must you wait for the picturesque prairie you envision?

Most of what's written about establishing prairie is from a third-person view – a human perspective. It might be technical, or detached and dry. But what if we could hear the prairie speak? What might we learn? If your fledgling prairie could share its story, perhaps it might say this.

Seed Dreams

(Before the First Growing Season)

The site is cleared for my arrival, and I am filled with anticipation. Where once corn grew tall, now all is bare earth, ready for me. For two years, the farmer prepared this space for me, careful to use only specific herbicides that guarded her cash crop but wouldn't stop my seed from sprouting. Now the long-awaited day has come. The farmer has been diligent, assessing these acres to ensure they have the right hydrology, topography and sunlight for me to grow and flourish.

On a crisp and quiet morning in late autumn, before the first snowfall, the farmer spreads me on land where my ancestors once lived. I am all these seeds, full of promise, ready to grow. For my benefit, she has chosen a broad mix of over 50 native plants, each selected from my local family based on their genetics. If I am to thrive in this place, I will need the genetic fitness of my forebearers.

As the seeding starts, I feel a thrill as I fly through the air. For a fleeting moment I am weightless, suspended in the atmosphere, and I have a sudden sense of what it must be like for all those insects who will one day fly among me. But now I drop to Earth and feel the coolness of the soil surface. I will lie here quietly. I mustn't go any deeper, for I'm barely bigger than grains of sand. As the cold sets in, I sink into slumber, recalling in my dreams a long-forgotten time when seas of grass swayed over this land. I'm aware of primal forces at work: freeze ... thaw ... wet ... dry ... cold. Gently, I sink my way into the soil at the depth preferred by each species that comprises my whole.

Awakening

(The First Growing Season)

The first hints of warmth soak into the soil. The familiar sensation of seed husks swelling with spring moisture awakens me from my winter slumber. I send a few little green shoots up to greet the sun, but my main focus is now below ground. I start to stretch my roots ever deeper into the soil, delighting in the textures. This soil is special, sacred even. It has been the home of my kind for more than 30 million years. I think of my grandmother, 10,000 generations back, and the gifts my ancestors bestowed.

Some of my kin can live for a century or more. Through a perpetual cycle of death and renewal, their roots left behind layers of life-giving organics, pore space – a sponge. Ultimately, over my own life, 75% of my biomass will reside below ground and I will continue that legacy of life-giving decay.

The spring warms into summer, and the farmer tends to me by mowing weeds once they're about a foot tall (any taller, and all that chopped weed matter might smother me). She will continue this through September, cutting weeds to 6 inches





above ground. I need this help, for the soil was altered with the coming of the plows that broke the dense lattice of ancestral prairie sod. But I will work to restore what was. When I am just a little older, I will help to halt erosion and nutrient runoff – something unknown to my ancestors – by up to 90%. For now, I am content to focus on my downward journey.

Strengthening

(The Second and Third Growing Seasons)

I am fortunate. These two years have seen plenty of rainfall to sustain my growth. But it matters not. Had it been dry, I would simply have slumbered once again, waiting dormant for the rain to fall. This, too, is a gift from my forebears, who learned how to survive the whims of weather across the eons. I am resilient. But I still appreciate the farmer's care. If I am to thrive, she and I are now linked in a shared journey, and I feel a certain joy when she passes by to study my above-ground growth.

Several of my fellows – like big bluestem, compass plant and gray-headed coneflower – are much taller now. We are strengthening into a sward of many layers, stratified by height and shade. The farmer seems to understand the things I need – competition, diversity,

disturbance. I must have space to grow, so she removes perennial and biennial plants, like switchgrass and purple prairie clover, that might shade me out or stunt my growth. For my steward, this has meant mowing, and mowing again, to ensure that I will brim with a heterogeneous whole. To truly flourish as a prairie, I need that species diversity.

I may never know the tickle of a bison's warm muzzle snuffling on my stems, or the thrill of being grazed and trampled by hundreds of those marvelous beasts that once thundered across the land. Such splendid perturbations entwined to forge a healthy whole – bison, prairie, fire. People, too, joined this symbiotic circle. When the First Peoples came, they knowingly wielded fire to tend the herds and help me thrive. Now, the farmer's frequent mowing – which continues through these hot and hazy days of summer – stands in to re-create a portion of that nourishing disturbance.

Maturing

(The Start of Long-Term Care)

Four years have passed since the farmer sowed my seeds. My roots now stretch nearly 10 feet long in spots and form a thick mat beneath the soil. They will reach down farther still – some will grow to nearly 20 feet. Big bluestem, Indian grass, prairie aster, compass plant and

rattlesnake master stand tall overhead. From miniscule seed, I have become a macroscopic multitude; an oasis for birds and bees, butterflies and badgers, moths and many others.

As I anchor and rebuild the soil, I shed my seeds for those to come. My stiff stems can catch the winter drifts, and my seedheads offer sustenance to wildlife during a shivering season of scarcity. I am now established here, on this ancestral turf – and in my return, the people see a glimpse of what once was, and what can be restored. Still, my upkeep must persist. I will need routine fire and mowing to halt the ingress of the trees, and to keep me free of fallen plant debris. Perhaps the farmer will even allow me to be grazed. In this way, the symbiotic circle of connection can also be restored – people, prairie, fire, grazer.

If I'm still here 100 years from now, I will pass on these gifts of wisdom and memory – these ancestral dreams, remembered in the seeds I leave behind. ■

This story was written with insights from Luke Gran, CEO of Nevada, Iowa-based Prudenterra, a habitat restoration company; and the Tallgrass Prairie Center, based in Cedar Falls, Iowa. All photos are courtesy of Prudenterra.



Gains With Grains

The decision to add oats has helped Brad Sheely and his sons expand their farm with livestock, harvesting and other enterprises.

By Taylor Hintch

In southern Minnesota, just across the Iowa border near Austin, where the drought hit exceptionally hard this year, a once-familiar crop is popping up again amid the fields of corn and beans.

Oats, once a leading crop in Minnesota, saw a steep decline starting in the 1950s as farmers shifted their operations to accommodate market demand for corn and soybeans. Now, oats are returning to a handful of area farms, where they're helping farmers boost crop diversity, farm resilience and economic opportunity.

For Brad Sheely and his sons Joel and Ben, the chance to grow oats has led to several new enterprises for the whole family – from new markets, to custom harvesting, to the chance to expand livestock on their farm.

From Oats to Cattle

It all started five years ago. While delivering grain with his trucking business, Brad learned of an opportunity to grow conventional oats for Grain Millers in addition to his typical corn and soybean rotation. He started by planting 105 acres of oats, which were destined for Grain Millers' food-grade markets.

"We did the legume cover crop with it, got the [PFI small-grains] cost-share and at the same time we realized there was a lot of forage out there," Brad says. At the time, the family had five or six hobby beef cows. Taking advantage of all the extra forage leftover from the oats, Brad's eldest son, Joel – who runs a baling business – baled the oat straw and the family bought more cows.

The flow-on effect continued. Ben, Brad's youngest son, saw the opportunity to add a cow-calf herd to the operation. He has now grown the herd to 60 head. "Ben is working to build a business and it is all because of the small-grain and legume cost-share in that first year," Brad says, noting that the cost-share is how he first got connected to Practical Farmers. He describes the cattle enterprise as a logical next step of adding oats and cover crops and seeing the new opportunities they opened up to raise a herd.

Along with adding oats to his rotation, Brad has also taken up custom harvesting as more farmers in his area have started growing small grains. He sees this as one of the benefits of being an early adopter. "I'm the only guy around here with a windrower and a combine to pick up the swath," Brad says. "So we do quite a bit of custom work with that equipment."



Brad Sheely (right) and his son Ben (left).

These new enterprises all stem from the initial decision to add oats to the rotation. But the family's oat crop has also helped them manage risk – which was especially evident during the 2023 drought. "This year our oats made 125 bushels," Brad says. "They matured before the worst part of the drought came. We did not get any legume cover crop due to the drought, but with the oats yielding really well, they were good risk management."

Cattle Insights

Before growing oats, the Sheelys considered cattle a hobby. They have always enjoyed raising cattle so their transition into building a livestock enterprise made sense. This is a key point, Brad says. "You have to enjoy cattle. If you don't, I wouldn't consider raising them." He advises farmers who want to add cattle to start small. "You are there with them every day," he says, "and they are a commitment."

For Brad, another important aspect of the cow-calf operation is that it has enabled the younger generation to get started farming. Ben has been able to build equity through his cattle business. And that business has let Joel and Ben support each other in their farming goals. Joel, for example, sold his cows to Ben, which then allowed Joel to buy his first 20 acres of land to start farming.

“Ben is working to build a [cattle] business and it is all because of the small-grain and legume cost-share in that first year.”

- Brad Sheely



The new enterprise has meant grappling with some new challenges – fencing being the most difficult. Brad explains that the farm they rent in a long-term contract “has pasture with 100-year-old fences that were all on the ground.” In addition to rebuilding that pasture fence, the Sheelys are working to build new fence on row crop ground they plan to use for grazing cover crops in the future. “We are building a mile of fence a year,” Brad says. “It is a slow process, and the cost and time is a challenge.”

The family has also fenced a 30-acre field where they plan to start grazing cover crops next autumn. “Our goal is to graze more cattle on more acres in the near future,” Brad says. The

fencing work has been necessary to get started raising cattle. But it also connects to Ben’s vision for the cow-calf enterprise: He plans to grow the herd to 100 head.

Expanding Oats and Covers

The Sheelys have also expanded their oat acres – and they plan to add more. After starting with the initial 105 acres of oats, they now have about 400 acres of oats in rotation each year. “We don’t have all the acres on a three-year rotation,” Brad says, “but we are working towards that.” After corn, they plant cereal rye cover crops on some acres and are looking to expand and graze more of those acres. Part of the motive for this expansion has been the new opportunities these crops have opened up for the family. Soil health is another. But Brad also points out how the oats and cover crops are helping them buffer risk and save money.

“Cattle are expensive now and calf prices are high,” Brad says. “If they’re grazing and getting a few pounds of gain a day, it doesn’t take long to figure out the cover crop is worth more money and still does the [soil health] job we want it to do on the land.” The Sheelys are currently working to secure a three-year Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract to help with cover crops on a field they are also working to fence in and graze.

As the Sheelys have made changes to the farm with oats, covers and cattle, Brad says he has felt encouraged by some of the long-distance landowners he rents from. “They are supportive and excited about doing this stuff on their farm.” Neighbors are also starting to take notice of the family’s practices – and this is leading to new land access opportunities. Earlier in 2023, Brad says a landowner in the area, concerned with doing something to help the soil, reached out to him about growing oats.

“They were watching what we are doing and they asked Joel to grow oats on 100 acres,” he says. “To have someone stop and recognize your practices is impressive.” ■



Ben Sheely saw the opportunity to start a cattle enterprise after his family planted oats on their farm.

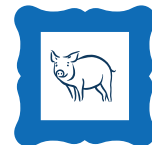
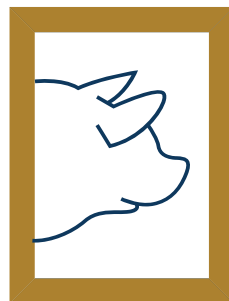
Pig Portraits

PFI farmers share their experience with different pig breeds and crosses.

By Amos Johnson

There's an ongoing discussion in many livestock circles about the merits of one pig breed over another. Some farmers discount breed altogether, arguing that pig performance depends on whether individual animals can thrive in a given system. Is there an answer?

In true PFI style, the farmers featured here don't claim to know what's right. Rather, they share their experiences with raising pigs and what's worked for them. Their approaches are diverse. But they have one thing in common: They're all on team pig.



Ethan Book

Ethan Book and his family have been raising Herefords for 12 years at Crooked Gap Farm near Knoxville, Iowa. They raise about 100-125 pigs per year, mostly in wooded pasture but also in a deep-bedded hoop barn during the cold and muddy months. Their pigs finish in seven to eight months and are all directly marketed.

Ethan's interest in Herefords, which were developed in Iowa in the 1920s, started while he was looking for a heritage breed to raise. "I'm a history guy, and an Iowa boy through and through, so that's the great thing about them." Another perk of Herefords, Ethan says, is that they were bred to be an all-purpose, hardy outdoor pig - traits that suit his production system.

Ethan has capitalized on these traits to use the Hereford breed as a marketing tool. Even so, he says lots of other breeds could suit farmers' needs. "Unless your marketing is really based around it, or there's a specific reason you want that breed, there's a lot of great pigs out there. Or a lot of great crosses!"

This perspective keeps him flexible. Despite his fondness for Herefords, he doesn't mind bringing in other breeds as needed to maintain his pig herd size. "I think a lot of times we get hung up on a specific breed. The most important thing," he says, "is what can you get that's close by that can be profitable. Choose based on what you can get consistently and has the meat quality, mothering quality and outdoor hardiness that you're looking for."

Herefords

FARMER:
Ethan Book

SYSTEM: Wean-to-finish. Wooded pasture and deep bedded.

REASON FOR RAISING: The breed was developed in Iowa during the 1920s to be a hardy outdoor pig. "I'm a history guy, and an Iowa boy through and through."

STATS: Average 125 pigs per year. Finish at 7-8 months.

THOUGHTS ON BREEDS: "I think a lot of times we get hung up on breeds. The most important thing is what can you get that's profitable."

Anna Hankins

Anna Hankins and Shae Pesek raise farrow-to-finish Berkshire pigs at Over the Moon Farm near Coggon, Iowa, along with flowers and various other livestock species. For them, the Berkshire breed is a key part of their marketing strategy.

“There is something to be said about the name recognition, like Angus beef,” Anna says, referencing the successful marketing campaign of the Certified Angus Beef brand. “When you sell to a restaurant, they’re going to put on the menu that it’s Berkshire pork. It’s highly desirable and highly marketable for them. Even at farmers markets, I always label it as Berkshire pork and there are people who see that and say ‘Berkshire pork is so fancy and good, we’ve got to try it.’”

The duo didn’t start out with Berkshires. At first, they sought out any feeder pigs they could get. While these pigs were fine, Anna says they felt their pork, which they raise in a deep-bedded, dry-lot system, needed a more consistent look and taste. “There’s a big difference between breeds for what your meat actually looks like,” she says, “and that can be confusing for a customer base.”

Anna knows farmers debate whether breed or management has more influence on flavor and carcass quality. “My experience is that the breed matters a lot,” she says. “Those other factors matter too. But you can raise a mixed group of pigs all the same way, like we were doing, and get mixed results just because they’re not the same.”

She and Shae eventually settled on Berkshires because they had raised a few and saw how adaptable the breed was. Shae’s father had also raised pigs in the 1970s and “had plenty of experiences with really mean sows,” Anna says. “So we knew we wanted pig breeds that were known for having a good temperament.” Other desirable attributes – such as good mothering instincts, big litters for a heritage breed (Berkshires average nine to 12 piglets) and taste – helped cement the switch.

The couple now raise two groups of pigs a year, one farrowing in the spring and one in the fall. Pigs go to the processor roughly eight months later at 290 pounds.

Berkshires
FARMERS:
Anna Hankins & Shae Pesek

SYSTEM: Farrow-to-finish. Deep bedded and dry lots.

REASON FOR RAISING: Raised multiple breeds; Berkshires worked best in their system. They’re good mothers and have excellent meat quality.

STATS: Directly to consumers and restaurants. “[Berkshire pork] is highly marketable, like Angus Beef.”

THOUGHTS ON BREEDS: “Breed matters a lot. Different pigs raised the same way get different results.”

Todd Manternach

Todd Manterach grew up on his family farm outside of Cascade, Iowa, and has been raising pigs his whole life. For most of that time, his family raised pigs that came from Yorkshire-Landrace sows crossed with Duroc boars. “That’s pretty standard,” says Todd, who raises his pigs in a conventional pig confinement system. “When you’re selling to a packing plant, that’s all they want. And we just try to please the packers.”

Today, the family operation includes Todd’s parents, three brothers and their families. “And Grandpa still helps out once in a while too,” he says. In the past, the Manternachs ran a farrow-to-finish operation. For increased efficiency, they now buy weaned pigs from a sow farm they’re part of. “When you’re in a sow farm, you’re in it with other farmers,” Todd says. “You come to an agreement on what genetic line you’d like within the given breeds.”

(Continued on page 12 →)

Yorkshire-Landrace
Crossed With Duroc
FARMER:
Todd Manternach



SYSTEM: Wean-to-finish. Conventional confinement.

REASON FOR RAISING: "When you're selling to a packing plant, that's all they want. We just try to please the packers."

STATS: 40,000 pigs per year, finished in 6 months.

PIGLET SOURCE: Bought into a sow farm; partners with other farmers to determine genetic line.

THOUGHTS ON BREEDS: Landrace for larger litters. Yorkshires for good mothering. Duroc grows quickly and contributes to meat quality.

The Landrace produces larger litter sizes, he says. Yorkshires have good mothering abilities. And Durocs grow quickly and contribute to the meat quality. Todd raises 40,000 pigs a year in batches of 5,000. Weaned pigs arriving at Todd's farm are 24 days old, weighing about 16 pounds. Around six months later, they're sold to the packer at 280 pounds.

Mangalitsas
Crossed With Large Black,
Tamworth, Hereford & Berkshire
FARMER:
Laura Tidrick



SYSTEM: Wean-to-finish. Pasture and deep-bedded.

REASON FOR RAISING: She grew up on a conventional hog farm and wanted pigs with self-reliant mothering instincts. "They'll build a big nest and farrow from early spring all the way through late winter with really good results."

WHY THIS CROSS: "Wonderful, super high-quality meat," but too much lard for many customers. Large Blacks increase litter size. Tamworth, Hereford and Berkshire increase lean meat and finishing speed.

Laura Tidrick

In contrast to Anna and Shae, Laura Tidrick started with a breed and moved to a cross. In 2015, she started raising purebred Mangalitsa pigs at Mossycup Farms near Clear Lake, Iowa. While she says they produce "wonderful, super high-quality meat," they are a lard pig. Originally bred in Hungary for abundant, useful lard, the amount of lean meat from each animal was low.

Growing up on a conventional hog confinement farm, Laura's first job was in a farrowing barn pulling piglets. That was the motivation for a complete shift to find a pig with good mothering instincts that would thrive on pasture and deep bedding. "They'll build a big nest and farrow from early spring all the way through late winter with really good results," Laura says of the Mangalitsas. She adds that they're "awesome mothers" and "really hardy animals" who need minimal care.

But the breed's dearth of lean meat and relatively small litter size of six to eight piglets soon made it clear there was room for improvement. Laura first introduced Large Black genetics to increase the litter size. That boosted the number of piglets per sow by about three, and they produced more milk. But Large Blacks are also fatty, and each carcass yielded 40-50 pounds of pure lard. In response, Laura brought in Tamworth, Hereford and Berkshire pigs.

With the addition of these genetics, she now gets 15 pounds more lean meat per pig. She also finishes at eight months instead of a year with the purebred Mangalistas. Even with these changes, the direct and wholesale market remains niche. "It's not what folks are used to from the grocery store - more marbling and fattier," Laura says. "It's not for everyone. But some people remember when pork used to be fattier, and this is perfect for them." It also lets Laura make lard soap to sell as a value-added product.

For those starting out, Laura says, "If you want to make money, you're much better off with a cross than a purebred. But I just love pigs. Even the ones I complain about are wonderful. If someone is considering an animal, hogs are a great animal to have." ■



2024 Annual Conference

NEW LOCATION!

January 19-20, 2024 | Des Moines, Iowa

Since our founding, the annual conference has been a keystone event for sharing knowledge, building connections and celebrating agriculture in Iowa (and good food!). As our conference grows to over 1,000 attendees, we are pleased to offer three pre-conference short courses, 60-plus farmer-led sessions on a wide variety of agricultural topics, 80-plus exhibitors, locally sourced meals and a spirit of curiosity and community. We hope to see you there!

REGISTER TODAY!

 REGISTER ONLINE

Visit our website to register online.
practicalfarmers.org/annual-conference

 REGISTER BY PHONE

Questions? Need assistance with registration?
Call the PFI office at (515) 232-5661.

 REGISTER BY MAIL

If you received a conference brochure in the mail, complete the tear-out registration form and mail it to the PFI office.

SPEAKERS, EVENTS, FOOD AND MORE!

Keynote Address



Keith Berns

Co-founder of Green Cover Seed. In 2012 he launched the SmartMix Calculator to help farmers select cover crop seed and build custom mixes.

Storytelling

To close out the conference on Saturday afternoon, all conference attendees will come together to hear true stories, performed live, from a selection of PFI farmers. If you enjoy bending your ear toward a lively, soberingly powerful or particularly well-narrated farmer tale, this storytelling event is for you.

Local Food



PFI Dinner

On Friday night, we'll roll in the bar cart and set up the dinner service. Tickets (\$15) are required for the dinner, which will feature locally sourced ingredients.

Want to learn more about the annual conference?

Members should have received an annual conference brochure in the mail! If you lost yours or just want an extra copy, email debra.boekholder@practicalfarmers.org or call (515) 232-5661.

You can also view all the conference sessions and extra details on our website:
practicalfarmers.org/annual-conference.



Farming From the Heart

For Max Chavez, sharing his harvest with others brings joy and helps him overcome barriers as a Latino farmer in Iowa.

By Valeria Cano Camacho



“Max, can we count on tomatoes from you this season?” asks the hostess of Pueblo Viejo Mexican Restaurant as Max and I head inside on a pleasant day in April 2023. It was my first meeting with Maximilliano Chavez, a farmer who goes by the name Max, and he wanted to meet here, outside this restaurant on the east side of Des Moines, Iowa.

Smiling proudly, he tells me, in Spanish, “They buy my tomatoes here. They do great things with my produce.”

Part of the reason we were gathering was so I could learn more about Max’s farm and his experience as a Latino farmer in Iowa. As PFI’s senior Latino engagement coordinator, part of my role is to build relationships with Iowa’s Spanish-speaking farmers and to understand their barriers and goals. My other task was to help Max fill out his application to join Iowa’s Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program.

What better way to start our relationship than over a plate of delicious food.

Learnings From Mexico

For the past 20 years, Max has operated Sunny Valley Vegetables in the Des Moines area, selling his produce from his well-known vegetable stand on Des Moines’ south side. For the past two years, he has rented 10 acres of land in Carlisle from one of his many customers. Before that, Max farmed near Easter Lake in Des Moines’ southeastern corner.

His agricultural roots are deep. He grew up farming in Mexico before moving to California as a young man, where he learned as much as possible from the nation’s top horticulture-producing state, including how to care for grapes. In 1999, Max moved to Iowa for “some peace and quiet” after the hustle and bustle of California life. Once here, he started working in Iowa’s grape sector, helping farmers plant and maintain their vineyards. Now, Max runs his own farm where he proudly grows heirloom tomatoes, zucchini, melons, jalapenos, cucumbers, bell peppers and hot and sweet banana peppers

following organic practices, though he’s not certified. In 2023, he added a new crop to his offerings: Jamaica (hibiscus flowers), an ingredient popular in Mexican cuisine for its refreshing taste.

From my first meeting with Max, I felt like I was talking to my Abuelito (a term of endearment for “grandfather” in Spanish). In Mexican culture, our grandparents are esteemed and highly respected. We learn from watching them and hearing about their lives and stories. And deep connections are often made through meals and surrounded by food. Since that first meal we shared at Pueblo Viejo, I’ve met with Max several more times.

“From my first meeting with Max, I felt like I was talking to my Abuelito.”

– Valeria Cano Camacho

Our conversations take place in Spanish, which lets me ask better questions and enables him to be more candid and share the depth of his experiences. He has shared stories of prejudice he’s encountered, and how he’s persevered through physical and mental hardships. I’ve also learned about Max’s gift for growing crops, his passion for local food,

his generosity (which has sometimes led to his being taken advantage of), the added hurdles he’s faced as an immigrant farmer working in a second language and his drive to succeed.

Max was born in Jalisco, Mexico, in the country’s southwest, and he grew up on a ranch near Jalisco’s northeastern border with Aguascalientes, a centrally located state in Mexico. His first interaction with agriculture was when his parents’ boss challenged him to grow watermelons – a difficult undertaking on more than one level. Watermelon thrives in moist soil environments, but Las Aguas, as the area is often called, has a semi-arid climate, despite its name meaning “the waters.”



From Mexico to California to Iowa

Max was born in the state of Jalisco, Mexico (*in burgundy*), and he grew up on a ranch near Jalisco's northeastern border with Aguascalientes (*in green*).



Clockwise from top: Hot banana peppers are ready to be harvested on Max Chavez's farm in Carlisle, Iowa. Max holds jars of pickled hot banana and jalapeno peppers, and tomato-based salsa – all made using his produce. Heirloom tomatoes are trellised with twine and wooden stakes at Max's farm.

“I struggled so much to get here, with little to no help, and I don’t want anyone to go through that.” – Max Chavez

Young Max proved himself so well that many started to take notice – by sneaking in to glean fruit from his small field.

The thefts upset him, but Max recalls how his mentor would say, “Let them. They are hungry, and you have enough to share.” That message has stuck with him. Recognizing his green thumb, Max’s mentor encouraged him to try other crops, supplying seeds for tomatoes, jalapenos, avocado and oranges. He was successful at all of it, but decided to move to the United States in the 1990s.

From Hobby Gardener to Full-Time Farmer

Once here, he brought the same open mind and willingness to learn from his mistakes. “I’ve always learned from firsthand experience,” Max says. He taught himself the skills he needed through trial and error and applied his knowledge to hobby gardens he kept in California and southern Iowa while working for commercial agricultural companies. He recalls how many of his co-workers and neighbors at the time regularly asked him for fresh produce, and he would sell or donate as much as he could.

Things got to a point, however, where Max couldn’t keep up with the demand for his homegrown food. At the time, he was still growing produce in his backyard. Seeing the steady interest – and passionate about local, quality food – Max decided to seek more land and farm full-time. “I realized I couldn’t keep up with the demand as a hobby,” Max says. Today, most of his customers are from Carlisle and Des Moines. But he has some who travel across town from Johnston, Iowa. A one-man operation, Max manages all aspects of the business. He uses a rain-fed system to water his crops, walks his fields daily to scout for weeds and handles all marketing, selling to local taco trucks, restaurants and small mom-and-pop shops on the south side of Des Moines.

In 2023, he participated in the Iowa Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program, a state program that aims to strengthen the food system and support local, regional and underserved producers. Farmers who sign up gain access to new markets, which can boost their income while connecting communities to more locally raised food. PFI helped Max become a registered vendor through LFPA. As a result, Sunny Valley Vegetables is eligible to help fill weekly orders and deliveries to Food Bank of Iowa and Eat Greater Des Moines.

Max had long wanted to connect with food rescue organizations to help tackle food waste from his fields – a concern for him because, as a one-man operation, he is unable

to fully harvest by the end of the season. This year was different, however. Because of LFPA, Max says he was able to sell thousands of dollars of produce into the program. And thanks to the connections he made, he was able to donate a further 2,000 pounds of produce to both organizations.

Farming for Community

One of Max’s biggest challenges has been finding reliable and trustworthy business partners. Discrimination has been a recurring problem. He shared stories of blatant prejudice, such as getting “scammed on land lease prices” and having his applications for aid to various government programs refused with little context. Some of his neighbors have also been unwelcoming, he says, recounting how he’s been told by other farmers “there’s no space for farmers like him” in Iowa. Another hurdle has been that many programs designed to help farmers often overlook basic issues of language and technological access. In today’s world, it is easy to assume people universally have email and internet access and can easily navigate it. This was not Max’s case; he only has his



How LFPA Helped Max

446

cases of extra
produce sold
through LFPA

2,000

pounds of
extra produce
donated

\$10,213

extra
income
earned



Opposite page: Max inspecting banana peppers.

This page: Full crates of Max's tomatoes (left) and cucumbers (right) after being harvested.

Android phone and no email. This is one reason why he needed my help to sign up for the Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program.

Max has also craved the ability to connect with a community of farming peers – like Practical Farmers of Iowa – but didn't know of any that existed for Latino farmers in the Midwest. "I've learned so much, and I want to share it with others who want to learn," Max says. Having connected with PFI, he's now eager to get more involved. In September, Max joined PFI's booth for a few hours at the Latino Festival in downtown Des Moines to share his experience with people. He has also signed up to be a trainer in PFI's Labor4Learning program in 2024.

His ultimate goal is to create a commercial-grade kitchen where he can make authentic salsas and hold workshops for his community. "I struggled so much to get here, with little to no help, and I don't want anyone to go through that," Max says. "It's hard. It feels awful." Despite the many challenges, Max has remained steadfast in pursuit of his dreams. He consistently shows up for his community – and appreciates that they, in turn, show up for him.

He sees the beauty and importance of local foods in our communities, and loves working with fresh ingredients. He says he cooks everyday and loves it – and he expresses great satisfaction that he has forged a devoted customer base because of the quality of his produce. "Not only Latinos like my produce, but also my white customers," Max says. "They love the chiles! It makes me so happy to share that with everyone."

The sentiment is characteristic of Max's generous spirit. Whenever I meet him, in classic Mexican Abuelito style, he never fails to share crates of fresh produce with me. I always leave with less than he wants, which causes him to shake his head at me. "There are only a few times in the year where we can eat this well," he tells me. "We need to take advantage of that."

At the end of a recent visit, I relent and end up taking at least 50 pounds of produce to share with the rest of the PFI office and with my family in Des Moines.

Max smiles – sharing the bounty is what gives him joy, and sustains him through hardship. "This, I want to continue doing this," he says. "I'm happy with the work I do." ■

Saving Land

When land near their homes came up for sale, a group of northeastern Iowa neighbors mobilized to safeguard it for sustainable agriculture.

By Carly Zierke

In 2014, Steve McCargar learned that a 22-acre piece of land near his home outside of Decorah, Iowa, was slated to go to auction. The news alarmed him.

Just one year prior, residents had dodged the prospect of a pig confinement being built in the area – known for its rolling hills and cold, clear trout streams – after a similar piece of land nearby went to auction and was bid on by a pig confinement operator. In that instance, the landowner stopped the auction after realizing who was bidding.

When he heard about the latest piece of land, Steve, a lifelong activist, decided to take action. “I had all these alarm bells going off in my mind,” he says. “We had to do something to protect our neighborhood from what the sale of this property might do to the quality of our lives here, to the quality of the air in our neighborhood and to the quality of the water that we all depend on.”

Steve hoped to stop the land from going to auction altogether, and he realized the best way to prevent future risk was to purchase it outright. What happened next is the story of a unique grassroots effort by concerned residents who came together to protect ecologically sensitive land through creativity and collaboration.

In the process, they created much-needed land access for beginning farmers while setting an example of how other communities could rally to preserve farmland for the next generation.

Organizing Hidden Falls LLC

Steve’s first act was meeting with the landowner. She agreed to sell the land at \$5,500 per acre – if Steve could find the funds, \$121,000, within the next three weeks. He then brought his idea for a collective land purchase to the annual meeting of the Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center in Decorah, which happened to be taking place around the same time. There, Steve asked people to invest their money in a half-acre or more to preserve the land for sustainable use.

He proposed forming an LLC, a structure that would let investors eventually recoup their contributions. Through the arrangement, one share – which equaled a \$2,750 investment in a half-acre of land – would equal one vote in the LLC’s decision-making processes. His call for action was answered.

Together, the Peace and Justice Center members, along with neighbors and others in town, pledged \$122,500 by the deadline. All told, 16 households joined the partnership, which they later named Hidden Falls LLC. The owner took the land off the market.

“That was kind of a series of serendipitous events and relationships that enabled that to happen in a short period of time,” Steve says.

Perry-O and David Sliwa, who lived just down the road from the land, were among those inspired to help. “We were very excited about the fact there seemed to be a number of people coming together and it was going to happen,” Perry-O says. “All we had to do was say ‘yes.’”

Creating Land Access

At the same time, beginning farmer Hannah Breckbill was running a diversified vegetable and sheep farm, Humble Hands Harvest, on rented land in southern Minnesota. While she had steady markets for her produce in the Twin Cities, Decorah was the center of her social life and she wanted to move her farm there. One day, Hannah chanced to carpool with Elsa McCargar, the daughter of Steve and his wife, Heidi Swets. From Elsa, Hannah learned about the effort led by Elsa’s father.



Steve McCargar and Hannah Breckbill



The members of Hidden Falls LLC accepting the Farmland Owner Legacy Award from PFI in September 2023.

In September, PFI awarded the 2023 Farmland Owner Legacy Award to the founding members of Hidden Falls LLC for their efforts to create land access for beginning farmers while protecting ecologically sensitive land. The award was presented on Sunday, Sept. 10, at Humble Hands Harvest, in Decorah, Iowa. View the full list of recipients online.

“I thought, ‘This might be my chance to access land in Decorah,’” says Hannah, who soon bought a share. “That’s all I knew: This might be my chance.”

After acquiring the land, members of Hidden Falls LLC continued meeting to formulate their shared vision. They attached several covenants to the deed for the land to ensure it would be organically managed. They also agreed they wouldn’t seek to profit from the land – their aim was simply to preserve it until the right land steward came along. As the group deliberated, Hannah, now a member of the LLC, expressed her desire to turn the 22 acres into the permanent home of Humble Hands Harvest – and to share the land with others.

Initially, not everyone felt a diversified vegetable farm could be viable. “I was just beginning,” Hannah says. “It took a lot of trust on the part of people. I hadn’t been successful yet.” Ultimately, the group decided to give her a chance. “I think Hannah is unusual in that her vision is broader and her willingness to work on big ideas is bigger than just her own farm,” Perry-O says.

Another priority for the LLC was to ensure members, many of whom were over 70 years old, could recover their investment in a timely manner. As a beginning farmer, however, Hannah lacked the capital to buy all 22 acres at once. Committed to their decision,

“It’s such a huge privilege to have been given the space to do my learning.”

– Hannah Breckbill

Hidden Falls members again took a creative approach by letting Hannah acquire shares over time, and from the people who needed their money back the soonest.

In 2017, Hannah was able to purchase the first 8 acres of land. By that time, she had acquired 17 shares through purchases she made, gifts of shares and shares that other members sold to her at a discount.

Hannah moved her farm and that year, Humble Hands Harvest had its first growing season on the land. “It’s such a huge privilege to have been given the space to do my learning,” she says.

Building a Future for Many

From her previous farming experience, Hannah had already decided that she didn’t want to keep farming alone. So she invited Emily Fagan, a second cousin she didn’t know very well at the time but who was also trying to find footing as a farmer, to work with her on the new land. After a successful season, Emily

joined Hannah permanently. Part of Hannah’s vision for the land was to create a worker-owned cooperative. To that end, in 2018 she and Emily formalized the farm’s bylaws to reflect the democratic ownership and decision-making structure, keeping the Humble Hands Harvest farm name.

Using their profits from the farm, they continued purchasing shares from Hidden Falls LLC members. Confident they would one day own the whole farm, Hannah and Emily also installed a well and electricity on the farm. In the last couple of years, they added a house and perennial orchards. By December 2022, they had purchased the full 22 acres. The farm now encompasses about 2 acres of organic vegetables; grass-finished sheep; and fruit and nut trees. Hidden Falls LLC, having achieved its aim to preserve the land for a sustainable steward, will soon dissolve.

“We’ve come to this moment here where you come to the farm and you go, ‘Wow, this has all happened in less than a decade,’” says Steve, gesturing toward Humble Hands Harvest’s house, shed, hoop houses, orchards, vegetable garden and pastures.

“This community is a place where we’ve tried out and are continuing to figure out ways to do things differently, and that’s a really important thing for the future of the world.” ■

2023 FIELD DAY Season

Since our founding in 1985, field days have been a core element of PFI's farmer-led model. Each year, they highlight the breadth, diversity and individuality of PFI member farms. This year, we held 42 field days across Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin. If you haven't been to a field day – or if you've been to only one – you might assume all field days are kind of the same. But it cannot be overstated: each is incredibly unique. Why? Because the farmers, not invited speakers or staff, are the hosts and the educators – and they often have as many questions and challenges to share as answers. We as a staff are grateful to all the field day hosts who opened their farms this year, and are proud to help make your field days successful. Enjoy these snapshots over the next six pages, and we look forward to seeing you out there next year!





(1) Late-summer brassicas flourish in the no-till fields at Humble Hands Harvest. (Sept. 10, Decorah, IA) (2) Attendees enjoy a winding hayride at Jerry Vander Wert's saturated buffer. Jerry has been steadily improving his water quality and riparian habitat for the last decade. (Sept. 8, Pella, IA) (3) Drone operator Nate Coleman fills his drone with winter camelina cover crop seed to be flown on a soybean field at Mark Peterson's field day. (Sept. 23, Stanton, IA)





(1) Host Ben Moest stands in his soybean field and highlights plans for relay cropping rye and soybeans for guests. (Aug. 31, Winslow, IL) (2) Carmen Black teaches beginning farmers tractor basics at her hands-on field day. (Aug. 20, Solon, IA) (3) Matthew Arndt talks about Matthew 25's Cultivate Hope Urban Farm volunteers, growers and grounds. (Aug. 20, Cedar Rapids, IA) (4) Mariel Barreras and her daughter pose for a photo together following their Pastured Egg 101 field day. (Sept. 16, Blair, NE) (5) Tracy Skaar discusses dry conditions and his legume cover crop mix of red clover and non-dormant alfalfa that was underseeded with his oat crop. (Sept. 18, Hayward, MN) (6) Rory Van Wyk digs for samples to demonstrate visual soil testing at his field day. (Sept. 13, Winterset, IA) (7) Field day attendees build community as they savor the umami-rich mushroom-tasting of chestnut mushroom soup, grilled lion's mane mushrooms and oyster mushroom cakes with remoulade at Flavor Country Farms. (Oct. 6, Honey Creek, IA) (8) Attendees examine the native prairie flora of Larry and Margaret Stone's prairie strips at their Traer, Iowa, farm. The Stones participate in ISU's STRIPS project; ISU extension specialist Tim Youngquist, who works with the project, was also present at the field day. (Aug. 23, Traer, IA) (9) These microgreens at Cherry Lane Farm are almost ready to be cut, washed, packed and sold at the Arnold's Park Farmers Market or regional Hy-Vee stores. (Sept. 6, Spirit Lake, IA) (10) Attendees begin their trek back to the popcorn processing facility after learning from Shaffer Ridgeway, district conservationist with Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District, about a perennial cover crop trial in a corn-soy-popcorn rotation on Jim Fitkin's farm. (Aug. 21, Cedar Falls, IA)









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(1) A pastured pig contemplates its forage at Dayna Burtness' field day. (Sept. 9, Spring Grove, MN) (2) Emily Fagan describes how no-till and tarping practices at Humble Hands Harvest have resulted in fewer weeds, improved soil health, reduced labor and better crops. (Sept. 10, Decorah, IA) (3) The fruiting bodies of chestnut mushrooms at Flavor Country Farms seem to emit an alluring glow as they develop. (Oct. 6, Honey Creek, IA) (4) Guests go on a stroll through newly established pasture at the field day hosted by Aaron Alons and Andy Getting. (Sept. 19, Ashton, IA) (5) Attendees and goats share a moment at Dayna Burtness' field day. (Sept. 9, Spring Grove, MN) (6) A cover crop mix of oats and field peas awaits fall grazing on Scott Schultz's farm in central Wisconsin. (Sept. 21, Watertown, WI) (7) Guests at Zack Smith's field day hear from him about his "stock cropping" system as they rest on hay bales before an in-depth farm tour. (Aug. 26, Buffalo Center, IA) (8) A young farmer, and volunteer hayride driver, showed guests his vintage tractor at Jerry Vander Wert's farm. (Sept. 8, Pella, IA)



8



(1) Kisonia Mafuta gives field day visitors a tour of her plot, recites recommended recipes for her vegetables and talks about farming at Cultivate Hope Urban Farm. (Aug. 19, Cedar Rapids, IA) (2) Krissy Thiessen describes how she and husband Calvin Thiessen have adapted their operations at Cherry Lane Farm, developed the market for their produce and built relationships to grow their local food system. (Sept. 6, Spirit Lake, IA) (3) Jim Fitkin talks with Donald Promnitz, a reporter with the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, after sharing his process for producing and marketing popcorn at his field day in August. (Aug. 21, Cedar Falls, IA) (4) Guests of Mark Peterson's field day watch the drone demonstration and listen to drone operator, Nate Coleman, as he answers questions about applying cover crops with a drone. (Sept. 23, Stanton, IA) (5) During Zack Smith's stock cropper field day, attendees listen to guest speaker and South Dakota farmer Rick Bieber explain what they are seeing in the freshly dug soil pit. (Aug. 26, Buffalo Center, IA) (6) An intrigued field day attendee gets close to the edge of a bioreactor being installed on host Josh Nelson's farm. (Sept. 8, Belmond, IA)

Lifelong Learning

When Rachel Perry was introduced to PFI, she quickly connected with its network and farmer-led approach.

By Emma Liddle

For lifetime member Rachel Perry, farming runs deep. She grew up in Waupun, Wisconsin, immersed in her parents' farm operation of vegetable and commodity crops. She also spent time helping out on the dairy operation of her mother's extended family in Wisconsin Dells. "These roots, and a wonderful agriculture teacher in high school, Tari Costello, helped grow my love for agriculture," Rachel says.



She took this passion to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied agronomy, global health and environmental science. After earning her bachelor's degree in agronomy in 2017, Rachel sought out work in research. She started at Seminis Vegetables, a vegetable seed grower and developer that's now a subsidiary of Bayer. After that, she worked at her alma mater in their field corn breeding program.

Rachel was eager to learn more about extension outreach and vegetable production. In 2019, she met Ajay Nair, an associate professor and extension specialist who oversees Iowa State University's Sustainable Vegetable Production Lab, and found exactly what she was looking for. She started her master's program in horticulture and sustainable agriculture in 2020, focusing on Iowa lettuce production systems through Ajay's lab. It was through that program, and Ajay, that Rachel learned about Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Ajay has been a dedicated advocate for PFI and partner on vegetable-related research trials, as well as a regular speaker at PFI events. Through him, Rachel quickly connected with PFI farmers and staff and began participating in events. She was one of the recipients of a gift access-level membership in late 2021, which put her on the mailing list for PFI's printed publications, including the magazine and conference brochure.

When the 2022 conference was announced, Rachel's colleagues asked if she would be willing to volunteer. "PFI's annual conference is one of my favorite PFI events, so it was easy to say yes," Rachel says. On the Saturday of the event, Rachel worked all day as a room host. This role is critical for making sessions run smoothly, with duties that include helping speakers set up their presentations, taking an attendance count for each session and helping manage questions at the end.

During her volunteer shifts, she got to sit in on farmer-led sessions related to her research. "I enjoyed hearing vegetable farmers share about management practices that worked at their farms," she says, adding that she also enjoyed visiting with

others between sessions. "The conference is a great way to network with farmers, companies, researchers and extension agents who hold similar values."

New Horizons

As Rachel progressed in her graduate program, she continued to involve herself in Practical Farmers of Iowa, thanks in part to the strong relationship between PFI and the ISU's sustainable agriculture program. In January 2023, she finished her master's program. "My sustainable agriculture classes challenged me to rethink agriculture and consider other ways to build resilient farms," she says. After graduating, Rachel moved to Illinois to work for Roquette, a company that manufactures plant-based ingredients. She works in the plant care area, and her day-to-day work involves answering customer questions and managing partnerships with outside research companies.

Rachel knew early on that she wanted to become a lifetime member of PFI. In May 2023, once she assumed her current position, she made it official. "PFI does an excellent job of supporting farmers who are interested in research and agriculture practices that are not considered mainstream. They also see value in investing in the next generation of farmers through farm transition and beginning farmer programs," she says. "I figured it's time to give back!"

Now that Rachel no longer lives in Iowa, most of her interaction is through membership materials and online resources. "Luckily, there are still webinars and online events I can attend to feel part of the community," she says. Excited as she is for PFI events in Illinois, Rachel will gladly return to Iowa for the annual conference. Until then, she will continue to spread the word.

"I truly believe in the PFI mission and wanted to support an organization that has and continues to teach and support me in my career and personal endeavors." ■

A Bird's-Eye View

Data from our recent member survey, sent every three years, offers a wealth of insights about our members and their priorities.

By Steve Carlson

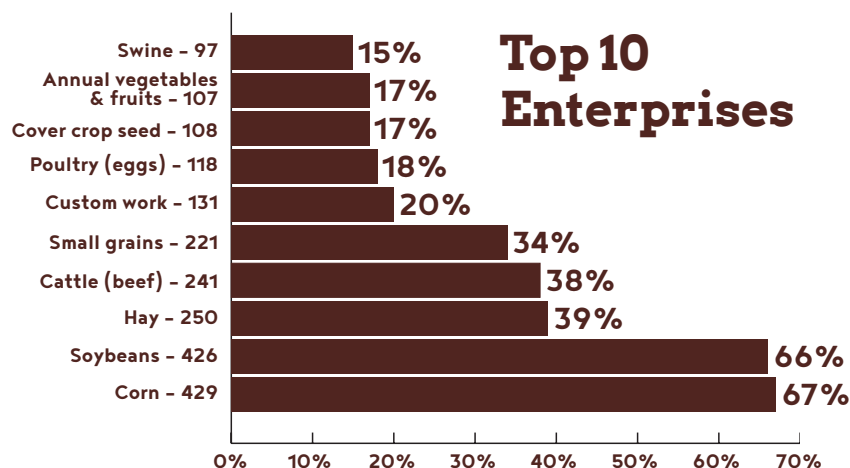
In early 2023, more than 1,000 households from the Practical Farmers of Iowa membership completed our member survey, which we send once every three years. The responses represent over a third of our membership at the time. The project is always a huge undertaking for the membership team, and a notable time commitment from our members. So, what did we learn?

Strongly Farmer-Led

I wish I could talk with each of our now 7,500-plus members to learn what they're up to and why they're a PFI member. Since that isn't possible, I get pretty excited when it's time to analyze our member survey information. It's a special chance to learn about all the individuals who took the time to share feedback with us. I also get to see what our membership looks like – who you are and where you want to go – from a bird's-eye view.

One of PFI's core values is farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge. We enact this value in a range of ways, but it starts with having a strong base of farmers in our network. The survey results back this up: in 2023, 67% of our membership actively farmed. That number jumps to 84% if we factor in farmland owners who aren't actively farming and those who aspire to farm.

The remaining 16% of members play a vital role supporting our farmer-led work. In their responses, they shared two primary reasons for being members: "concern for agricultural issues in Iowa" and a desire "to financially support the work that PFI does." Those in this group are also our most ardent PFI magazine readers (though nearly everyone reports reading the magazine), and our most vocal advocates.



Purposeful Growth

Part of my member survey analysis includes digging through old member survey data, magazine articles and annual meeting minutes from the early days to see how we've stayed true to our mission and how we've changed based on members' interests.

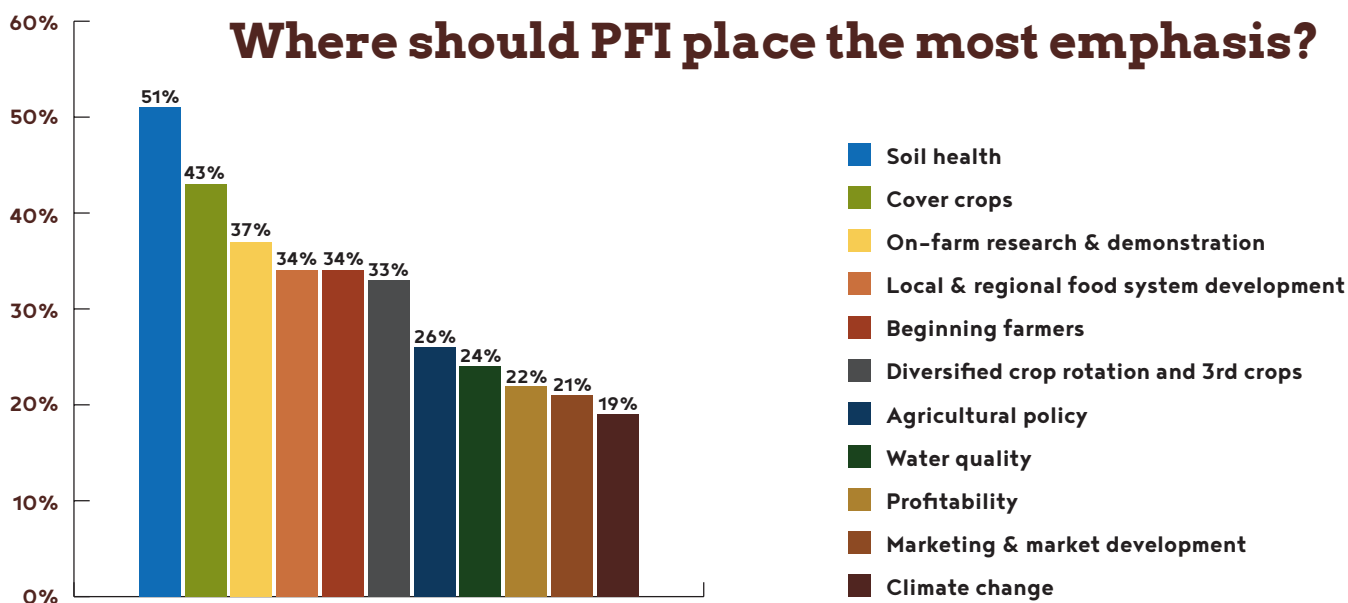
Our broad coalition of non-farmers, farmers, Iowans and non-Iowans is one example of how we've evolved. In PFI's early days, only those who lived in Iowa and gained "a significant part of their income directly from farming" were eligible to be regular voting members, according to PFI's annual meeting publications from the 1980s. While we're still strongly farmer-led, I'm glad we now welcome non-farmers. I'm also glad we've broadened our geographic focus to include surrounding states. Currently, 23% of our members live outside of Iowa and represent 41 additional states.

The survey data also reveals shifts in farm income satisfaction. For instance, while only a third of members reported earning 81-100% of their household income from the farm, 76% still said they met their farm income goal in the past year. That's a significant jump from our last member survey in 2020, when only about 50% of members said they'd met their income goal. This may seem puzzling, but these statistics partly reflect the

nature of agriculture today. They may also indicate that many of our farmer-members don't expect to earn their entire household income from the farm. I think PFI's founders would be OK with us offering full membership privileges to those who live outside of Iowa, and those who don't make a significant part of their income from farming.

Other areas have remained steadfast member priorities across the years. On-farm research is one such area, and our member survey results consistently bear this out. In the latest survey, members again ranked on-farm research and demonstration as one of their top three priorities for PFI to focus on in the future.

Where should PFI place the most emphasis?



Diverse, With Shared Goals

A 2011 article in the PFI magazine recapped that year's member survey with the title "PFI Membership: Diverse Enterprises, Many Opinions." I could confidently say the same thing about our membership 12 years later. Our field day and annual conference attendees reflect the diversity of people in our network – from enterprises and production practices to personal backgrounds, motivations and skillsets. Survey data this round showed 40 distinct enterprises represented on PFI farms.

Yet this diverse network shares a common interest in freely sharing experiences to help one another improve. The top reason farming members cite for being part of PFI is to learn how to better their farm. Many members also see conservation as integral to their operations. We learned this by asking about their top farm goal for the next five years. While these open-ended responses can be tricky to analyze and aggregate at the macro level, they help us understand the range of members' individual priorities. We heard about goals related to work-life balance, farm financials, scaling up and marketing.

But what we heard most often were five-year goals related to both production and conservation. Our members largely think of these two areas as intertwined, and their goals focus on

addressing both. This theme has endured throughout PFI's existence.

Guidance for the Future

An important part of the survey is where members tell us what we can do differently. Most of the freeform feedback in this section was about our programming. You want to see our research program grow (and offered specific topic ideas). You suggested we increase our cost-share offerings, along with other financial assistance and education, and suggested new services we should offer. Ideas ranged from farmer health to machine sheds to local food development, and much more. Thank you for all of these ideas!

We also heard a lot of feedback on our big tent. Most comments encouraged us to continue our efforts to increase the diversity of our membership. Suggestions included reaching out to more underserved communities, recruiting more larger-scale commodity farmers and continuing to welcome a wide range of enterprises and production practices to meet the needs of a diverse set of farmers. A few members voiced concerns that our network has gotten too diverse, or that we're focusing too much on diversity. This tension is not new to PFI. Similar differences of opinion emerged when horticulture farmers, non-farmers and out-of-state members joined. PFI is working diligently to add – not replace – seats at the table.

A noticeable group of comments was about our policy work. These individuals asked us to increase our policy work while remaining nonpartisan. For example, Keaton Krueger wrote, "I know the organization has stayed outside of the policy area for the most part. I think that may have to change, though. Current policy isn't optimized to reward PFI-type farmers; the system is set to drive to consolidation. It doesn't have to be this way."

Other guidance ranged from advice on our communications (you'd like us to improve our website and become a bigger voice in the media) to continuing to work on partnering with others. It will be vital for us to strengthen partnerships so we can serve your diverse needs and continue to foster change. You also care about better knowing and connecting with our growing PFI staff. And not surprisingly, half a dozen of you asked for a shorter survey.

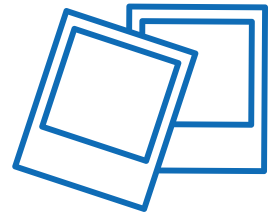
What you see in this article is only a snapshot of the insights you shared. We truly appreciate your time and feedback. THANK YOU for your leadership and guidance – it's vital to our success and impact. ■

Steve Carlson is PFI's membership and office manager. As part of his work overseeing membership matters, he leads PFI's member survey process and data analysis.

PFI MEMBER

Photo Album

This section features photos taken by PFI members. Whether you're a farmer, landowner or a non-farmer, we invite you to share your images of the everyday, the awe-inspiring or the curiously beautiful from your farm or community; we'll work to curate them into the album.



Teamwork makes the dream work! Red and Green give a harvest high-five. (Mark Peterson, Bent Gate Farm, Red Oak, Iowa)



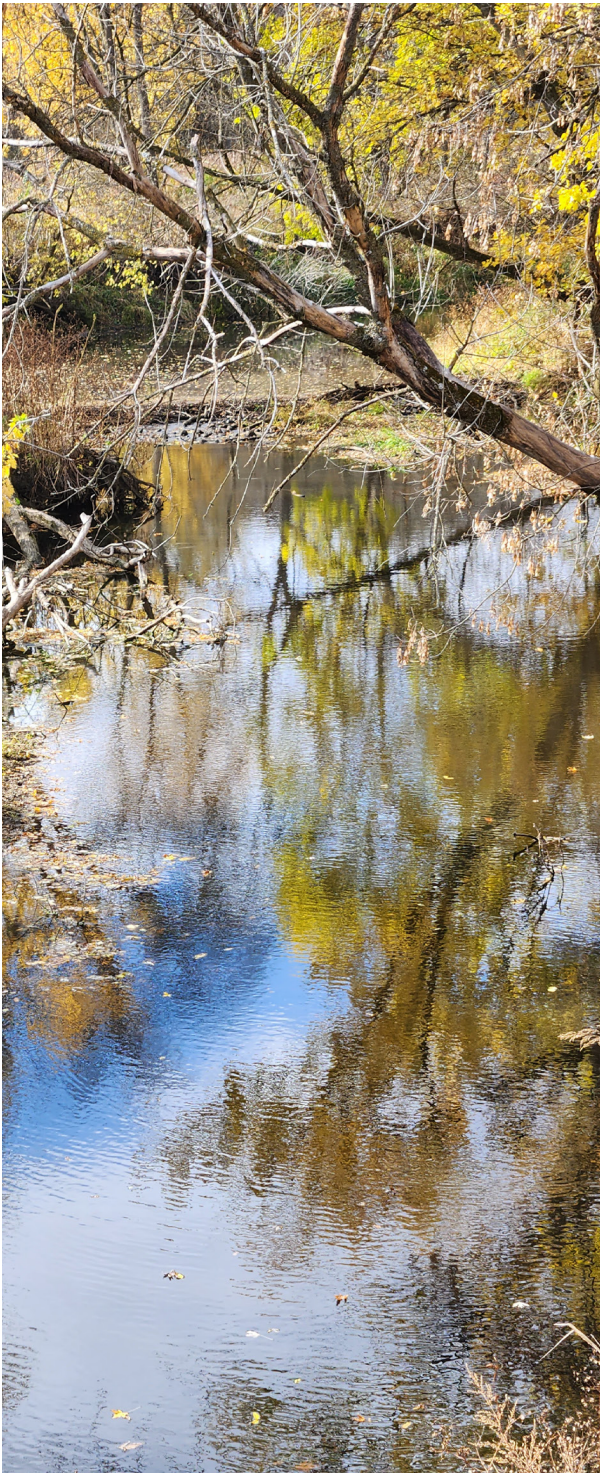
A cover crop cocktail after winter wheat is looking fine in October. (Josh Hiemstra, Hiemstra Dairy, Brandon, Wisconsin)



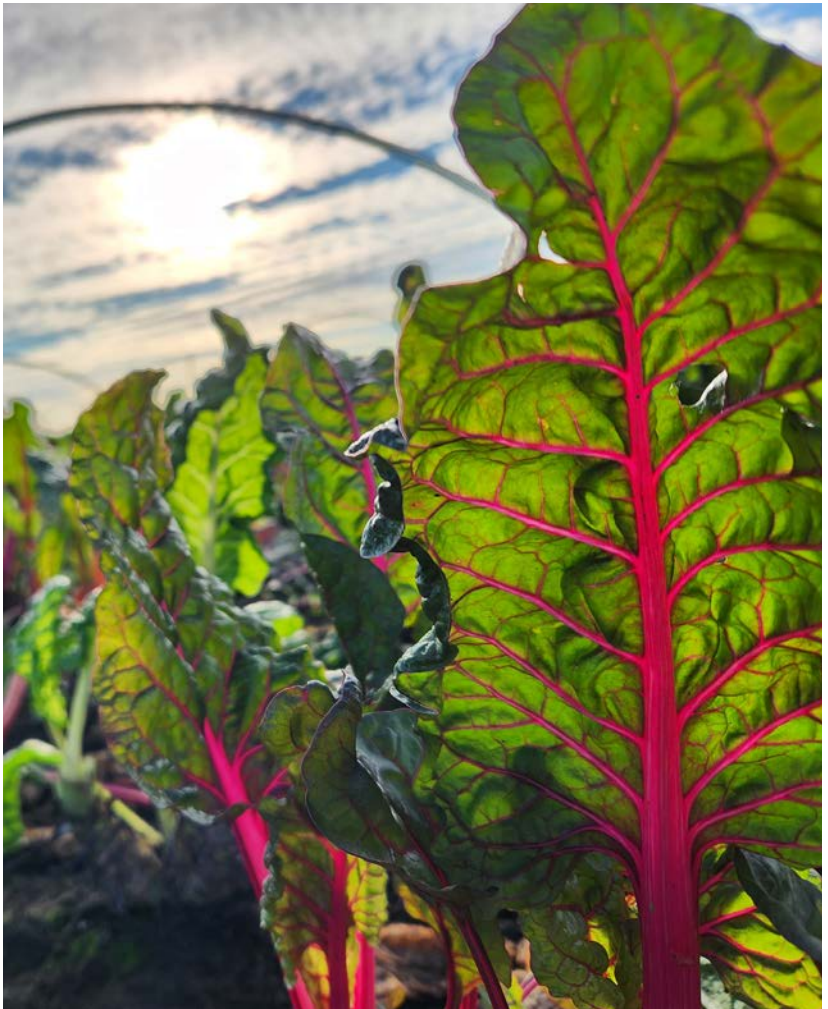
Shelby and her goats dress up as "Winter" for Halloween 2023. (Bailey Lutz, Hollyhock Land & Livestock, Decorah, Iowa)



Not everyone needs cinnamon and nutmeg to enjoy their pumpkins! (Jessica Peterson, Bloomsbury Farm, Shellsburg, Iowa)



Low water for multiple years has meant the resident beavers maintain and rebuild the dam in the background, creating a reflecting pool below it and a covering of leaves above it. Southfork, a tributary of the Iowa River, flows through Gibraltar Farms, operated by the Gilberts in central Hardin County. (John Gilbert, Gibraltar Farms, Iowa Falls, Iowa)



Swiss chard is finally enjoying the seasonal (much cooler) weather at Root to Rise Farm. (Sarah Nizzi, Boone, Iowa)



A honeybee bathed in pollen alights on an okra blossom. (Mari Hunt Wassink, Black Earth Gardens, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)



Have a photo you'd like featured in the magazine?
Email it to liz.kolbe@practicalfarmers.org or tag PFI on social media and let us know!

Review of Tomie dePaola's "The Popcorn Book"

By Isabel Gilbert

I think that "The Popcorn Book" by Tomie dePaola, who is a great children's author in my opinion, is a good book if you like history, fun illustrations and funny endings. It is short and informative at the same time.

The book is about two brothers; one of them is cooking popcorn while the other is reading aloud facts all about popcorn, with excellent illustrations to go with the story. The information is shown in drawings, unlike other nonfiction books with photographs. The illustrations really help explain what is going on in the facts, so be sure to pay attention to the pictures when you read it.

I liked that it was teaching you about the history of popcorn and had a funny story when Tony was making the popcorn, especially when it went everywhere. So it's nonfiction but with fun illustrations if you wanted to read a nonfiction book and a picture book at the same time.

I learned about how popcorn came to be such a popular food, and how its evolution goes back a long time. Like where Tomie said that "1,000-year-old popcorn kernels were found in Peru and they could still be popped." I also learned popcorn was introduced to English colonists by the Indigenous people.

I can't believe that there was such a thing as popcorn soup; I think I would be willing to try it.

I think that younger kids, like my 3-year-old sister, would enjoy the book

because it has fun pictures, a funny story and interesting facts for those who would like to learn about popcorn. For kids my age, I think that they might like another book but would probably like this one – just not if they were looking for a very in-depth, informative text. But this is still a good book if you would like to learn about popcorn in general.

Overall, I really enjoyed "The Popcorn Book" and recommend it if you like learning new things or are just looking for something to learn, this would be a great choice. ■

Isabel Gilbert is 10 years old and lives with her family on a farm near Iowa Falls, Iowa. She enjoys reading; playing outside; learning about reptiles, as she wants to work with reptiles when she grows up; and playing the piano. Her favorite part about living on a farm is having space to play outside and be with the animals.



Isabel Gilbert

The Popcorn Book

Author and illustrator: Tomie dePaola

Published: 1978

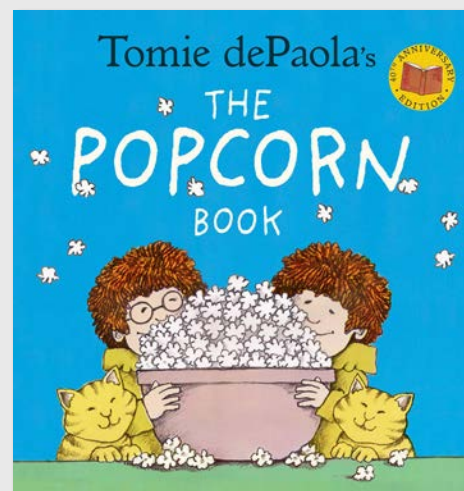
Length: 28 pages

Everyone loves popcorn! Newly updated with the latest research, a delicious 40th anniversary edition of a POP-ular classic.

Tony likes to cook. Tiny likes to read. And both twins like to eat . . . POPCORN! So while Tiny cooks it, Tony reads about it: what popcorn is, how it's stored and prepared, legends and stories about it, and its history in Europe and North America.

A favorite since its original release in 1978, The Popcorn Book has sold nearly a million copies. This fresh new edition features refreshed interiors with bolder colors, and revised text— updated with new information and vetted for accuracy by a Native American expert.

Colorful, funny, and informative, this nonfiction classic from the best-selling author-illustrator of Quiet, Strega Nona, and many more will teach you everything you need to know about this favorite snack food— and leave you hungry for more. And because the best thing about popcorn is eating it, two great recipes for popping corn are included!





PFI Events

Registration information for all PFI events can be found at practicalfarmers.org/events, or by calling the PFI office at (515) 232-5661.

JANUARY

JANUARY 18-19 • Pre-Conference Short Courses
Des Moines, IA

JANUARY 19-20 • PFI Annual Conference
Des Moines, IA

JANUARY 30-APRIL 23 • Winter Webinar Series
Weekly on Tuesdays | Noon-1 p.m. | Online
Full descriptions, register and join at practicalfarmers.org/farminars

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 6 • Commercial Apple Growers Workshop
Ames, IA

FEBRUARY 10 • Beginning Farmer Retreat
Location TBD

FEBRUARY-MARCH • Regional Fruit & Vegetable Farmer Meet-Ups
Various locations around the state

MARCH

MARCH 4 • Midwest Covers & Grains Conference
Mankato, MN

PFI Current Enrollments

From January - March

SMALL GRAINS COST-SHARE

SIGN-UP DEADLINE: JULY 1, 2024
practicalfarmers.org/small-grains-cost-share

N RATE RISK PROTECTION PROGRAM

SIGN UP DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2024
practicalfarmers.org/n-rate-risk-protection-program

CONSERVATION COST-SHARE

ROLLING APPLICATION
practicalfarmers.org/conservation-cost-share

BENEFICIAL INSECTS COST-SHARE

ROLLING APPLICATION
practicalfarmers.org/beneficial-insect-cost-share

LANDOWNER COACHING PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION
practicalfarmers.org/landowner-coaching

LOCAL FOODS PURCHASE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION
Sign up to be a vendor at iowalfpa.org/producers

Keep an eye out for announcements on the following programs:

LABOR4LEARNING PROGRAM

APPLICATIONS FOR TRAINEES WILL OPEN IN LATE WINTER
practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning

Meet the Newest Members of PFI's Team

Katie Aupperle | Conference and Events Coordinator



Katie Aupperle joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in October 2023 as the conference and events coordinator. In this role, she supports planning both internal and external PFI events and ensures all company events are successfully carried out in a timely and efficient manner.

to working at Practical Farmers of Iowa, Katie worked extensively in the agriculture sector, specifically in the poultry industry, coordinating and hosting events worldwide. Katie's passion and love for agriculture continues to grow with her journey through PFI.

Originally from southwest Iowa, Katie now resides in Grimes, Iowa. In her free time, she enjoys crafting, traveling, watching true crime and relaxing with her pup, Ali. ■

Katie graduated in 2019 from Northwest Missouri State University with a Bachelor of Science in marketing. Prior

Sophie McGovern | Marketing Project Coordinator



Sophie McGovern joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in September 2023 as the marketing project coordinator. Her work supports the communications department and program staff by managing marketing projects and providing administrative and logistics support.

for the outdoors. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in health science, biology and psychology at Norwich University in Vermont. Prior to PFI, Sophie worked in the sports industry assisting the marketing team by managing projects and running events.

In her free time, Sophie loves spending time with her two pups, Raymond and Koda, along with her partner, Brent. She also enjoys traveling back home to Minnesota as often as she can, taking walks with her family, thrifting for fun finds, searching for a new coffee drink fixation and cooking. ■

Sophie grew up in northern Minnesota, where she played hockey since she was able to walk, fished on all of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes, camped on various lakes and started her love

Jennifer Reddel | Cost-Share Administrative Assistant



Jennifer Reddel joined PFI in November 2023 as the cost-share administrative assistant. In this role, she assists the farm viability department, working specifically with the field crops team and the back-end processes of PFI's cost-share programs.

and Collector's Show, which is a huge tradition for her family.

Jennifer has a degree in business and is working to finish another in organizational leadership. Before PFI, Jennifer spent the majority of her career experience with adult education, operations and compliance in the franchise world. She also spent time in a school district, as well as a real estate office. These experiences helped to strengthen her skills in communication, transaction management, client services and relationship-building.

Jennifer grew up on a dairy farm in northwestern Iowa. When she was in sixth grade, her family moved to an acreage in the same area that they lovingly called "the roadside zoo. Her family always planted a large garden, and canned and froze vegetables. She was also member of 4-H, where she showed sheep and has fond memories of woodworking with her grandpa and baking with her grandma. Both sides of her family were farmers. Going back home is always special, especially for the Threshermen

Outside of work, family is a priority, which usually includes cheering on their beloved Cyclones. Jennifer enjoys caring for her pollinator garden and anything that has to do with flowers and plants. She enjoys good food, good wine, live music and time with friends and family. Jennifer and her husband, David, live in Ankeny, Iowa, and have two sons. ■

Seeking Participants for Two PFI On-Farm Trials

Can We Reduce N Rates to Corn and Improve ROI?

Have you been using soil health practices like cover crops, diversified crop rotation, integrated livestock grazing, reduced tillage or compost, among others? Join farmers from the Upper Midwest in an ongoing research study that pays you to put your soil health to the test!

This project involves comparing your typical nitrogen fertilizer rate to a reduced N rate of your choosing in randomized, replicated strips. For instance, if your typical N rate is 200 lbs N/ac, your reduced rate could be 160 lbs N/ac (a 40-unit reduction).

The reduced rate is entirely up to you; decide on your reduced rate in any manner you see fit. When, how and what form of N you apply is also entirely up to you, whether it's pre-plant, split application, side-dress, Y-drop, chemical fertilizer, manure, a combination of the two, etc.

Note: *If you apply manure, we do need an analysis so that we can calculate units of nitrogen applied.*



Do Cover Crops Increase the Number of Days Suitable for Field Work?

Do you think you're getting into your fields earlier than your neighbors in the spring and not leaving ruts in the field when harvesting in the fall? Do you suspect these suitable field conditions are due to your use of cover crops? If so, consider joining a multifarm effort that will help unpack what's going on.

This project relies on farmers like you observing cover-cropped fields through the year. You'll complete a short survey on a weekly basis that asks, "If you wanted to, could you have completed field activities this past week without compromising field integrity? On which days this past week could you have done so?"

We think the results will validate your experiences – and run counter to the trend in recent years of fewer days suitable for field work in the spring and fall. Help us find out! ■



To learn more about either of these trials, or to sign up, visit:
practicalfarmers.org/open-calls-for-on-farm-research-cooperators.

Labor4Learning Jobs Will Go Live in February

Are you a beginning or aspiring farmer? Do you want to find paid, on-the-job training with experienced farmers in Iowa?

The Labor4Learning program is designed for beginning farmers seeking paid farm work along with additional training in farm management and production skills. Past jobs have covered a range of enterprises and marketing practices in field crops, livestock, dairying, horticulture and orcharding, and have been located all around the state. As a trainee, you'll get paid at least minimum wage and earn other benefits, including:

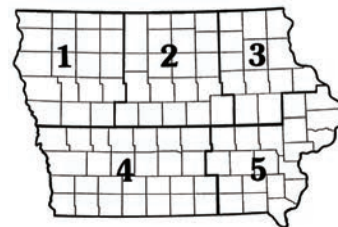
- the chance to learn farm business development from an experienced PFI farmer
- paid time off to attend a PFI event during your term of employment
- a discounted rate to attend PFI's annual conference
- opportunities to connect with other trainees in the program
- a free PFI membership



Watch for open 2024 positions to be announced in February. Visit practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning to learn more, or contact Rachel Burke at (515) 232-5661 or rachel.burke@practicalfarmers.org.

Welcome, New Members!

From August 9–November 14, 2023



DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Terry Aberson – Orange City
- Colton Barnes – Cherokee
- Alan Bennett – Galva
- Jared Blankespoor – Rock Valley
- Gary Blythe – Spirit Lake
- Mark Boyle – Danbury
- Mason Boyle – Danbury
- Dick Coffman – Hinton
- James Davelaar – Rock Valley
- Brent De Haan – Orange City
- Dennis Degner – Lytton
- Bradley Den Herder – Sioux Center
- Glenn DeVries – Alton
- Adam and Mary Ebert – Coon Rapids
- Ben Erdman – Marcus
- Mitch Erdman – Marcus
- Michael Folsom – Hornick
- Ben Gardewine – Rolfe
- Dan Gengler – Remsen
- Myron Gradert – Sioux Center
- Nathan Graham – Cherokee
- Troy Hare – Ida Grove
- Monte Harpenau – Le Mars
- Heath Hilbrands – George
- Keaton Hildreth – Lohrville
- Conner Hildreth – Rockwell City
- Dick Homan – Remsen
- Collin Hoops – Ireton
- Will Horsley – Dickens
- Treven Howard – Lake Park
- Eric Hunziker – Lakeview
- Bruce Husman – Quimby
- Ryan Johnson – Cherokee
- Klint Koster – Orange City
- Kyle Kovarna – Merrill
- Brian Kroeze – Orange City
- Neil Krummen – Linn Grove
- Ronald Lampe – Havelock
- Larry Leaverton – Sioux City
- Joel Leusink – Orange City
- Eric Mahaney – Arion
- Grant Meyer – Sac City
- Darrell Millard – Alta
- George Miller – Sioux City
- Jack Montgomery – Larrabee
- David Musselman – Newell
- Nathan Nieland – Breda
- Joel Onken – Carroll
- Brent Oolman – Orange City
- Jason Otto – Ocheyedon
- Patrick Pridle – Hinton
- Dustin Puhmann – Paullina
- Jeff Redenius – Lake City

- Gary Reinders – Orange City
- Matthew D Richardson – Storm Lake
- John Rosenboom – Pomeroy
- Steven Rosenboom – Pomeroy
- Kevin Sandbulte – Sioux Center
- Keith Schelling – Orange City
- Russell Schmidt – Ireton
- Donna Schmitt – Remsen
- Dale Schneider – Denison
- Ryan Schorg – Remsen
- Daniel Schroeder – Granville
- Clay Shumate – Dow City
- Brian Sievers – Storm Lake
- Brian Steinhoff – Hornick
- Steve Swart – Dickens
- Brent Swart – Spencer
- Kyle Tapper – Marcus
- Harwin TeSlaa – Hull
- Ray Van Gorp – Orange City
- Joshua Van Kekerix – Sheldon
- Leon Van Kley – Sioux Center
- Jeremy Van Middendorp – Doon
- Kim Van Peursem – Orange City
- Nate Vander Schaaf – Sioux Center
- Chris Vander Veen – Orange City
- Arthur Vander Waal – Orange City
- Edward J Vander Wilt – Sheldon
- Glen Vetter – Storm Lake
- Steve Vis – Maurice
- David Vliieger – Maurice
- Dan Vonk – Ireton
- James Vonk – Ireton
- Kendall Wassenaar – Orange City
- Derek Wellendorf – Boyden
- Kevin White – Peterson
- Tyler Whited – Marcus
- Luke and Nancy Wielenga – Hull
- Morningside Ag Club, Dan Witten – Sioux City
- Dan Witten – Whiting
- Robert and David Witzke – Newell
- John Zimmer – Cherokee

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Sean Arthur – Nora Springs
- Jim Beninga – Dike
- Alex Blood – State Center
- Keith Braun – Northwood
- Kevin Braun – Northwood
- Nathan Brinkman – Webster City
- Bradley Brunsvold – Northwood
- Jeremy Buck – State Center
- Keith Bunger – Wellsburg
- Laura Carlson – Garner
- Tom Carlson – Humboldt

- Steve Carlson – Stratford
- Kyle Carpenter – Melbourne
- Brian Chambers – Marble Rock
- Josh Chambers – Marble Rock
- Earl Check – Madrid
- Steven Damman – Indianola
- Hunter Danker – Traer
- Troy Davis – State Center
- Iowa State University Organic Agriculture Program, Kathleen Delate – Ames
- Nathan Easley – Reinbeck
- Stephanie Erickson and Jeff Graw – Marshalltown
- Michael Freed – Grundy Center
- James Ham – Osage
- Jon Haugo – Northwood
- Kristi Heffelmeier – Buckingham
- Craig Heineman – Ogden
- Dustin Helland – Huxley
- Craig Hempy – Montour
- Nevada High School FFA – Nevada
- Nathan Holven – Garwin
- Douglas Honold – Coon Rapids
- Don Jagerson – Madrid
- Chad Jones – State Center
- Kurtis Kadolph – Hubbard
- Craig Kajer – Toledo
- Wyatt Kalinay – Toledo
- John Kaspar – Rockwell
- Dan Koch – Reinbeck
- Shannon Kooima – Ames
- Kathleen Large – State Center
- Mike Ledvina – Toledo
- TC and Kurt Loving – Humboldt
- Mikal Luiken – Grundy Center
- Jonathan Marshall – Paton
- Sarah Mattingly – Garwin
- John Maxwell – Maxwell
- Jason McMartin – Grundy Center
- Greg Messerschmidt – Nevada
- Clay Mitchell – Buckingham
- Wade Mitchell – Buckingham
- Steven Murty – Gladbrook
- Nathan Nedved – Garner
- Benjamin Neff – Beaman
- Dave Nelson – Belmond
- Doug Neuhaus – Shell Rock
- Nancy Nickerson – Clear Lake
- Steve Norby – Osage
- Holden Nyhus – Forest City
- Duane Parizek – Clutier
- Reuben Peterson – Ames
- Michael Powers – Ames
- Paul Regenold – Charles City
- Hal Reiter – Buckingham

- Dan Remsburg – McCallsburg
- Ron Rethmeier – Laurel
- Nathan Rickerl – Ames
- Joseph Rowe – Manly
- Drake Schonhorst – Slater
- Gary Schotanus – Saint Ansgar
- Michael Schreck – Dike
- Darwin Sents – Grundy Center
- Chris Smith – Nevada
- Dennis Sponheim – Saint Ansgar
- Larry Stolte – Boone
- Mike Stricker – Orchard
- Ryan Sundine – Boone
- John Svoboda – Clutier
- Ryan Thomas – Clear Lake
- Candie Tow – Gilman
- Robert Ullicki – Lehigh
- Joseph Wick – Clear Lake
- Katie Woodard – Nevada
- Brian Weber – Buckingham

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Kevin Adams – Plainfield
- Ryan Albertsen – Buckingham
- Mike Andera – Calmar
- Josh Anderegg – Garber
- Travis Anderson – Elkader
- Andrew Aronson – Waterloo
- Terry Barth – Decorah
- Darren Bechthold – La Porte City
- Carolyn Becker – Blainstown
- Jeff Boddicker – Newhall
- Mark Bohach – Fort Atkinson
- Matt Bruening – Charles City
- Tyler Carlson – Saint Olaf
- Braxton Clubb – Vinton
- Vincent Collis – Hudson
- Lewis Cook – Holy Cross
- Dustin Egeland – Ossian
- Jeff Eichenberger – New Hampton
- Dean Elsbernd – Calmar
- Justin Enzinger – Marion
- Brandt Fehl – La Porte City
- Rollin Fink – Randalia
- Gregory Fischer – Manchester
- Ian Flores – Dysart
- Jack Friedman – Dyersville
- Jonathan Friedman – Milford
- Sarah Frydenlund – Decorah
- Nicholas Fuller – Independence
- Daniel Ganz – Mount Vernon
- Jason Gaul – New Vienna
- Cory Glass – Arlington
- Larry Glass – Strawberry Point
- Ryan Goedken – Earlville
- Cindy Goodner – Decorah

- Tyler Green – Hudson
- Michael Greiner – Cedar Falls
- Travis and Vanette Grover – Cresco
- Thomas A. Hagen – Blairstown
- Timothy Handley – Marion
- John Harris – Waverly
- George Hershey – Alburnett
- Brian Hodgson – Dubuque
- Daniel Hoeger – Earlville
- Kelly Holthaus – Decorah
- Cody Huber – Blairstown
- Paul E Jirak – Calmar
- Jeffrey Junge – Atkins
- Joseph Kane – Walker
- Richard Kann – Garnavillo
- Brandon Kann – Guttenberg
- Bailey Klein – Frederika
- Corey Klimesh – Calmar
- Patricia Klimesh – Ridgeway
- James Klopping – Vinton
- Jordan Kluesner – Holy Cross
- Mike Knipper – Dyersville
- James Langel – New Vienna
- Brian Lensch – Marion
- Steve Manternach – Watkins
- Ted McAllister – New Vienna
- Sarah McGee – West Union
- Randy McIntosh – Decorah
- Noah McMurrin – Sherrill
- Douglas McNally – Monona
- Dale Menke – New Vienna
- Michael and Hunter Meyer – Postville
- Victor Miller – Oelwein
- Jake Mills – Oelwein
- Matt Miner – Cresco
- Glen Mormann – New Vienna
- Dylan Nielsen – La Porte City
- Kevin Nieman – Delhi
- Jarret Orr – Independence
- Jim Orr – Rowley
- Jason Orr – Rowley
- Mark Palmer – Waukon
- Jameson Peterson – Lansing
- Anthony Phillips – Ridgeway
- Anton Pickart – Keystone
- Randy Pickart – Keystone
- Chris Praska – New Hampton
- Blake Rau – Aurora
- Joe Recker – Earlville
- Daniel Regan – Waukon
- Andy Rippel – Mount Auburn
- Jeff Rottinghaus – La Porte City
- Michael and Erin Ryan – Decorah
- Kevin Sash – La Porte City
- Tim Scheidel – Lawler
- Dennis Schlueter – Worthington
- Andrew Schmitt – Fort Atkinson
- Jeff Schmitt – Fort Atkinson
- Joe Schmitz – La Porte City
- Peter Schueller – Sherrill
- Kenneth Simmer – Waverly
- Matt Simon – Blairstown

- Paul and Miriam Skrade – Fayette
- Eric Smith – Decorah
- Derrek Sommerfelt – Tripoli
- Brad Steege – Fredericksburg
- Danny Steege – Fredericksburg
- Chase Steggall – Ely
- Nick Stortz – Waukon
- Daniel Takes – Ely
- Pat Tekippe – Fort Atkinson
- Jake Thomsen – Marion
- Eric Thronson – New Hampton
- Michael Tigges – Dubuque
- Mark Vagts – West Union
- Clayton Vopelak – Dysart
- Craig Walker – Vinton
- Erik Wangsness – Decorah
- Todd Warnke – Fredericksburg
- Kirk Weih – Mount Vernon
- Gregory Wellman – La Porte City
- James Zwanziger – Nashua
- Kevin Zwanziger – Nashua

DISTRICT 4 – SOUTHWEST

- Ethan Abbott – Osceola
- Bill Adams – Winterset
- Doug Baughman – Kirkman
- David Body – Polk City
- Justin Boggs – Seymour
- Adam Boswell – Corning
- Todd Brace – Defiance
- Bill Campidilli – Bouton
- Reggie Carlson – Essex
- Sophie Churchill – Altoona
- Brad Clevenger – Indianola
- Spencer Collins – Adel
- Kerry Confer – Emerson
- Larry Cronin – West Des Moines
- Scott De Prenger – Otley
- Craig De Vries – New Virginia
- David DeVries – Red Oak
- Ron DeVries – Red Oak
- Chisum Downing – Creston
- Diane Eblen – Atlantic
- Marlin Eddy – Osceola
- Doug England – Clearfield
- Wade England – Sharpsburg
- Rod Ewing – Clio
- Sam Fager – Atlantic
- Ross Farwell – Northboro
- Lindsey Felder – Panora
- David Felt – Adel
- Suzanne Fey – Ankeny
- Jerod Flaherty – Osceola
- Robert Geiger – Thurman
- Ethan Gilman – Stuart
- Jacob Githens – Dallas Center
- Eugene Gochenour – Mondamin
- Jim Goins – Diagonal
- Jeena Hall – Mondamin
- Stephen Hansen – Winterset
- Kirk Hartman – Cumberland
- Paul Hathaway – Malvern
- Jared Henderson – Panora
- Paul Hietbrink – Pella

- Harold Hill – Minburn
- David Hobbs – Lucas
- Clair Hochstetler – Dexter
- Randy Hoksbergen – Polk City
- Daniel Holaday – Atlantic
- Mike Holmes – Prairie City
- Brian Hoxmeier – Indianola
- David Jenkins – Red Oak
- Matthew Jones – Red Oak
- Don Karwal – Elliott
- Kevin Kennon – Stanton
- Peter Keuning – Otley
- Jeremy Klepinger – Emerson
- Jeff Krueger – Walnut
- Kurt Lager – Bedford
- Kyle Lager – Bedford
- Tyler Lain – Corydon
- Phil Lautner – Adel
- Matt Lowe – Seymour
- Cory Maassen – Hancock
- Mike Mace – Perry
- Doug Maher – Stanton
- Bethany Maronde – Shenandoah
- Jason Marshall – Numa
- Boyd Mathes – Pella
- Scott Mattes – Adel
- Laurie Mcclarnon – Blanchard
- Marlon Mormann – West Des Moines
- Tyce and Hilary Mothershead – Grand River
- Austin Nothwehr – Clarinda
- Lyle Nothwehr – Clarinda
- Pat O'Hara – Shenandoah
- Karl Olson – Villisca
- Annie Palmer – Martensdale
- Ned Parker – Story City
- Tom Peplinski – Humeston
- Cale Perry – Waukee
- Mason Peters – Avoca
- Monroe Peterson – Red Oak
- Dan Phelps – Red Oak
- Matt Puffer – Des Moines
- Bradley Rietveld – Otley
- Brett Robberts – Clarinda
- John and Duane Schmaltz – Knoxville
- Eric Schroeder – Coon Rapids
- Catherine Schut – Prairie City
- Mackenzie and Jack Shelton – Council Bluffs
- Judith Slough – Clarinda
- Jacob Smith – Newton
- Daniel Swanson – Essex
- Ila Taylor – Bouton
- Allen Taylor – Woodburn
- Kyle Thelen – Afton
- David Thien – Council Bluffs
- Juli Tripple – Linden
- Conner Van Walbeek – Monroe
- Zach Vander Linden – Pella
- Andy Wailes – Ankeny
- Mitchell Williamson – Wiota

DISTRICT 5 – SOUTHEAST

- Tom Adam – Harper
- Eric Adam – Washington
- Paul Anderson – Kellogg
- Mark Anderson – Keota
- Matthew Barton – Mount Pleasant
- Vincent Bein – Atalissa
- Vaughn Bein – Stockton
- Ken Beuthien – Wheatland
- Bethany and Tyler Bird – Solon
- Olivia Bohlmann – Iowa City
- Eric Bortner – Davenport
- Tanner Brecht – Marengo
- Thomas Brown – West Liberty
- Rob Bruxvoort – New Sharon
- Mark Bulechek – Iowa City
- Christian Calderwood – Brooklyn
- Rich Caves – Oskaloosa
- Steven Caves – Oskaloosa
- Susan Clark – Iowa City
- Taylor Collins – Mediapolis
- Chad Cronbaugh – Marengo
- Karen Cummins – Coralville
- Josh Day – Wilton
- Adam Donohoe – West Branch
- Mike Downes – Oxford
- Jason Dumont – North Liberty
- Luke Duttlinger – Williamsburg
- Darrell Egli – Columbus Junction
- Scott Eichelberger – Muscatine
- Steve Eiler – Tipton
- Jason Eness and Teresa Maas – Iowa City
- Frederick Engel II – Brighton
- Erica Finken – Iowa City
- Michael Fosdick – Sperry
- Julie Garetson – Nichols
- James Gent – Wellman
- Faye Gerig – Marengo
- Joe Golinghorst – Walcott
- Don Goodman – Colfax
- Jill Greiner – Clive
- Mitch Guldenpfennig – Letts
- Leo Haack – Williamsburg
- Mel Haler – Lone Rock
- Erin Harbison – Brighton
- Ben Harner – Columbus Junction
- Roger Harrington – Ollie
- Craig Headley – Birmingham
- Dennis Helkenn – Stockton
- Colin Hermiston – New Liberty
- Michael Hildebrand – Brooklyn
- Martin Hills – Fruitland
- Doug Hoag – Muscatine
- Joseph Holtkamp – Donnellson
- Russ Holtkamp – West Point
- Ronald Honts – Muscatine
- Joel Huber – Wellman
- Paul Jacobs – Ottumwa
- Samantha Jamison – Columbus Junction
- Kathy Jennings – Buxton – Winfield
- Larry Jones – Newton

- Austin Keppy – Muscatine
- Jim Kessler – Walcott
- Patrick Kinney – Oxford
- Arlyn Koeppel – Stockton
- Derek Kriegel – Chelsea
- Rodger Krogmeier – Lockridge
- Melvin Krogmeier – Salem
- Randy Kuehl – Anamosa
- Michael Leichty – Wellman
- David Lerch – Martelle
- Mike Lodge – West Branch
- Earl Wayne Lowe – Columbus Junction
- Terry Martin – Muscatine
- Katie McWhirter – Ainsworth
- Adam Meyer – Williamsburg
- Kris Miller – Hedrick
- Chris Montross – Williamsburg
- Michael Mosier – Walcott
- Steven Nolte – Kalona
- Alex Ogren – Lone Tree
- Mike Paustian – Walcott
- Kent Pedersen – West Branch
- Amy Poe – New Sharon
- Martha Rasmussen – Fairfield
- Justin Render – South English
- Joe Rich – Mt. Pleasant
- Trevor Rich – Washington
- Dennis Roberts – Marengo
- Doug Roberts – Marengo
- Leo Rudolphi – Marengo
- Greg Ryan – Marengo
- Jenna Schneider – Washington
- Trevor Schneider – West Liberty
- Doug Schroeder – Clarence
- Jason Schroeder – Durant
- Mitch Schroeder – Tipton
- Tim Shellabarger – Blue Grass
- Mark Smyth – Solon
- James Snakenberg – Sigourney
- Travis Spevacek – Iowa City
- John Stanton – Bernard
- Dillon Streets – Anamosa
- Daryl Sywassink – Muscatine
- Jack Tank – Iowa City
- Jason Thomann – Ainsworth
- Ross Thomann – Columbus Junction
- Jerry Timm – Muscatine
- Steve Treimer – Wilton
- Centered Wealth, Stuart Valentine – Fairfield
- Sarah Vande Voort – New Sharon
- Troy Vincent – West Branch
- Diane Volrath – Princeton
- Marcia Ward – Solon
- Lyle Waters – West Branch
- Tim Wegmann – Solon
- McKane Wells – Milton
- Neil Welsh – Williamsburg
- Robert Welsh – Williamsburg
- Wesley Wickham – Montezuma
- Brian Wolken – Monticello
- Bill Wonderlich – Pleasant Hill

- Raymond Woody – Fairfield
- Neil Wulf – Durant
- Luke Yoder – Kalona
- Patrick Zuber – Williamsburg

DISTRICT 6 – OUT OF STATE

- Frants Madsen – Sun City West, AZ
- Linda Plazak – Bridgeville, DE
- Seth Logsdon – Largo, FL
- Wayne Turner – Tallahassee, FL
- Ronald Heidesch – Bishop, GA
- Dennis Freedlund – Winnebago, IL
- Wes Hepker – Mount Carroll, IL
- Brian Pickering – Algonquin, IL
- Daniel Waters – Valparaiso, IN
- Dean Renner – Paxico, KS
- Sandra Weaver – Overland Park, KS
- Jenny Vaughn – Smithfield, KY
- Patrick Baldock – Carleton, MI
- Shelley Breyen – Duluth, MN
- Curtis Cauley – Belle Plaine, MN
- Kristofer and Julie Coffman – Stillwater, MN
- David Emslander – Oak Park, MN
- Chris Engelmann – Norwood Young America, MN
- Rodney Estling – Roosevelt, MN
- Wade Gronau – Redwood Falls, MN
- Joseph Guiney – Minneapolis, MN
- Cindy Hamilton – Adams, MN
- Mark and Mia Howard – Aurora, MN
- Morgan Kauth – Ivanhoe, MN
- Charles Krause – Buffalo, MN
- Steve Miller – Hastings, MN
- Andy Mundt – Utica, MN
- Leroy and Sheryl Petersen – Kerkhoven, MN
- Tom and Eric Polacek – New Brighton, MN
- Peter Ratka – Foley, MN
- Keith Ripplinger – Holdingford, MN
- Andy Rubischko – Goodridge, MN
- Terry Selness – Mabel, MN
- Eric Skroch – Rice, MN
- Greg Tax – Pierz, MN
- Matthew Thomas – Lakeville, MN
- Andrew Thorson – Waverly, MN
- Sara Van Asten – Dayton, MN
- Otto Alber – Shelbina, MO
- Adam Gatson – Vandalia, MO
- Julie Gatson – Vandalia, MO
- Joni Gingerich – Bethany, MO
- Eric Hogan – Kahoka, MO
- John Jennings – Frankford, MO
- Tim Kurz – Vandalia, MO
- August Luther – Lawson, MO
- Kurt Middleton – Moberly, MO
- David Minnick – Richmond, MO
- Leon Perkins – St. Joseph, MO
- Jon Runde – Gentry, MO

- Ticia Sanderson – Meadville, MO
- Chris Schnelle – Pollock, MO
- Tom Stuart – Jefferson City, MO
- Mark Ulrich – Laredo, MO
- Brian Anderson – Hoskins, NE
- Evan Aschoff – Plainview, NE
- Leland Aspegren – Wilcox, NE
- Levi Bakenhus – Columbus, NE
- Austin Baldwin – Bloomfield, NE
- Don Batie – Lexington, NE
- Del Bowden – Omaha, NE
- Daniel Brester – Howels, NE
- David Brookhouser – Creighton, NE
- Lee Buchholz – Avoca, NE
- James Buchholz – Otoe, NE
- Russ Cech – Rogers, NE
- Keaton Clark – Pierce, NE
- Nate Coleman – Omaha, NE
- Cole Condon – Creighton, NE
- David Condon – Creighton, NE
- James Crook – Nebraska City, NE
- Clint Damme – Talmage, NE
- Lisa Doerr – Osmond, NE
- Corby Forbes – Brunswick, NE
- Rod Frank – Madrid, NE
- Janis Gress – Nebraska City, NE
- David Grimes – Minden, NE
- Sally and Charles Hillis – Lincoln, NE
- Doug Hillman – Otoe, NE
- Garrett Hingst – Allen, NE
- Brent Hinrichs – Hildreth, NE
- Matthew Hinrichs – Hildreth, NE
- Dalson Hitz – Osmond, NE
- Brian Hoffman – Brunswick, NE
- Aaron Hoke – Orchard, NE
- Chris Jessen – Bloomfield, NE
- Steve Keck – Plainview, NE
- John Klitz – West Point, NE
- Myron Kumm – Wausa, NE
- Tony Kumm – Wausa, NE
- Kyle Lechtenberg – Oakland, NE
- Jeff Liesemeyer – Nebraska City, NE
- Michael Lollmann – Nebraska City, NE
- Sandro Lopes – David City, NE
- Marty C. Marx – Wayne, NE
- Mike Masat – Brunswick, NE
- Drew Meyer – Syracuse, NE
- Brandon Nichols – Bridgeport, NE

- Dale Nichols – Bridgeport, NE
- Austin Nicholson – Wilber, NE
- Tim Nissen – Hartington, NE
- Fred Olson – Craig, NE
- Zachary Paulman – Sutherland, NE
- Manuel Pena – Omaha, NE
- James Peschong – Lincoln, NE
- Bradley Petersen – Herman, NE
- Marty Peterson – Lyons, NE
- Dean Poskochil – Pawnee City, NE
- Dan Rippe – Auburn, NE
- Mike Rolf – West Point, NE
- Brandon Rosberg – Wausa, NE
- Brandon Schlautman – Henderson, NE
- Kristin and Cory Schlueter – Scribner, NE
- Ben Skroch – Bloomfield, NE
- Tim Slagle – West Point, NE
- Gerald Smith – Pender, NE
- Martin Smith – Pender, NE
- Mary Lou Stehr – Omaha, NE
- Chad Taubenheim – Kearney, NE
- Scott J. Uecker – Norfolk, NE
- Thomas Unick – Mason City, NE
- Steven Wellman – Syracuse, NE
- Cathy Yindrick – David City, NE
- Derek Zuhlke – Plainview, NE
- John Haverhals – Hudson, SD
- Bruce J Paulson – Garden City, SD
- Patrick Toomey – Brandon, SD
- Keith Yoder – Maryville, TN
- Steven Pennings – Houston, TX
- David Carl Dummer – Elk Mound, WI
- Beth and Mark Heinze – Portage, WI
- Jud Isebrands – New London, WI
- Jason Kjos – River Falls, WI
- Steve Kratz – Hartford, WI
- Donna Martinson – Dresser, WI
- Pete Morts – Mt. Hope, WI
- Briana Peterson – Mayville, WI
- Mackane Vogel – Brookfield, WI
- Matt Welter – White Water, WI
- Amy Woldt – Brillion, WI
- Daryl Woldt – Brillion, WI
- Kelsey Woldt – Brillion, WI
- Daniel Zimmerman – Fox Lake, WI

INTERNATIONAL

- Roberto Crestan – Sao, Brazil



Thank you
to our newest lifetime member!

Patrick Koima
Rock Valley, IA

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.

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: _____ Email: _____

* 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 at the level of:

- Access - \$25
- Individual - \$50
- Farm or Household - \$60
- Organization - \$110
- Lifetime Member* - \$1,200
* See details at bit.ly/PFI-lifetime

3. How many years of farming experience do you have?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11 or more

2. Which category best describes you? (choose one)

- Farmer or farm operator
- Not farming yet, but would like to
- Farmland owner who does not actively farm myself
- Other: _____

4. How did you hear about PFI?

MEMBER BENEFITS

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

Please add my farm to PFI's:

- Local Foods Directory
- Business Directory (Organization members only)

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:

- \$1,200
- \$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

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

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Ames, IA 50010

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That'll Do, Pig

There are smiles all around as Shae Pesek gives some affection to her happy Berkshire pig. Learn more about Berkshires and other different pig breeds and crosses on page 10.

