

the PRACTICAL FARMER

SPRING 2024



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Putting Soil to the Test

The Wonders of Windbreaks



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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 a quarterly magazine published as a benefit of membership in Practical Farmers of Iowa. Through engaging stories and photos, our aim is to share the knowledge and experiences of PFI farmers, build a strong and connected community of members and supporters and celebrate our collective efforts to build resilient farms and communities.

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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Partnering to Achieve Our Mission

Practical Farmers’ mission to equip farmers to build resilient farms and communities is an important one. Given the landscape in the Midwest, creating resiliency in the food and farm system is a tall order. Fortunately, there are many organizations we partner with to better realize our mission. These partnerships are crucial to making the change we want to see. With limited time and resources, partnership simply makes sense.

Farmers, of course, are vital partners in our work. Farmers set our priorities; serve on governance committees; lead events; conduct research; serve as mentors; implement new on-farm practices; and are spokespeople in the media. We have a goal to partner with additional farmers as we “equip a deep bench of leaders to make change,” one of the strategic directions from our strategic plan. One way farmers partner with us is by conducting on-farm research. See an example of this on page 14, where farmers are looking at whether cover crops affect the number of days suitable for fieldwork. Another way is by hosting events on their farms to build community and share knowledge. In 2023, farmers in our network welcomed fellow farmers and supporters at 43 field days across Iowa and neighboring states.

We ask farmer hosts for feedback to make sure we’re being a good partner – for instance, by helping with logistics so they can focus on showcasing their operation to attendees. Dayna Burtness, who hosted a field day on pastured pigs in 2023, shared this advice to future event hosts: “Do it! I was a little uncertain about biosecurity and parking, but Amos (PFI’s senior livestock education coordinator) and the PFI staff took care of everything. It ended up being the best, most joyful day of my season yet.” Farmers: If you are interested in deepening your partnership with Practical Farmers, please let us know!

We also strategically partner with other groups to harness our collective efforts. These partnerships range from local community organizations – like Healthy Harvest of Northwest

Iowa – to state and federal collaborations. For example, PFI is partnering with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore oxbows in Iowa. With Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development, we’re working to deploy Iowa’s Local Food Purchasing Assistance program, which buys table food from farmers and distributes it to underserved communities.

We’re working with the Center for Rural Affairs to increase Latino farmer education and engagement. We’re also partnering with a range of companies that specialize in consumer packaged goods to help them meet sustainability goals – which include helping farmers reduce the burden of increasing conservation on their farms. But this list is just a sampling of PFI’s active partnerships.

There is so much to do that it’s imperative we work together. There’s no need for competition. My colleagues and I are extremely proud of our work, but not proprietary about it. We openly share how we do our work and seek out partners to collaborate with (we keep farmer data private and secure). Our partners generously do the same.

At a recent PFI board meeting, board members discussed how we can better understand existing partnerships and forge new ones. Kristine Lang, a board member from Brookings, South Dakota, suggested we do a social network analysis of our partnerships. This tool would help us understand and harness patterns in our relationships with individuals, organizations and groups, thus illuminating partnership gaps and opportunities.

As spring ushers new growth to emerge from the soil, so too will we be looking at how we can grow our partnerships to harness the impact of our work. If you would like to talk about further partnering with Practical Farmers, please contact me!

Sally Worley



Dayna Burtness (left in light blue) and Amos Johnson (with hat on right).

OVER THE *Garden Gate*

Farmer-to-farmer tips
for vegetable production

By Jacqueline Venner Senske

With raising vegetables, as with many things, personal experience is often the best teacher. But that insight can also come from hearing the experiences of others. From swapping tips with neighbors over the garden gate to connecting with virtual “neighbors” online, farmer-to-farmer learning remains a central way of passing on knowledge.

For this article, vegetable farmers from across the state, and representing a range of farm sizes and enterprises, shared advice and musings in response to the question: “What are your favorite lessons gleaned from experiences on your vegetable farm?”

The answers may spark ideas, raise eyebrows and make heads nod – just like those neighborly chats. Lean on the proverbial fencepost with us and browse these tips worthy of sharing over the garden gate.

PLAN & THINK AHEAD

Erik Sessions

Patchwork Green Farm | Decorah, Iowa

Put some texture in any cement floor surface, indoors or outdoors. You’ll be walking on it with wet boots or shoes and heavy tubs – you don’t want a slick surface!

Do your best to site a hoop house on level ground. All of our land is sloped, and we learned the hard way that it would be a good idea to level the ground before constructing a hoop house.

Don’t sell poor quality vegetables (over-ripe tomatoes, under-ripe winter squash, dirty lettuce, buggy kale). You will lose customers and reputation, both of which are hard to win back.

Stephanie Meyers

Sonshine Farm | Hubbard, Iowa

Keep records! Planting dates, first harvest dates, amount sold, etc. Take the time to do this as it helps with future planning. Even though it is time-consuming, it is very much worth it in the end.



Carly McAndrews

Trowel & Error Farm | Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The No. 1 book I recommend to any beginning vegetable farmer is “Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers” by Frédéric Thériault and Daniel Brisebois.

In the winter of 2019, I was trying to finish grad school and plan our first CSA season. I had six seasons of farm work but no experience with crop planning. I was trying to piece together different resources to figure out exactly how much to plant to make sure I had enough each week of the season. I’m not a math person, and I was swimming in numbers and spreadsheets, totally unsure if my numbers were right.

Then I found this book (by Thériault and Brisebois) at a farm conference, and it made crop planning feel straightforward and accessible. I especially like that it is geared toward people going into their very first season farming on their own.

BE RESOURCEFUL

Jill Beebout

Blue Gate Farm | Chariton, Iowa

Talk to your regional seed reps. Whether you are a big or small producer, they are a valuable resource.

Partner with other farms for group buys and projects.

In the off season, do your tool equipment maintenance and inventory your supplies so those things are all ready when you need them.

Kathy Rose

Lyn Farm | Lanesboro, Iowa

I container-garden using recycled cattle protein tubs, milk crates, rusted wash tubs and plastic feed sacs. Containers fit into small areas with fences to keep rabbits, chickens and goats out.

Erik Sessions

Patchwork Green Farm | Decorah, Iowa

Hire an accountant for tax preparation. You'll save a lot of money – and time and frustration.

Matt Johnson

Long Walk Farm | Council Bluffs, Iowa

For maximizing germination of plant starts, we use a simple germination chamber that keeps a steady temperature and humid environment for fast and consistent germination. We use old single-door and double-door coolers that are no longer functional, put a crock pot filled with water in the bottom of the cooler and use an Inkbird thermostat to control the temperature.



A germination chamber like this can be set up for less than \$100. Nonfunctional coolers are cheap or often free, old crock pots are inexpensive at thrift stores and new Inkbird thermostats are less than \$50. We grow lots of lettuce transplants in paperpot trays and with this setup we can germinate lettuce in 48 hours consistently.

USE THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Shaffer Ridgeway

Southern Goods Farm | Waterloo, Iowa

Buying a waterwheel transplanter was a huge time saver on my farm. It was a game changer.

Erik Sessions

Patchwork Green Farm | Decorah, Iowa

Buy a reliable tractor as soon as you can afford to.



T.D. Holub

Garden Oasis, LLC | Coggon, Iowa

Mechanize and build infrastructure whenever possible. In all aspects of our farm where I have been able to build something or purchase machinery, it has helped increase our farm's efficiency, which in turn increases our productivity.

On my vegetable farm, mechanical help has been most effective with soil prep (chisel, disc, Perfecta field cultivator), seeding (vacuum seeder), planting (waterwheel), harvesting (potato harvester, utility task vehicle to bring in harvest) and washing and packing (AZS Rinse Conveyor).

Over the years, I have added these pieces of equipment to increase efficiency and speed. When we first started our CSA, it took nearly six to eight people to perform all of our farm tasks. Now it takes just three – my partner Sarah and myself plus just one employee.



Mechanization helps to set the pace because you have to keep up with the waterwheel or the produce washer. It's more sustainable on your body because a machine can lift heavy totes and loads; it makes activities faster and more comfortable; and generally, it creates a little nicer product due to all the previous factors.

By this, I mean if your task can be performed in a comfortable manner and a faster, more efficient way, you will have less burnout and thus have a product that is better because the people producing it aren't overworked and overstressed.

(Continued on page 8 →)

TAKE CARE OF YOUR SOIL

Shaffer Ridgeway

Southern Goods Farm | Waterloo, Iowa

When I was starting out with vegetable farming, I wish I'd known more about nutrient requirements and pest management. I also wish I would have made a production plan.

Erik Sessions

Patchwork Green Farm | Decorah, Iowa

Test for salts in your hoop house soil.



Rob Faux

Genuine Faux Farm | Tripoli, Iowa

A buckwheat cover crop early in the season followed by a thick cover of something like Japanese millet in a field that has had Canada thistle issues will suppress the Canada thistle effectively for a couple of years. But that's often enough to get back on top of controlling them with other methods.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF & YOUR TEAM

Jill Beebout

Blue Gate Farm | Chariton, Iowa

You don't have to grow every crop, and it's okay to drop crops that don't do well for you or that you don't enjoy growing.

Emily Paulsen

Brun Ko Farm | Exira, Iowa

Less is more. Get really good at growing and marketing one thing. And if veggies are your "thing," pick five to 10 crops and probably just one sales avenue the first year.

Erik Sessions

Patchwork Green Farm | Decorah, Iowa

Try to take a little time off mid-season for rejuvenation. Also, pay your help well.



Want to learn more?

Stay connected with other farmers in-person and online. Our upcoming field day season will feature over 50 events around Iowa and surrounding states. To connect virtually, our horticulture email discussion group is an excellent way to hear and share tips and experience. If you're not already signed up, contact debra.boekholder@practicalfarmers.org.

Q & A

with Rachel Burke



Get to know PFI's beginning farmer engagement coordinator

This edition of the Practical Farmer marks the debut of the new PFI Profiles magazine department. In this section, we'll help you get to know more about our members, donors, staff and board – and anyone else who's part of our network – through a mix of stories and Q&As.

For this first installment we interview PFI staff member Rachel Burke, who started as our beginning farmer engagement coordinator last March. Prior to this, Rachel served at PFI as a member of Green Iowa AmeriCorps from September 2022 until joining the staff in March 2023. Before coming to Practical Farmers of Iowa, Rachel lived in New Orleans, where she painted sets in the film and television industry.

Since starting her work with beginning farmers, Rachel has helped plan and lead a full slate of field days, socials, workshops and conference sessions for beginning and aspiring farmers. She also leads PFI's Labor4Learning Program, which pays beginning farmers for on-the-job training with established mentor farmers.

How long have you lived in Iowa?

I moved to Iowa from New Orleans during Hurricane Ida in 2021, but this is not my first time living here. I moved to Iowa in 2005 to attend St. Ambrose University in Davenport, and stuck around for a while after my degree. I married a born-and-raised Iowan, so I often feel like an honorary Iowan.

How did you learn about PFI, and why did you choose to work here?

I first heard about Practical Farmers of Iowa when I lived in Louisiana. I told a friend I was moving to Iowa and she said, "You need to get connected to an organization called Practical Farmers of Iowa. I love them!" PFI has been on my radar since. My second introduction to PFI was through the signs that members post in their fields. I love driving across Iowa and seeing those signs planted across the landscape.

My third introduction was working for PFI as a temporary Green Iowa AmeriCorps member. Once I saw how

dedicated PFI members were to supporting one another, I knew it was the place for me. I am in awe of the way our members lift one another up. They are living proof that we (humans) really are better when we come together.

What do you do as PFI's beginning farmer engagement coordinator?

Not to brag, but I have the best job at PFI. I get to be the first contact for beginning farmers hearing about PFI for the first time. I share resources with them and connect them to other farmers in our network. I also help farmers plan field days, annual conference sessions, beginning farmer socials and more.

How do you spend your free time?

My free time is spent sewing my own clothes and painting my house.

Is there anyone at PFI or in our network you look up to?

This is a very hard question. There are so many members that I idolize. I'm a big

fan of Shaffer Ridgeway. I have seen him put in immense time and work to mentor the next generation, especially when it comes to new and young farmers of color who face unique challenges. He has an unparalleled ability to encourage beginning farmers while still leaving them with realistic expectations. That is hard to do!

I adore how welcoming and nurturing Kathy Dice is to our beginning farmer members. She has a marvelous energy that is contagious. I always feel fully motivated after I speak to Kathy. Carmen Black is my favorite member to brainstorm with. She has amazing ideas for beginning farmer programs and resources. I walk away from conversations with Carmen feeling like we can take on all problems the world throws our way.

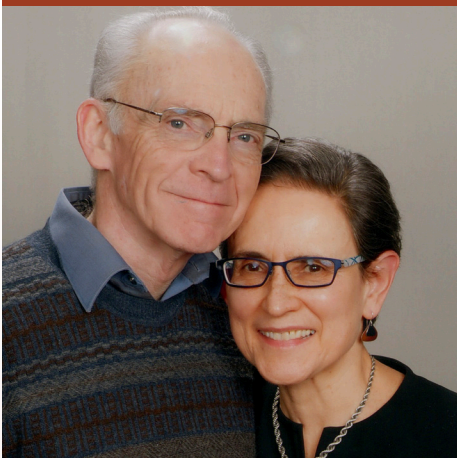
What do you enjoy growing?

I enjoy growing and tending to communities. A farmer's medium is soil and seed, mine is relationships and networking. ■

Finding Common Ground

By Martha McFarland

Open communication is central to how landowners Paul Thompson and Elena Meyer work with their farmland operator



Paul Thompson & Elena Meyer



Paul & Elena's farmland near Belmond, Iowa



Josh Nelson

Paul Thompson grew up in the 1950s on a diversified farm near Belmond, in north-central Iowa, which his grandfather purchased in 1900. “We grew sugar beets, dairy cattle, pigs, chickens, honeybees, sheep, dogs, cats and seven people,” he says.

As a boy, he loved farming but was also drawn to engineering. The latter prevailed, and Paul ended up pursuing degrees in electrical engineering from Cornell University, and a doctorate in biomedical electronics engineering from University of Pennsylvania. He now lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where he's an emeritus senior scientist in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Paul left the farm but kept ownership of the land he inherited from his family. He also bought the land his sister inherited, adding him to a growing number of landowners in Iowa and the U.S. who

grew up on a farm but no longer operate it themselves. Some of these landowners have minimal to no involvement with the land – and this can be especially true for those who live far away. For Paul, however, distance hasn't dimmed his connection. He and his wife, Elena Meyer, are showing how farmland owners who have a vision for stewarding their land can partner with a farm operator who shares that vision.

Changing Directions

Like most farms in Iowa, the farm tenant operating Paul's land raised only corn and soybeans for decades. In 2019, after years of increasing concerns about soil health and conservation, Paul and Elena made the momentous decision to change tenants. They wanted to find a farm operator who would transition their land to a more sustainable model. In particular, they wanted to find someone willing to add no-till, cover crops and a third crop into the rotation. Through a farm manager, they connected with Josh Nelson, a young

farmer from Belmond who was looking for additional land to farm.

With his family, Josh raises rye, oats, corn, soybeans and a small herd of Scottish Highland cattle, along with some feeder pigs, at Cardinal Creek Farm. Since 2015, he's also been planting no-till soybeans, strip-tilling corn and using cover crops. “We interviewed him, talked through our mutual objectives and concluded our agreement (for him) to take over the farm in 2020,” Paul says. That year, Josh added Paul and Elena's 197 acres to his production.

Their shared interest in soil health and regenerative practices is important. But Paul and Elena emphasize that trust and open communication are just as important to making the relationship work. “Sometimes we guide Josh, sometimes he guides us,” Paul says. “Having a profound mutual respect has helped. Each year, Josh has been more willing to speak his mind and to let us pay him for the time he uses in improving the practices on the farm.”

“Sometimes we guide Josh, sometimes he guides us. Having a profound mutual respect has helped. Each year, Josh has been more willing to speak his mind and to let us pay him for the time he uses in improving the practices on the farm.

– Paul Thompson

The story of their partnership highlights the importance – and the rewards – of shared risk and collaboration between landowners and farm operators.

Adding Small Grains

Of Paul and Elena’s top farmland goals, integrating a third crop was a new challenge for Josh, but one he was willing to take on. He chose to try planting oats. “They were concerned about fertilizer runoff and general soil health,” Josh says. “When you have that third crop, it gives the soil time to recover, time to breathe a bit and to plant a multispecies cover crop mix.”

After he harvests the oats mid-summer, he plants a multispecies cover crop – currently an eight- or nine-seed cover crop mix. While a single cover crop species is still good for the soil, Josh says that adding more plant families and root types supercharges the soil. “You’re increasing the diversity in your microbes, and in the types of insects you attract,” he says. “You have to be careful how you design your mix, but if you get help, you’re going to see results the next year.”

The hardest part of adding a third crop, Josh says, was finding a market for the oats. He also had to adapt to receiving a lower gross profit than he had on corn and soybeans alone. But he says his net profit is better because he spends less money on seed and fertilizers and has fewer acres to harvest in the fall. He also values how the benefits of the cover crop carry over to next season. “The net profit, and the amount of labor you save, makes it worth it,” Josh says. “And I’ve planted a full long-season cover crop after the oat harvest, which sets me up well for corn the following year. That’s been the real benefit.”

Aware of the challenges and risks associated with adding small grains into the rotation – including the financial risk – Paul and Elena offered Josh a significant rent discount on up to 30 acres of small-grain production. They saw it as a matter of fairness and as a way to encourage further exploration. “We don’t want him taking risk without a mutually supportive arrangement,” Paul says.

“He can keep experimenting,” Elena adds. “But not at his expense.”

Designing a Fair Land Lease

Looking for other ways to promote fairness, Paul and Elena turned their attention to the terms of their lease with Josh. Using a flex lease based on the market price of corn and soybean yields didn’t make sense when oats were added into the equation. So when PFI launched its Landowner Coaching program in 2022, Paul and Elena signed up, curious to find ways to work small grains into a flex lease. The program gives any landowner who has at least 80 acres of row crops a chance to learn more about their land from a professional – in this case, Mollie Aronowitz, a farm manager and conservation agronomist with Peoples Company.

With Mollie, they discussed the potential for crop-share, where everyone shares the expenses and profits. Paul felt this approach was the fairest since it places an equal risk on all parties. “But we were in no position to market our own corn, soybeans and oats,” Paul says. “So the next best thing was a flex lease.” With a flex lease, a landowner charges a low base rate, then calculates a final payment based on yields at harvest. Paul and Elena opted to structure theirs by deciding a rate for the corn and bean yield, as well as a percentage of the total proceeds from the oat income. They’ve also kept in the discount for acres that are not in corn.

Paul and Elena credit PFI’s Landowner Coaching program with helping them better understand rental options. But they also learned a lot about their farm. As part of their meeting with Mollie, they received a detailed report that included topographic maps, corn suitability ratings, soil types, rainfall data and more. Mollie also shared resources and worksheets they could use to communicate about farm practices with their farm operator. “I can’t think of a section that wasn’t helpful to us,” Elena says.

Josh has also found the process – and his relationship with Paul and Elena – to be worthwhile. “I can’t believe how great they’ve been to work with,” he says. “They ask a lot, but that’s because they’re interested in their farm, and that’s a good thing. And, they’re not asking for something that’s overly burdensome.”

Elena sums up what makes their relationship so constructive: “Unless you have an honest, transparent relationship, you can’t really define fairness because each of you is wondering what the other is really saying. When you don’t need to decipher the negotiation, that is the only way you can know if each is really satisfied and comfortable, understanding what needs to be tweaked.”

As the trio continue their collaboration, this kind of honest communication will remain central to their shared vision of land stewardship. ■



Stay Connected!

To learn more about PFI’s Landowner Coaching program, ways to improve landowner-tenant communication or to receive the Practical Landowner e-newsletter, contact martha.mcfarland@practicalfarmers.org.

The Wonders of *Windbreaks*



By Vanya North *Since taking over managing her family land, Ruth Rabinowitz has planted hundreds of trees to benefit wildlife and the land*



Three-year-old silver maple trees growing amongst mature box elders, red oaks and hackberry on Ruth Rabinowitz's farm.

Ruth Rabinowitz is a farmer and landowner in Iowa and South Dakota with a 270-acre farm in South Dakota and various smaller acreages spread between four farms in Iowa.

Both farms are traditional corn and soybean operations, though she's currently transitioning about a dozen acres of her Iowa land to organic alfalfa. Ruth's father pieced together the family acreage through the years, with Ruth stepping into the farm manager role in 2012.

Since taking over land management, Ruth has incorporated cover crops, ponds and buffers for quail and pollinators. She has also installed wildlife corridors, particularly by using trees as windbreaks. "This has been my family's home and has since become mine," Ruth says. "I wanted to protect that and provide a home to wildlife as well."

Creating a Home for Trees

According to Iowa State University, windbreaks offer myriad benefits. The most intuitive is that they slow wind speeds by acting as a physical buffer. In Iowa and other parts of the Midwest that tend to experience cold, snowy winters, tamping wind speed can lower home heating costs by as much as 30%. It can also limit snow drifts from building up against homes and outbuildings. These benefits were likely evident in Iowa this year, where heavy snowfall and blizzard conditions swept across the state in January.

But windbreaks, also referred to as shelterbelts, were first used in the U.S. in the 1930s to halt a different sort of blizzard: the tsunami of topsoil exposed by years of poor farming practices that swept across the Great Plains during the Dust Bowl years. As part of his plan to help halt the ecological disaster, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched the Prairie States Forestry Project, which between 1935 and 1942 planted about 200 million trees across six states, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Shelterbelts also benefit livestock in a range of ways. Livestock that can shelter within these areas have better feed efficiency and less weather-related stress. In the winter, these areas can reduce wind chills, increasing the temperature within the windbreak and creating a more comfortable environment for the animals. For farmers, this can translate to cost savings since the animals will require less feed to maintain their core temperatures.

Ruth doesn't have livestock but says she noticed other benefits of planting trees. "There was a definite energy savings. The trees, some now getting taller, are protecting my home and structures from the winds that often hit harder in the winter."

"And," she adds, "while this is my home for now, these trees will be here another 100 or 200 years. This is paying it forward to the next generation. These trees provide such a sense of beauty and serenity – and home."

Creating a Home for Trees

When Ruth first acquired the farm from her father, she put a lot of effort into conservation practices, particularly trees. Sourcing trees from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and a local nursery, she planted 300 trees, many by hand – though she had help from contractors for some of the planting work. Tree spacing was largely decided by local arborists, who based their decision on the expected height of each species. On average, however, trees in the windbreak are spaced about 20 feet apart. Ruth handles all the maintenance on her own, which includes mowing, mulching and fencing.

“I had never done this before. It wasn’t like planting a single tree in a backyard,” she says. “This was a lot of digging one by one with an auger, planting, then putting in angle stakes and installing chicken wire as protection.” Despite the extra labor involved, she opted for that approach because she’s not a fan of tree tubes. “Aside from the expense, they (tree tubes) always felt claustrophobic to me. These trees are like babies, and all they know is your soil. I wanted them to be at home here.”

Ruth planted the trees on the sides of her house where the prevailing winds came from and tended each tree by hand, monitoring them for signs of distress throughout three summers of drought. She started out watering the trees by hand, but later added hydrants – something she now recommends for anyone planning to install large windbreaks. “I put in four hydrants, and now have water on all four sides of my house. It’s about making it easier and comfortable for myself.”

Easier water access translates to better long-term care – and Ruth’s hard work is evident. “The trees are growing so well,” she says. “I couldn’t believe how well the silver maple is growing. They are putting out a remarkable show of color, and my red oaks, even for a slower-growing species, are growing well.” Ruth reports a survival rate over 85% for all her trees.

Looking back, however, she says there’s one species she would not plant again: hackberry. While the species is native to Iowa and rates highly for benefits such as providing wildlife habitat, for Ruth, other species have proven easier to care for. “While they are growing well, she says, “the hackberries seem to need more water, mulch and care.” And on her land, Ruth has also observed that wildlife seem to favor other species like red oaks, silver maples, serviceberry and concolor fir.

“I really liked the idea of the concolor firs,” Ruth says. “I just knew that I wanted some evergreens because everything else drops their leaves in winter, and I wanted year-round wind protection and habitat.”

“While this is my home for now, these trees will be here another 100 or 200 years. This is paying it forward to the next generation.”

- Ruth Rabinowitz



Ruth takes a break after planting a white oak on her farm. She planted most of her trees by hand and watered all with rain barrels.

Trees for Stewardship

Her reflections on hackberry are part of broader concern for Ruth: creating a hospitable place for wildlife. “I really feel like this is their home too, not just mine. It goes back to the Indigenous way of thinking – of sharing the land and being a good steward.”

Beyond the cost- and energy-saving benefits, windbreaks play a critical role in providing home for wildlife. In Iowa, migratory birds, squirrels, deer and other mammals, as well as pollinating insects, can all find shelter, sustenance and safety in these areas. Ruth found that once she started planting trees, birds followed.

“When I first moved here, the bird song was dim,” she says. After planting trees, prairie and adding other conservation practices, she now says that “the birdsong surrounds the home. It’s like a theater or having a personal stereo of birdsong. I also have owls. They particularly love the oak trees. And we have resident pheasants and quail.”

In addition to birds, Ruth has encountered beneficial snakes on the farm, as well as moles, rabbits and raccoons. The trees, she says, are a scaffold for many species. “When you have trees, they have places to perch. They have places to get nesting material and leaves to hibernate under.

“Yes, there’s crop ground here, but there are also ponds, prairie and trees. This is a haven for wildlife.” ■

Putting Soil to the Test



Alec Amundson plants into a no-till, cover-cropped field on a damp day.

By Solveig Orngard

Many PFI farmers have noted that cover crops boost their field access. A new PFI on-farm trial aims to back those claims with data.

It's an unseasonably warm, grey December day. Dozens of horticulture, livestock and field crop farmers, many finally done with their fall harvest, gather in Ames, Iowa, for PFI's Cooperators' Meeting. They're here to connect as a community of on-farm researchers. Over two days, the farmers, often referred to as "cooperators," will present results from their 2023 on-farm research trials, share stories, ask big questions about their farms and brainstorm ideas for how to answer those questions in the coming year.

For these farmers, this annual gathering is the capstone to a year of farmer-led curiosity. Since the founding of PFI's Cooperators' Program in 1987, it's also been a defining event for PFI's farmer-led on-farm research program.

The first bustling day nears its end after hours of presentations, swapping of ideas and hearty mealtime conversation. Delivering the keynote address that evening, Sam Bennett, a field crop farmer from Galva, Iowa, expresses a view shared by many PFI research cooperators. "We're all curious," he says, "and most of us are okay doing things that aren't normal."

Growing cover crops is one way many PFI farmers are challenging prevailing agricultural norms. When grown between and alongside cash crops, cover crops can reduce erosion, hold moisture, add nutrients back to the soil and boost overall soil health. Sam has been using cover crops for a decade, and he's seen how they've helped with everything from weed control to water management in his fields.

He's not alone. Many farmers have anecdotally shared how their cover cropped fields drain more quickly after big rain events, giving them earlier access for field work – and more access across a season. To date, however, no formal study PFI is aware of has looked at this aspect of cover crops.

PFI, along with farmers like Sam, is changing this with a new multi-year on-farm research project that seeks to answer, "Do cover crops increase the number of days suitable for field work?"

Why It Matters

The idea for the study came from PFI's senior research manager, Stefan Gailans. "I kept hearing cover crop farmers state how they were getting into their fields earlier in the spring than their neighbors," he says. He began to wonder if there was a way to back those stories up with data. PFI farmers were eager to do so. Cooperators have researched cover crops from a range of angles – from weed control, to yield impacts, to profit from grazing them – but measuring suitable field days is new.

"The data PFI farmer researchers are generating right now is not enough to sufficiently move the needle on cover crop adoption," Stefan says, referring to the glaring gap between Iowa's current cover crop acreage and the amount needed to reach water quality goals laid out in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. In 2022, for instance, Iowa farmers planted about 3.3 million acres of cover crops – about a tenth of Iowa's

crop acres. It's a big increase from a few years ago. But it's still a long way from the 12.5 million acres recommended in the state's strategy.

Stefan thinks the new PFI project will confirm what farmers are seeing – and he hopes it inspires more farmers to give cover crops a try.

To gather data, farmers will observe their cover-cropped fields throughout the year and complete a short survey on a weekly basis that asks if they could have done field activities that week without compromising field integrity, and on which days. They'll also share several years of field history at the start of the project. PFI agronomists will then compare farmers' data to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's weekly Crop Progress and Condition reports.

The study is designed to reflect farmers' individual views of suitable fieldwork days. Each farmer will get to decide the question within their own farm context. "Every farmer will look at it differently," Sam says. "I'm hesitant to go out when it's too wet because my family no-tills, so we won't be able to fix the ruts. Farmers who are tilling can fix ruts more easily."

“As a cover crop farmer, when you get comfortable with your soil and what it contains, you’re going to have more confidence to get out in the field, even when the ground still has a lot of moisture.”

- Alec Amundson

Alec Amundson, who farms near Osage, Iowa, has participated in several on-farm trials with PFI over the past few years and also plans to take part. “As a cover crop farmer,” he says, “when you get comfortable with your soil and what it contains, you’re going to have more confidence to get out in the field, even when the ground still has a lot of moisture.”

Getting Into the Fields

In deciding when fields are fit for work, temperature, wind and dryness (and the risk of field fires) must be considered. Alec recognizes that cover crops can

only do so much in getting farmers out in the fields sooner. “If I decide I can’t spray because of wind, cover crops don’t control the wind,” he says. Wetness, however, is often top of mind, especially in the spring. Cover crops can soak up and hold excess moisture that would otherwise linger as puddles and mud.

Heading into the 2024 growing season, though, drought is a concern for many. Keaton Krueger, who farms in central Iowa and has been cover cropping for four years, is one such person. He’s worried that cover crops could harm his cash crops in a sustained period of low rainfall by keeping the small amount of available moisture from reaching his corn or soybeans. He also had a patchy cover crop stand emerge last fall. As a result, he suspects his stand of covers this spring will be inconsistent, making field access hard to navigate on especially dry or wet days when some parts of the field might be suitable for work while others aren’t.

But he’s also mindful how cover crop benefits can accrue over time, potentially moderating the effects of both too much and too little rain. “I hear

from long-time cover croppers that a healthy stand of green cover will absorb moisture in its growth, and that the rate of water infiltration improves after many years.” If that’s true, a field that’s had cover crops for many years will hold onto soil moisture better even in a drought, thus reducing the chances of dry soil blowing away on windy days or during equipment passes.

Whether fields are too dry or too wet, Keaton sums up why it matters so much to have more days for field work. “I barely have enough days available in the spring as it is,” he says. “I can’t risk losing any of them.” Every workable day counts, he says, especially in the spring when there tends to be both more rain and more moisture from winter snow. Alec finds that when he has just a few extra days, he can be more patient when deciding when to get into the field.

Sam agrees. “I do a better job if I have all week to get it done. I take my time to do it well.” And based on his own experiences, he’s pretty sure of what this new study will find: “Having cover crops definitely increases time in the field.” ■



Keaton’s corn following a triticale and oat cover crop. The field was strip-tilled in the spring prior to corn planting.



A terminated cereal rye cover crop creates a mat to help suppress weeds and maintain soil integrity for Keaton’s soybean cash crop.

Want to Take Part?

Enrollment is closed for 2024, but we’ll be seeking more farmers for the trial in 2025.

Contact Stefan at stefan.gailans@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661 for questions, or visit practicalfarmers.org/farmer-led-research to learn more about PFI on-farm research.

Annual Conference

January 19-20, 2024 | Des Moines, Iowa

Photo Album

Thank you to 100+ speakers and nearly 1,000 attendees who joined us at the 2024 PFI Annual Conference! We're incredibly grateful to everyone who made the journey to Des Moines and navigated the new space with us. The PFI spirit of curiosity, creativity and community was evident from the first cowbell to the final goodbye. See you again in 2025!

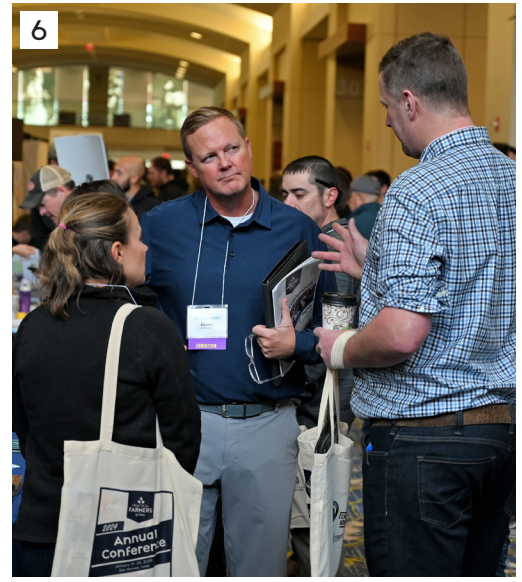


(1) Keith Berns delivers his keynote address Friday evening. Taking on the skeptics, Keith dove into the details of how cover crops make both dollars and “sense.”

(2) Joel Gruver (*right*) receives PFI’s 2024 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from Mark Quee on Friday night before the keynote.



(1) From left: Jodi Enos-Berlage, John Berlage and Carol Bouska stroll through the exhibitor hall in the Iowa Events Center. **(2)** Angie Scharnhorst and Marla Looper of Bountiful Harvest Farm catch up with friends. **(3)** During PFI Storytelling, Nancy Brannaman recounted her family's emergency exit from rural post-Soviet Russia after the agricultural organization she was working for crossed paths with the Dagestani mafia. **(4)** Attendees and exhibitors enjoyed a little more elbow room for conversation during breaks between sessions. The 2024 Annual Conference included 90 different exhibitors. **(5)** From left: Max Chavez, Marcela Hurtado and Javier García share their experiences farming in Iowa during a Spanish-language panel discussion. 2024 was the first year PFI offered a full track delivered in Spanish or with consecutive interpretation.



(1) Doris Montag demonstrates an antique corn planter during her farm history session “Farming Before Tractors.” **(2)** Attendees catch up over breakfast on Saturday. This table met specifically as a Spanish-language affinity group. **(3)** Staff from Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development pose for a photo during the cocktail hour on Friday evening following the keynote. **(4)** Cousins and third-generation conference-goers Geneva Rosmann (left) and Maggie Rosmann pause for a photo. **(5)** Greg Judy of Green Pastures Farm discusses grass-finishing on perennial pastures. Greg also led a popular pre-conference short course - “Grazing Intensive With Greg Judy” - that welcomed over 100 attendees. **(6)** From left: Hillary Olson, Landon Plagge and Jason Johnson touch base during a break between sessions.



(1) Attendees move through the Saturday lunch line. All meals during the conference used ingredients from PFI member farms and local businesses. **(2)** Ruth McCabe regales the audience during PFI Storytelling with her “hot takes” on global agricultural conservation. Ruth shared stories from her Nuffield Scholarship travels to Britain, Brazil and Borneo. Keep an eye on the PFI email discussion list for more opportunities to hear about Ruth’s travels! **(3)** From left: Zac Couture, Esta Minani and Jerome Vyizigiro from Global Greens Farm pose for a photo. **(4)** From left: Liz Carlson, Tate Carlson and Halee Wepking pause for coffee and a photo. Liz and Tate’s little one came dressed to impress the veggie growers. **(5)** From left: Matt Liebman, Marshall McDaniel and Steven Hall answer questions during a panel discussion on soil health research. **(6)** Richie Breeggemann (left) and Scott Shriver chat at Grain Millers’ exhibitor booth.

A Calling to Teach

Throughout his career, Joel Gruver has sought to deepen his knowledge of sustainable agriculture and share it with others

By Tamsyn Jones



In the realm of agricultural research, Joel Gruver is something of a household name.

A prolific on-farm researcher, he's well-known in farmer circles thanks to his equally prolific outreach. Over the course of his long career in agriculture – which includes nearly two decades of teaching and research at Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois – Joel has shared his insights at hundreds of farmer meetings across the country.

“I have spoken at somewhere between 400 to 500 farmer meetings since the mid-1990s,” Joel says. “It has been part of my identity, that I do lots of outreach.”

This generous sharing has earned him a reputation as a trusted source of information. A consummate teacher, Joel is known to both farmers and his students for being approachable, innovative and committed to sharing what he's learned. Since 2007, Joel has been on the faculty at WIU, where he teaches several undergraduate courses each year in soil science, sustainable agriculture, conservation and agronomy.

He also manages the university's Allison Organic Research & Demonstration Farm, where he oversees nearly a dozen large-scale, replicated on-farm research projects each year. These studies have explored a range of practical questions related to organic farming, weed control, soil health, crop hybrids and varieties, planting dates and more. “Our overall goal is to conduct practical research that will benefit organic grain farmers, but also conventional farmers who are interested in enhancing soil health, crop diversification and reduced input costs,” Joel says.

Cover crops have featured prominently in Joel's research. During his time managing the farm, Joel has expanded the farm's use of cover crops and explored many questions related to integrating cover crops into production systems. This research focus has earned him a reputation as something of a cover crop guru.

“Joel is committed to education and innovation,” says Mark Quee, farm manager at Scattergood Friends School in West Branch, Iowa, and a recent PFI board member (his board service ended in February). “When a row crop farmer

experimenting with cover crops asks, ‘Have we tried this?’ the answer is that Joel is currently doing so or is willing to start.”

In January, Joel received PFI's 2024 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award for this dedication to teaching and research in service of a more sustainable landscape. The award is given each year by PFI to an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food.

Presenting Joel the award during PFI's 2024 Annual Conference, Mark said: “It's Joel's dedication to building human relationships that will inspire all of us to make our farms, our communities and our world more joyful and resilient.”

Shaped By a Wild Land

Joel was born in Baltimore, but spent considerable time exploring the 15-acre farm his parents purchased north of the city when he was 6 years old. The farm – formally called Honeycomb Farm but which Joel later affectionally referred to as Gruver Land – was foundational to his identity. A land of wild beauty, it was the setting for family adventures and togetherness throughout Joel's childhood and adult life.

“It was a beautiful piece of land with big trees, streams and rocks – a wild area surrounded by lots of other farmland,” he says. “My brother, sister and I explored the land all the time.”

His parents, whom Joel describes as part of the back-to-the-land movement, were passionate beekeepers who found endless joy in tending their bees – photographing them, harvesting their honey, studying their personalities. Each hive had a name, Joel says, with descriptive monikers that reflected

“My becoming interested in nature, soil, just having a language of the land – that all came from the way my parents introduced us to nature.”

- Joel Gruver

some aspect of the bees' history or personality. "One of the hives was Bee Tree. We had that one for probably a decade," Joel says. "And we had Apple Blossom." When the colony died, the hive names were respectfully retired.

Joel's parents, Arthur and Barbara, also shared their love of nature with Joel and his siblings. His parents planted hundreds of trees and other plants to improve the farm's habitat. Energized by the work, they kept a daily flower journal. Joel recalls many family hikes to see what flowers were in bloom and which plants the bees were foraging on.

"My parents introduced us to the plants and animals as our neighbors, just like the surrounding farms," Joel says. "That really was very formative for who I am today. My becoming interested in nature, soil, just having a language of the land – that all came from the way my parents introduced us to nature."

Charting a Path to Agriculture

The family land also gave Joel a window into farming as a vocation. As a teenager through his first year in college, he worked on a neighbor's cow-calf farm, where he learned about rotational grazing and developed an interest in grazing systems. Joel assumed he'd have some sort of career in farming but wasn't sure how. He decided to get his bachelor's degree in chemistry from Principia College in Elsah, Illinois. "I saw chemistry as a toolbox, a way to understand the world," Joel says.

After graduating, he got a job managing a CSA vegetable farm and sheep flock at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. He credits his time there with showing him a pathway to an agriculture-focused career. Joel enrolled in a master's program in agronomy at University of Maryland, where he studied under internationally known soil scientist Ray Weil. He read extensively about sustainable agriculture and found himself at the nexus of several sustainable agriculture organizations, including the Northeast Organic Farming Association and the Pennsylvania-based group PASA.

"I started becoming aware of the movements and organizations of farmers that were interested in organics

and tackling all the different elements of sustainability," Joel says.

After earning his master's degree, Joel moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, to manage the University of North Carolina's Center for Environmental Farming, staying on to earn his doctorate in soil science. It was there that Joel met his late wife, Lisa Stocking Gruver – who later also studied under Ray Weil. Joel and Lisa married in 2006, shortly before moving to Macomb. "She was somebody who basically immediately started transforming this community," Joel says.

In Macomb, Lisa joined a range of civic, environmental and local foods-focused organizations. Joel often participated, extending his outreach and teaching into his personal life. Once such effort was The Nature Quilt Project, an organization Lisa started after learning that children in Macomb knew more about rainforests than prairies and local ecosystems. The initiative, which Joel was involved with, blended art and science to create ecology-themed quilts.

"We would bring science experts to elementary schools and provide books related to science and nature," Joel says. "Each quilt had a book that was the source of the art." After Lisa's sudden death in 2012, Joel eventually loaned the quilts to the Leopold Landscape Alliance in Burlington, Iowa, where they now hang in Aldo Leopold's house.

Broadening the Field

After taking over managing WIU's Allison farm, Joel says he got a crash course in Midwestern organic agriculture. He credits one of the farm's technicians, Andy Clayton, with helping him learn

some of the fundamentals of actually farming those crops.

"I had done corn and soybean research before, but I wasn't growing the corn and soybeans. I was sampling them," Joel says. "I had to learn all aspects of planting, mechanical weed control and spreading large quantities of manure. Andy was fundamental in teaching me how to do those things."

Through his ongoing affiliation with PASA, Joel learned of PFI. In 2007, he became a PFI member and has since spoken at various PFI events. He also regularly engages with farmers on PFI's email discussion groups, sharing research from his on-farm trials or adding to conversations.

As he looks to the future, Joel is excited about the new crop of students he'll be guiding to a better understanding of sustainable agriculture. He's also excited about on-farm trials at the Allison farm looking at how to make the most of cover crops. One trial is exploring solar corridors, where cover crops are planted between wider-set crop rows. Another is looking at letting cover crops grow for a whole year, something Joel calls "regenerative years."

In between teaching and research, it's certain Joel's calendar will be filled with travel – to share what he's learned and get ideas for new on-farm trials.

"It's my way of life. Building learning communities is what I try to do in all the different types of outreach I do," he says. "I'm trying to not just tell people something, but create a relationship where we keep learning together." ■



Joel receiving PFI's 2024 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award.

The Roots of Community

By Amos Johnson

PFI's grazing cost-share is getting livestock on the land while helping farmers build new connections



The sky was grey and the temperature had dropped overnight. It was officially the first day of winter and the weather made sure we knew. We stopped by a field to see where the cows had been. They had grazed and been moved to greener pastures. Now, only the brittle and windswept stalks of lambsquarters remained, and the soft cowpies dotting the field as a parting contribution from the cattle.

Within sight of her farm, close enough that her son watched the cattle while waiting for the morning school bus, Laura Keniston of Night and Day Ranch near Alburnett, Iowa, explained what it meant to see her cattle graze this neighboring land, otherwise unavailable, using portable fencing she was able to purchase through Practical Farmers' grazing infrastructure cost-share program.

"We've established relationships with neighbors," Laura says. "The relationships are the only way all this works."

In 2022, Laura was part of the inaugural group of farmers to access funds through PFI's grazing infrastructure cost-share pilot program. Now in its second year, the program helps farmers achieve their unique grazing goals by reducing expenses for grazing infrastructure. Graziers have responded enthusiastically – nearly 150 applied for the limited funds. Margaret Chamas, PFI's livestock viability manager, says the cost-share has helped farmers improve grazing management through investments in portable, flexible infrastructure, like mobile watering and fencing. More broadly, however, the program is feeding PFI's mission to equip farmers to build resilient farms and communities.

"Cost-share is a way to support farmers' investments in their operations and help them make better decisions as they increase their grazing infrastructure," she says. But she has



Laura and Mike Keniston with their children, Madison and Harrison

also noticed other benefits. "The program is generating more curiosity, excitement and relationships among participants."

Maintaining Dreams

A few hours away, in northwest Iowa, Silvino Morelos raises goats, chickens and horses on his farm outside of Storm Lake. Surrounded by blackberry bushes (the fruit of which he donates to a local baker), the farm is an old livestock auction site. It's been an undertaking to transform the space into a working farm. Silvino has removed buildings to make pasture space, and repurposed materials for feeders and shelters for the goats.

He too enrolled in PFI's grazing infrastructure cost-share and used the funds he received to build a waterline. He's also

“Cost-share is a way to support farmers’ investments in their operations and help them make better decisions as they increase their grazing infrastructure.”

- Margaret Chamas



Silvino Morelos (Photo courtesy of Storm Lake Times Pilot)



Silvino’s goat herd forages on his farm near Storm Lake, Iowa.

looking at buying portable fencing to rotate the goats. “We’ve been working really hard on setting up our goat operation and making everything a bit more streamlined,” Silvino says, with optimistic pride, during an interview conducted in Spanish. “And honestly, I’m finally seeing the light at the end, and seeing how this will be overall more economically friendly to my businesses.”

To make the farm viable, he aims to sell meat and dairy products from his storefront in downtown Storm Lake. “I wouldn’t have time to do what I love if it wasn’t part of my job, so this is me doing both.” In his roles as farmer and small-business owner, Silvino is a leader in his community who helps to build bridges and make resources more accessible.

“In my experience, the folks I’ve talked to are hesitant to believe there are organizations that have genuine intentions to help the Latino community,” says Valeria Cano Camacho, PFI’s senior Latino engagement coordinator. “So it takes community leaders like Silvino to shovel a path of trust that others are more likely to follow. Reputations via word of mouth are huge.”

The relationships Silvino has built – ranging from farmers to shop customers – are critical to his success. Growing up in Mexico, he learned farming, butchering and cheesemaking from his grandfather. Now in Iowa for the past eight years, Silvino has found he’s able to rely on his new network for ideas and insights, and to help troubleshoot questions that arise. As he provides meat for celebrations like quinceañera and weddings, Silvino is sharing what he’s learned and hearing new ideas from his community.

“Especially with goats, I feel like there is a stronger sense of community due to the lack of vet visits available for small ruminants,” he says. “So a lot of folks end up peer-mentoring each other.” He adds, “I see it as the only way to survive and maintain our dreams.”

(Continued on page 24 →)



Clockwise from top left: Silvino stands in front of his Storm Lake business, Valentina's Meat Market (photo courtesy of Sheila Brummer/IPR News). Harrison Keniston showing the goats some love. Silvino's goats munching on some lunch. Laura's cattle grazing land made accessible with cost-share fencing.

A Win-Win

Back at Night and Day Ranch, Laura looks at the pile of step-in posts and spools of polywire fencing she bought with her husband, Mike, using grazing infrastructure cost-share funds. These portable fencing components had just been pulled from neighboring properties for the season and wrapped up for storage and reuse. The livestock are home for the winter and only a fraction of fence is needed to graze cornstalks in the field.

"I knew you were going to ask me how much fencing there was, and I just don't remember," Laura says with a laugh. "It's a lot." All that new fencing let the Kenistons divide their animals and graze based on more specific needs. Now, they have up to four separate groups grazing at a time based on species and seasonal birthing. It takes more coordinating, but the relationships they've built allow that flexibility.

Their first partnership was with Laura's uncle, who farms her family's row-crop ground. He didn't take much convincing. "Fertilizer prices skyrocketed last summer," she says. "So we said, 'Hey, instead of driving manure back and forth across the field wasting fuel and time, why don't we let the cattle eat up some of the corn on the ground and spread the manure for you?' It was a win-win."

Laura also connected with Sean Stokes and Drew Erickson at the Rodale Institute Midwest Organic Center, which owns land across the street from her farm. The pair are exploring ways to integrate livestock as part of their experiments with small grains. One of the questions they want to answer is what role the cattle play in these integrated systems. "Is it just manure that matters (for soil health), or is there more to it?"

Sean says. "Is it the actual grazing, urine and hoof action? Or does simply spreading manure give the same effect?" Thanks to the portable fencing, Laura is able to take part in the research project. For Sean and Drew, having neighbors with cattle and fencing made the partnership easy.

Laura and Mike formed a similar partnership with Indian Creek Nature Center. The center, based in Cedar Rapids, owns the Etzel Sugar Grove Farm, which is adjacent to the Rodale land Laura's grazing. The Kenistons are now helping to graze permanent pasture at the farm that had sat unused for decades and become almost impassable. Without healthy disturbance from livestock, black locust trees took over, choking out everything else. Locust thorns punctured tires while fallen fence tangled around legs. Seeking to rehabilitate the pastures, the center started managing the brush through mechanical removal. Thanks again to the new portable fence, Laura and Mike are able to assist the effort by rotationally grazing their cattle on the land. The work continues, but the pasture is noticeably clearer.

"Not all landowners are going to have livestock, and not all livestock producers will have adequate land for grazing," Laura says. "It's nice to try out these relationships and show that it's going to work. You just need good communication to make sure everyone is achieving their goals."

At each farm we visited where Laura and Mike grazed livestock in 2023, signs of the community they've built were silently on display: Mike helping a neighbor finish insulating a new house before the cold set in, Christmas gifts exchanged before the holidays. Silent, daily acts of coming together, of care. Relationships rooted in grazing. ■

Review of Isabella Tree's "Wilding: Returning Nature to Our Farm"

By Muriel Strand

On ancestral land now called Knepp, in West Sussex, England,

Isabella Tree and her husband Charles Burrell traveled a long, winding – and very rewarding – path back to the future, as it were. From a wild location for medieval aristocratic hunting, the land was enclosed for agriculture in the late 16th century. It passed through a variety of owners, culminating with the Burrell family.

In "Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm," Isabella describes their journey from struggling farmers to pioneers in the rewilding movement. Their late 20th century farming predicament is a familiar one: Their dairy and row crops were no longer financially sustainable, and they found themselves squeezed between dairy consolidation and the side effects of chemical farming on their clay fields.

Desperate, they took a leap of faith and tried wilding – the practice of letting plants in an area grow uncultivated – on their 3,500 acres. Isabella prefers the term "wilding" to "rewilding" because she notes we can never truly return the land to how it was. Rather, we must chart a new path to a stable biological future for the flora and fauna.



Muriel Strand

In Britain, Isabella describes the backdrop of their project as a landscape where various wild species had gradually disappeared since the end of World War II, largely due to intensive agriculture. To change course on their land, a first step was removing industrial equipment. Soon after, they sowed a native wildflower meadow and installed a 6-foot deer fence around 370 acres. They stopped plowing and brought in fallow deer to graze the pastures and shrubbery while also fertilizing them. They also let dead trees and animals decay in place. "But the biggest change of all," Isabella writes, "came from simply not drenching the land with fungicides and pesticides, as we have since the 1960s."

Insect populations exploded, then bird species began to return, as well as bats and mushrooms. As the couple let nature take over, they were delighted when rare and imperiled species – like turtledoves, nightingales and many others – appeared. Luck, timing and the goodwill of many helped in their success. Reading about the couple's efforts, we learn that bureaucratic boggles, adroit choices and assiduous networking are all part of the process of restoring the land to itself. At first, Isabella says neighboring farmers were skeptical – myths of the dire, dark forest and of what modern farming entails are tenacious.

Not long after starting their wilding project, they learned of Frans Vera's work with the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve in the Netherlands, another rewilding project. There, ruminants and other types of animals are key parts of the solar-powered ecological cycles. "The right number of the right species of grazing animals introduced into even a relatively small, isolated area can have an exponential impact on biodiversity," Isabella writes. (Amos Johnson's article in

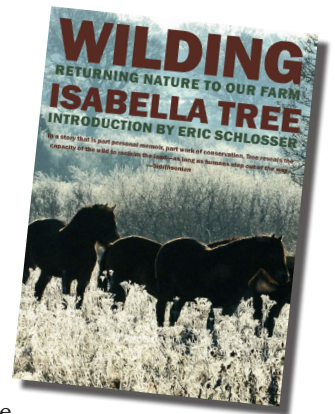
PFI's Summer 2023

magazine issue about relearning the evolved interrelationships between grasslands and forests also echoes Vera's thinking.)

Seeing the ecology revive, Isabella and Charles sought to expand their vision. They obtained government funding for a 25-year experiment, fencing the entire 3,500 acres and bringing in Heck cattle and Exmoor ponies along with the deer. Natural herd dynamics led to healthy herds – and reduced costs and effort. To replicate the work of native wild boar, they introduced Tamworth pigs to play the traditional role of rooting and aerating the heavy soil.

Today, the land and activities such as commercial rentals, meat production and a farm shop provide a steady income and draw people from a wide area to visit. Opening the estate to more visitors has meant dealing with occasional conflicts. Isabella shares a few unfortunate incidents when guests, and perhaps their dogs, interfered with some resident animals. But the book is above all a message of hope. In wilding their land, Isabella and Charles show that it's possible to change tack on the landscape. That landowners and farmers can restore the land while sustaining their livelihoods – and in the process, experience the enchantment of watching nature revive and thrive. ■

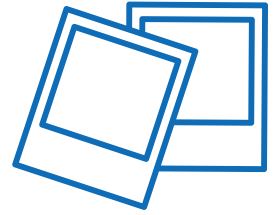
Muriel Strand is a bookworm – and California girl, now living in Sacramento – whose father was an Iowa farm boy during the Depression. Her Berkeley-reared mom taught her all about energy around the house, and about making cookies and baking bread. All of this naturally led to studies in mechanical engineering, economics and permaculture, as well as joining Practical Farmers of Iowa and taking part in PFI's email discussion groups.



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.



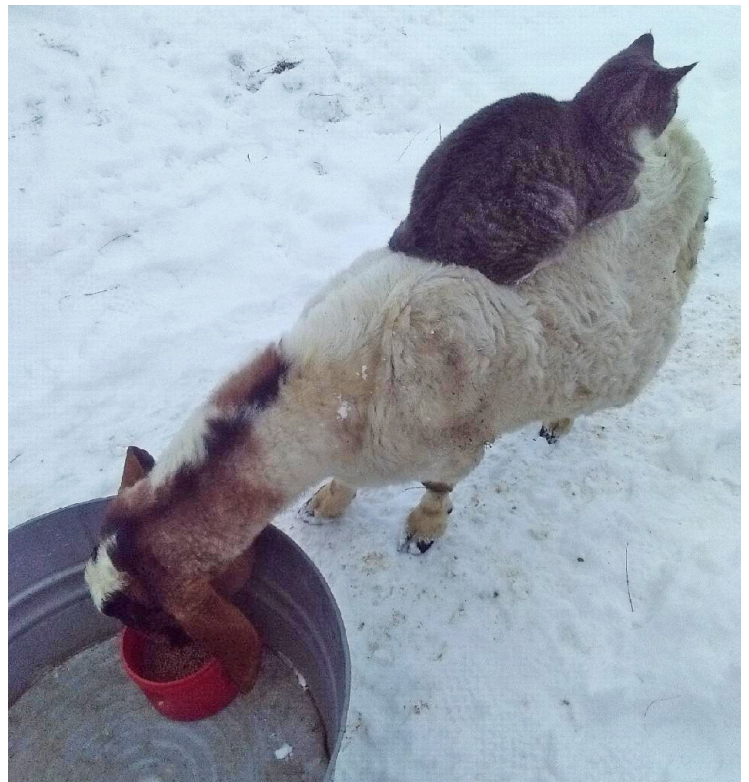
"It might feel warmer if we keep moving" (MaryAnn Mathis, Cory Family Farm, Elkhart, Iowa)



Still could use a bigger shovel... (MaryAnn Mathis, Cory Family Farm, Elkhart, Iowa)



All done shoveling in the -42 degree windchill (for now). (Billy Sammons, Hunter Organic Farm, Churdan, Iowa)



"It's not just the snow, it's the cold!" (Norman McCoy, Pinecrest Farm, Maxwell, Iowa)



“We’re gonna stay in again today. Bring the hay over.” (Susan Kasal Young, Lucky Star Farm, Iowa City, Iowa)



No plow yet. (Susan Kasal Young, Lucky Star Farm, Iowa City, Iowa)



John Deere and Massey Ferguson aren’t going anywhere soon. (Paul Lengeling, Lomp-Lengeling Farms, Collins, Iowa)



Cat-assisted shoveling coma: “Must be 10 feet deep!” (Miram McCoy, Pinecrest Farm, Maxwell, Iowa)



Zach Wenke standing beside the tunnel full of winter spinach and salad. (Ashley Wenke, Pleasant Grove Homestead, Montezuma, Iowa)



Many tiny honeybee doorways to scoop. (Joe Klingelhutz, Iowa City, 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!

Global Greens Is PFI's New Tedesco Farm Tenant

PFI is excited to welcome Global Greens, a program run by Lutheran Services of Iowa, as the new tenant at Tedesco Farm, a 13-acre farm near Granger, Iowa, donated by Angela and John Tedesco to PFI in 2016. Global Greens was selected in November by PFI's board of directors to be the next tenant at the property after a lengthy and careful search last summer and fall, which involved an open call for applications and in-person interviews with a committee of experienced PFI farmers from diverse farming backgrounds.

Global Greens provides farmers who came to Iowa as refugees with land access, business development assistance and technical support. For years, the organization has provided farmers with quarter-acre plots in West Des Moines at a site LSI refers to as the Valley Community Site. Now, farmers who have gained more experience at that scale will have the chance to expand and grow their operations at the Tedesco Farm, fulfilling a longstanding land access need.

"It's a step above for those graduating off of the valley site that we really need," says Jennie Erwin, farm management specialist at Global Greens.

The ability to move some more experienced Global Greens farmers to bigger plots at the Tedesco Farm will also free up much needed space at LSI's West Des Moines location, giving more aspiring farmers the chance to access land and start farm businesses. "We have long waiting lists for the valley site," Jennie says. "They (LSI) had four spots open for 2024 and interviewed about 20 applicants."

The first Global Greens farmers will start farming at the Tedesco Farm this spring. Jennie says the plan is to start with two or three farmers who will together use about 6 acres of land. LSI will plant cover crops on the remaining acres.

"We're excited to give a couple of folks who have been chomping at the bit for larger plots of land a chance to farm a larger area," Jennie said. "Their excitement is contagious." ■



Jennie Erwin



Global Greens members pose at PFI's 2024 Annual Conference in Des Moines, Iowa.

Looking for Paid Farm Jobs? Try Labor4Learning

Are you a beginning farmer looking to gain hands-on skills? Consider applying for a paid on-farm job through Labor4Learning, a PFI program that offers on-the-job training with experienced PFI farmers across the state who are committed to mentoring the next generation. Several jobs are still available for the 2024 season.

All positions will offer mentoring that goes beyond an ordinary farm job on topics such as record-keeping, marketing and other skills beginning and aspiring farmers might not otherwise be exposed to. These skills are vital aspects of running a successful farm business. But they're not a typical part of most on-farm jobs. Labor4Learning seeks to fill the gap by offering a more well-rounded job experience



“Working with Donna Warhover at Morning Glory Farm fast-tracked my farming experience and built lasting relationships,” says Sara Ziehr, a Labor4Learning trainee from West Branch, Iowa, who operates Seven Branches Farm with her family. “I was able to observe a well-run farm with established procedures and got to be hands-on with a variety of tools and equipment. I also learned about

different planting methods, integrated pest management and business management.”

Each trainer farm in the program was approved by a committee of Practical Farmers of Iowa members to serve as qualified teachers. The farms represent a diversity of enterprises and production practices, including row crops, multiple species of livestock, fruits and vegetables, flowers, cover crops, organic certification and more.

All positions are paid, and most trainer farms offer competitive wages, plus other perks and benefits. To see the full list of open positions, visit practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning. For questions, contact Rachel Burke at (515) 232-5661 or rachel.burke@practicalfarmers.org ■

Read (and Share!) Our 2023 Annual Report

Members should have received a copy of our 2023 annual report in the mail (if you haven't, please contact Debra at (515) 232-5661 or debra.boekholder@practicalfarmers.org to make sure your membership details are current!).



Inside, you'll read about our impact in 2023, from the impressive reach of our farmer-to-farmer education, to our efforts to grow and broaden our network, to how we're working to tackle the barriers many food and farm businesses are facing, and more. This year's report is organized by work we've undertaken to achieve our strategic directions.

It also includes fun report cards highlighting how we fared in meeting some of our 2021-2023 objectives and key results, which we crafted to help

us achieve our strategic directions. Our goals were audacious, and we did not meet all of them, but we made impressive progress.

As always, our annual report is filled with snapshots of our members and examples of how farmers are helping one another through our

network. It also offers an excellent overview of our programs, financials and what we accomplished together last year.

If you know someone who's not yet a member of PFI but could benefit from our community, our annual report is a perfect place to start – please consider sharing it with them. Find it online at practicalfarmers.org/accountability, or contact the office to request additional hard copies in the mail. ■

Welcome New Board Members

Please welcome Margaret Smith of Hampton, Iowa, and Tim Youngquist of Zearing, Iowa, to PFI's board of directors. They were elected by members during our 2024 Annual Conference, and are starting their first terms as farmer at-large board members. Jon Bakehouse, of Hastings, Iowa, was also re-elected to serve his second term as director for PFI's southwest district.

The new board met in February and voted on PFI's next executive committee: David Rosmann of Harlan, Iowa, as president; Carmen Black of Solon, Iowa, as vice president; Jon Bakehouse as treasurer; and Gayle Olson, of Winfield, Iowa, as secretary. Learn more about board service, and see the full board roster, at practicalfarmers.org/board-of-directors.

“I cannot remember a time before PFI, as my parents were here from the beginning,” David says. “It is humbling to follow in my dad's footsteps as president over 35 years later.” ■



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.

APRIL

APRIL • Winter Webinar Series | Noon-1 p.m.
Online | Free | [Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/winter-webinars](https://practicalfarmers.org/winter-webinars)

April 2: Establishing and Grazing Native Perennials
Speaker: Kevin Fulton, Clear Creek Land & Livestock

April 16: Precision Conservation: Increasing Profitability and Conservation on Your Farm
Speakers: Jacob Bolson | Stennie Nelson, Pheasants Forever

April 23: Diversifying Pollinator Habitat on a Multi-Generational Illinois Farm
Speakers: John and Nancy Brannaman

APRIL 3 • Meet & Greet: Practical Farmers of Iowa and Pheasants Forever
Jake's Pizza, 330 Stadium Rd, Mankato, MN | Noon-3 p.m.
[Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/pf-meet-greet](https://practicalfarmers.org/pf-meet-greet)

APRIL 5 • Small Grains Shared Learning Calls | Noon-1 p.m.
Online | Free | [Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls](https://practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls)

JUNE

PFI field days begin in June! Starting in mid-May, look for the complete PFI Field Day Guide in your mailbox or stay tuned to the website and e-news for the full line up of 50-plus field days in Iowa and surrounding states.

EVENTS IN SPANISH

Stay tuned to our e-news and website for information about this summer's "Year in the Life" series on meat goat production and local Spanish socials. These online and in-person events are intended for our Spanish-speaking audience. *To keep up with the latest on PFI's Latino program, subscribe to Sembrando Resiliencia at practicalfarmers.org/email-newsletter-subscribe.*

Estén atentos a las noticias electrónicas y al sitio web para obtener información sobre la serie "Year in the Life" de este verano sobre la producción de cabras de carne y nuestros sociales de PFI. Estos eventos en línea y en persona están destinados a nuestra audiencia de habla hispana. Para mantenerse al día con las últimas novedades de la programación Latina de PFI, subscribes a Sembrando Resiliencia en practicalfarmers.org/email-newsletter-subscribe.



Find PFI At

JUNE

JUNE 8 • Women & Soil
Dyersville, IA | [Learn more at swcs.org/events-module/women-and-soil](https://swcs.org/events-module/women-and-soil)

JUNE 13-14 • Community Food Systems + Farm to School and Early Care Conference
Iowa City, IA | [Learn more at extension.iastate.edu/ffed/cfs-annual-event](https://extension.iastate.edu/ffed/cfs-annual-event)



PFI staff member Valeria Cano Camacho tabling at the 2023 Festival Jamaica in East Des Moines, Iowa, sharing information about PFI and upcoming events.

PFI Current Enrollments

From April - June 2024

HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/habitat-incentives-program

LANDOWNER COACHING PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/landowner-coaching

COVER CROP BUSINESS ACCELERATOR

APPLICATIONS OPEN: JUNE 2024

practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-business-accelerator-program

GRAZING CONSULTATIONS

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/grazing-consultations

1 ON 1 LAND MATCHING

ROLLING APPLICATION

Contact Martha McFarland at martha.mcfarland@practicalfarmers.org or call our office at (515) 232-5661

COVER CROP COST-SHARE

SIGN UP DEADLINE: DEC. 1, 2024

practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share

LABOR4LEARNING PROGRAM

OPEN UNTIL ALL POSITIONS ARE FILLED

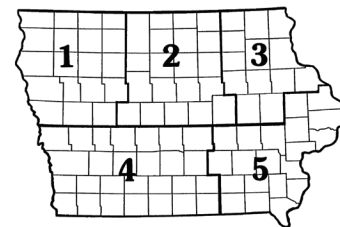
practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning



Suzanne Slack (middle) talks about pruning trees for optimal production in a high-density apple orchard at PFI's commercial apple workshop in February 2024. Michael Malik from Long Lane Orchard (left) and Rose Hanna from Jasper Winery (in purple) look on while Sean Yousef from Storybook Orchard (right) examines the neighboring tree.

Welcome, New Members!

From November 15, 2023 – February 8, 2024



DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Alan Ammons – Albia
- Gary Anderson – Hull
- Jeff Blum – Manning
- Mike Bruning – Castana
- Tim Collison – Rockwell City
- Darren Davelaar – Inwood
- Eric DeJager – Inwood
- Michael Delperdang – Le Mars
- Alex Epperson – Marathon
- Logan Ernst – Salix
- Scott Feuerhelm – Merrill
- Steven Graham – Quimby
- Greg and Teri Grupp – Spirit Lake
- Curtis Henningsen – Emmetsburg
- Alex Husk – Coon Rapids
- Bobby Johnson – Cherokee
- Pamela Johnson – Maurice
- Will Jones – Sioux Rapids
- Kent Jurgensen – Larrabee
- Neil Jurgensen – Sutherland
- Randy Kats – Rock Valley
- Galen Kats – Rock Valley
- Kyle Klaassen – Rock Rapids
- Jeff Kock – Lake City
- Terry Kooima – Rock Valley
- Steve Kovarna – Merrill
- Robert Ladd – Rock Rapids
- Jeff Mordhorst – Ute
- Mike Nothem – Remsen
- Cory Puetz – LeMars
- Alan Ripperger – Rolfe
- Pat Ritz – Akron
- Jerry Schorg – Remsen
- Tom Small – Rembrandt
- Russell Smith – Newell
- Jessob Steffen – Linn Grove
- Marcia Steffen – Linn Grove
- Clayton Taylor and Noelle Wolterman – Lohrville
- Dean Tiefenthaler – Lake View
- Bob Van Zanten – Rock Valley
- Art Vander Wilt – Orange City
- Nathan Vermeer – Maurice

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Matt Aldrich – Garwin
- Dane Askelsen – Clarion
- Mike Balvanz – Steamboat Rock
- Rodney Beachy – St. Ansgar
- Scott Berger – Traer
- Devin Boettcher – Ogden
- Scott Borchering – Hampton
- Adam Brandt – Swea City
- Norman Buck – State Center

- Austin Charlson – Belmont
- Kaye Check – Madrid
- John Clark – Orchard
- Edwin Damman – Melbourne
- Dean Damman – Melbourne
- Crystal and Luke Davis – Holland
- James Dobel – Manly
- Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, Andrea Evelsizer – Clear Lake
- Paul Fahrman – Latimer
- Craig Fausch – Cambridge
- Chris Fehr – Garrison
- Darrell Goodman – State Center
- Jesse Grote – Boone
- Jeremy Ham – Osage
- Brad Harris – Clear Lake
- Bill Heckt – Dysart
- Nick Hoffman – Nevada
- Dillin Hofmeister – Geneva
- Justin Hosek – Clutier
- Samuel Hulme – Clutier
- June Isaacson – Boone
- Thomas Johanns – Mason City
- Grant Johnson – Wellsburg
- Mark Kingland – Forest City
- Brian Knudtson – Forest City
- Steve Krumwiede – Charles City
- Joe Kvidera – Traer
- Sam Kvidera – Traer
- Randy Luze – Dysart
- Marty McCoy – Toledo
- David McGregor – Charles City
- Dean McKenna – Dysart
- Phil McKenna – Dysart
- Norman Nederhoff – Wellsburg
- Stanley Neff – Beaman
- Laurie Nelson – Belmont
- John Nelson – Dysart
- Ryan Obrecht – Zeoring
- Grant Ostercamp – Parkersburg
- Jon Ouverson – Clear Lake
- Jerry Ouverson – Fertile
- Grant Pals – Alexander
- Judy Peters – Norwalk
- Kevin Pruisner – Dike
- Derrek Rasmussen – Gowrie
- Nick Reding – Wesley
- Antonio and Zoami Rios – Webster City
- Joe Roberts – Belmont
- Carl Roberts – Belmont
- Henry Rolston – Conrad
- Ryan Ruzicka – Buckingham
- Richard Ruzicka – Traer
- Jessica and Ray Schmidt – Ames

- Brad Schmidt – Thornton
- Elizabeth Severson – Belmont
- Keith Smith – Gladbrook
- Kevin Sprung – Osage
- Kendall Staker – Traer
- Bob Thompson – Woodbine
- Ariana Torres Mora – Webster City
- Justin Tunning – Coon Rapids
- Clayton Vogeler – Traer
- David Voight – Osage
- Skylar Warehime – Gowrie
- Wayne Watts – Clarion
- Randy Welton – Garwin
- Brian White – Tama
- Mike Wiarda – Ackley
- AJ Wiechmann – Hubbard
- David Willits – Union
- Josh Wolff – Aplington

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Brad Albaugh – Lisbon
- Jason Ambrosy – Sherrill
- Paul Andera – Fort Atkinson
- Sam and Jen Beard – Decorah
- Justin Becker – Earlville
- Bobbi Jo and Kollin Berg – Lansing
- Manley Bigalk – Cresco
- Alan Blekeberg – Ridgeway
- Josh Blough – Waterloo
- Justin Brincks – Clermont
- Randy Brincks – Ossian
- John Broghammer – Manchester
- Tim Bruihler – Hawkeye
- Dennis Burkle – Earlville
- Pete Burmeister – Rowley
- Darrick Burnikel – Cresco
- Cory Cannon – West Union
- Greg Carson – Central City
- Alan Charlson – Waverly
- Adam Cline – Decorah
- Tom Cook – Sherrill
- Matthew Daley – Cresco
- James Decker – Bernard
- Russ Demmer – Epworth
- Daniel Deutmeyer – Dyersville
- Dan Dietz – Nashua
- Drew Dietz – Nashua
- Jackson Dohlman – Riceville
- William Dolan – Independence
- Matthew Dupont – Sherrill
- Gina Dye – Central City
- Lee Embretson – Farmersburg
- Kyle Falck – Decorah
- Randy Flugge – Cresco
- Dan Forsyth – Oelwein
- Edith Fortmann-Comley – Ryan
- Kelly Frana – Calmar
- Ron Franck – Newhall
- Dan and Renee Frank – Bernard
- Kevin Frieden – Elgin
- Ray Fuller – Independence
- Jonathan Gallagher – Marion
- Curt Gentz – Masonville
- Tim Goedken – Hopkinton
- Glenn Griffin – Postville
- John Grimm – Elgin
- Grant Guetzko – Delhi
- Garrett Hackman – Fort Atkinson
- Benjamin Hannan – Holy Cross
- Matt Hatcher – Garnavillo
- Eric Hawbaker – Riceville
- Maya and Brian Heims – Postville
- Craig Heims – Worthington
- Scott Hermanson – Manchester
- Michael Hinzman – Guttenberg
- James Hoeger – Earlville
- Jason Hoeger – Manchester
- John Hogan – Earlville
- Dale Humpal – Ridgeway
- Joe Jarding – Farley
- Jonathan Jaschen – Fairbank
- Neil Jaschen – Tripoli
- Doug Kaiser – Aurora
- Jon Kaiser – Garrison
- Joe Keith – Delhi
- David Keller – Marion
- James Kintzle – Sherrill
- Carlton Kjos – Decorah
- Brad Klein – Sherrill
- Charles Knepper – Cascade
- Scot Knepper – Cascade
- Kraig Knipper – Hopkinton
- Keith Koopmann – Epworth
- James J Krogmann – Lamont
- Dan Kuboushek – Calmar
- Dave Kuboushek – Calmar
- Matthew Kutsch – Sherrill
- Robert Lahey – Farley
- Greg Lahr – Manchester
- Brad & Larry Lamont – Hopkinton
- Bruce Lantzky – New Hampton
- David Larson – Ossian
- Kurt Leistikow – Readlyn
- Russell Lensing – Calmar
- Cody Lerch – Clermont
- Tristen Liebe – Alburnett
- Gary Lien – Calmar

- Dan Link – Holy Cross
- William Mahr – Lime Springs
- Joseph McEvoy – Central City
- Wayne McQuilkin – La Porte City
- Brad Meier – Cascade
- Jason Menne – Postville
- Eric Meyer – Postville
- Bob Mundell – Waterloo
- Mark Nelson – Clermont
- Dave Neubauer – Lime Springs
- TJ O'Donnell – Elma
- Carolyn Pettit – Dubuque
- Kevin Pitz – New Vienna
- Regan Pleggenkuhle – Sumner
- Katie Prochaska and Michael Bollinger – Decorah
- Derk Radloff – Luana
- Mark Recker – Arlington
- Benjamin Reetz – Rudd
- Don Reichenauer – Monticello
- Jason Reimer – Garnavillo
- Josh Reis – Cresco
- John Reis – Lime Springs
- Jason Reis – Lime Springs
- Alex Richter – Earlville
- Dustin Ricklefs – Monticello
- Mark Riegler – Dubuque
- Hans Riensche – Jesup
- Randy Rigdon – Dunkerton
- Doug Rolwes – Epworth
- Steven Roney – Decorah
- Tyler Rue – Ridgeway
- Ronald Sabelka – New Hampton
- Robert and Mary Sass – Luana
- Joel Schanbacher – Atkins
- James Schieltz – Luxemburg
- David J Schieltz – New Vienna
- Joe Schmitt – Sherrill
- Kathy Schmitt – Sherrill
- Josh Schoulte – Farmersburg
- Travis Schwickerath – New Hampton
- Howard SWCD, Neil Shaffer – Lime Springs
- Roger Shatek – Fort Atkinson
- Tom Simon – Farley
- Ben Sindelar – Central City
- Michael Sperflage – Edgewood
- Dave Stamy – Robins
- Jeffery Steffensmeier – Cedar Rapids
- Scott Steffensmeier – Dyersville
- Jason Steffensmeier – Farley
- Wilfred Steffensmeier – Farley
- Scott Stick – Alburnett
- Bob Strauel – Jesup
- Brian Streeper – Waterville
- Matt Svoboda – Winthrop
- Dan Tekippe – Manchester
- Matthew Then – Bernard
- Marc Thronsdon – New Hampton
- Lance Tieskoetter – Castalia
- Robbie Uhlenhake – Ossian

- Bryce Uhlenhake – Ossian
- Robert Wagner – Ft. Atkinson
- Ryan and Ashley Wallace – Luzerne
- Eric Wemark – Ridgeway
- Andy White – Cascade
- Todd Whiting – Cedar Falls
- Daniel Wille – Marion
- Daniel Winter – West Union
- Ethan Wise – Decorah
- Marty Wulfekuhle – Strawberry Point
- Doran Zumbach – Coggon

DISTRICT 4 - SOUTHWEST

- Sam Barkley – Cumberland
- Randy Barnard – New Virginia
- Ron Beaver – Clarinda
- Chase Bloethe – Mingo
- James Bourn – Red Oak
- Lee Brooke – Clarinda
- Brandon Bruxvoort – Colfax
- Mike Canney – Runnells
- David Carter – Randolph
- Kevin Ceaser – Laurel
- Darin Cerven – Blanchard
- Jake Cerven – Blanchard
- Austin Christensen – Lenox
- Greg Cook – Winterset
- Branden Craig – Dexter
- David Curnes – Osceola
- Jordan Dammann – Clarinda
- Justin Dammann – Essex
- Devin Davis – West Des Moines
- Justin and Ann Doyle – Des Moines
- Menda and Jada Fife – Afton
- Steven Forsyth – Griswold
- Brian Fuller – Osceola
- Harold Fuller – Osceola
- Lynn Grobe – Oakland
- Green Valley, Inc, Josh Guyer – Avoca
- Knute Hallquist – Stanton
- David Hart – Stanton
- Clyde Hoyt – Corning
- Jones Household – Cumberland
- Chad Jones – Massena
- McKinley Lain – Centerville
- Jason Larabee – New Market
- Larry Lauman – Coin
- Randall Long – Creston
- Bill Manske – Algona
- Kevin McClure – Johnston
- Katie Meyer – Bayard
- Millermatic Seed, Dan Miller – Silver City
- Justin Miller – Wiota
- Trevor Millikan – Pacific Junction
- Mark Mills – Adel
- Will Mullenix – Red Oak
- Jeff Mundorf – Red Oak
- Sam Parker – Des Moines

- Ernest Peters – Portsmouth
- Scott Peterson – Red Oak
- Justin Pierce – Knoxville
- Paulette Reveiz – Des Moines
- Douglas Rossell – Atlantic
- Gary & Tim Runyon – Allerton
- Robert Rus – Pella
- Larry Schaben – Earling
- Larry Schneider – Dallas
- Tom Schneider – Lacona
- Leland Shipley – Nodaway
- William Shuler – Corning
- Tanya Shultz – Dallas
- Calvin Smith – Perry
- Scott Steele – Casey
- Tyler Strub – Des Moines
- L.I.F.E. 5b, Shad Swanson – Farragut
- Gary Taylor – Woodburn
- Brett Thompson – Bridgewater
- Duane Troyer – Leon
- Paul Vanderholm – Stanton
- Brennen Vogel – Van Meter
- Colton Vos – Sully
- Jerome and Espy Vyizigiro – Indianola
- John Whitaker – Polk City
- Richard Woodward – Lewis

DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST

- Eric Adam – Richland
- John Armstrong – Rose Hill
- Ray R. Arp – Wilton
- Brian Aschbrenner – Monticello
- Rick Bartenhagen – Muscatine
- Daryl Beachy – Kalona
- Bryan Bearerstadt – Brooklyn
- Sophie Bell – Keota
- James Bisinger – Monmouth
- Dan Black – Iowa City
- William Blanchard – Wever
- Craig Bloethe – Brooklyn
- Patrick Blomme – Ladora
- Doug Blythe – Williamsburg
- Scott Boedeker – Lowden
- Jim Bone – Monticello
- David Braet – Calamus
- Calvin Branderhorst – Oskaloosa
- Bob Buline – Lone Tree
- Wayne Busch – Lost Nation
- Richard Buser – Conesville
- Jonathan Caes – Stockton
- Dennis Campbell – Grand Mound
- Nicholas Campney – Fairfield
- Matt Daufeldt – West Liberty
- Mike Deahr – Muscatine
- Ryan Deahr – Muscatine
- Cody Dumont – Sigourney
- James Erb – Cedar Rapids
- Jeff Falkers – Tipton
- Platt Farm – Marion
- Colin Feuss – Lost Nation
- Will Fischer – Grand Mound
- Daniel Flaherty – Iowa City
- Kevin Flynn – Wellman
- Keith Gasper – Calamus
- Lee Gasper – Calamus
- Emily Geertz – West Liberty
- Nathan Gerlach – Springbrook
- Rob Gerot – Riverside
- Samuel Gerot – Riverside
- Jon Gingerich – Parnell
- Richard Ginn – Olin
- Chris Goodman – Leighton
- Elizabeth Goodman – North English
- Scott Grantz – Bryant
- Jeff Greiner – Bloomfield
- Earl Greiner – Richland
- Joel Groenenenboom – Oskaloosa
- David Helgersen – Ottumwa
- Scott Hingtgen – Bellevue
- Greg Hipple – Solon
- Loren Hochstedler – Kalona
- Keith Hora – Washington
- Kurt Hora – Washington
- Kyle Johnson – Oxford
- Corey Johnson – Oxford
- Samantha Kabela – West Liberty
- Richard Keith – Burlington
- Jessica Keller – Tipton
- Gene Keppy – Durant
- Michael King – Eddyville
- Kurt Kirchner – Nichols
- Chad Knapp – Bloomfield
- Cassie and Craig Krebill – Donnellson
- Rustyn Kropf – Spragueville
- Kyle Leer – Keswick
- Matthew Lorenzen – Center Junction
- Darren Luers – Keota
- Kevin Luers – Keota
- Myron Luers – Keota
- Bradley Luers – Sigourney
- Eli Lynn – Fairfield
- Jordan Lyon – Nichols
- Austin Maas – West Liberty
- Curt Manatt – Johnston
- Steve Mann – Wellman
- Phil Martin – Columbus Junction
- Garrel Mattingly – Charlotte
- Bradley Mattingly – Charlotte
- Andrew McCall – West Chester
- Jeff Meier – Clarence
- Marlin Miller – Kalona
- Dane Miller – Kalona
- Dennis Miller – Wellman
- Donald Miller – Wellman
- Kevin Miller – Wellman
- Steve Morrison – Letts
- Jacob Nunnikhoven – Leighton
- Dale Oldham – Tipton
- Marilee Oldorf – Stanwood

- John Pacha – Brighton
- Wesley Plett – Letts
- Darwin Ricklefs – Monticello
- William Riedesel – Davenport
- Margaret Rogers – Washington
- Jerad Ropp – Kalona
- Clinton Ryan – Wapello
- Stanley Sanders – West Point
- Steve Schinkel – Lynnville
- Brian Schlapkohl – Durant
- Drew Schroeder – Clarence
- Austin Schwarz – Eldridge
- Arthur Schwarz – Eldridge
- Jayme Sieren – Keota
- Scott Sieren – Keota
- Kenny Sieren – Keota
- Ereik Sittig and Kelly Wells Sittig – North Liberty
- Ray Slach – West Branch
- Caleb Stam – Oskaloosa
- Nathaniel Stam – Oskaloosa
- Matthew Steinke – Gibson
- Robert Stoll – Cascade
- Thaila Sutton – Muscatine
- Lowell Teggatz – Oxford
- Chris and Kerry Thatcher – Pella
- Austin Twinam – Crawfordsville
- Aaron Van Dyke – Searsboro
- Greg Van Dyke – Searsboro
- Jack Van Nice – Bluegrass
- Henry Vande Voort – New Sharon
- Doug Vande Voort – New Sharon
- Randell Veach – Wapello
- Matthew Wagaman – Wilton
- Matt Wardenburg – Williamsburg
- Matt Weber – Mechanicsville
- Les Welter – Onslow
- Jon Widmer – Washington
- Jeremiah Wiese – Wheatland
- Jordan Wood – Rose Hill
- Mike Yaley – Mount Pleasant

DISTRICT 6 – OUT OF STATE

- Penny Wells – San Rafael, CA
- Edward Adrian – Parker, CO
- Melissa Brookhart – Mystic, CT
- Joanne Kennedy – Naples, FL
- Lani Gill Flesch – Hawthorn Woods, IL
- Heather Harner – Lemont, IL
- Midwest Grass & Forage, Laura and Donna Lant – Macomb, IL
- Emma Spencer – Waukegan, IL
- John Wilken – Chatsworth, IL
- Bridget Zurcher – Scales Mound, IL
- Common Ground Producers and Growers, Inc., Donna Pearson McClish – Wichita, KS
- Pack Household – Grand Blanc, MI
- Sam Back – Harmony, MN
- Aaron Blyth – St. Paul, MN
- Dustin Brabec – Belle Plaine, MN
- Bill and Rhonda Brandt – Lakefield, MN
- Ethan Brinegar – Webster, MN
- Roxane and Tom Demuth – Vesta, MN
- William Feldman – Prior Lake, MN
- Jason Garvin – Alexandria, MN
- Larry Gates – Kellogg, MN
- Spencer Hackett – Rice, MN
- Scott Hauer – Shakopee, MN
- Brian Hazel – Lanesboro, MN
- Jay Hedtke – Grove City, MN
- John Hoffman – Chatfield, MN
- Chad Ihde – Dayton, MN
- Alan Jostock – Hammond, MN
- Josh Klehr – Montgomery, MN
- Craig Koop – Pine Island, MN
- Ario Kordestani and Charlotte Marqueste – Alpha, MN
- Alan Mote – Lewiston, MN
- Lisa Nelson and Scott Wakefield – Waconia, MN

- Tim Olsen – Luverne, MN
- Kelley O'Neill – Rushford, MN
- Dan Quinnell – Northfield, MN
- Darwin Smith – Lino Lakes, MN
- Benjamin Storm – Dover, MN
- Alex and John Udermann – Sartell, MN
- Mace Coston – Maryville, MO
- David Dudley – Purdin, MO
- Joe Haiducek – Perry, MO
- Jack Harriman – Malta Bend, MO
- Katie Hochstedler and Nicole Morgan – Dardenne Prairie, MO
- Jan Judy-March – Clark, MO
- Luke Linnenbringer – Auxvasse, MO
- Ethan Miller – Columbia, MO
- Neil Monnig – Columbia, MO
- Justin Smith – Eagleville, MO
- Andrew Stark – Ewing, MO
- Caroline Adrian – Omaha, NE
- Tanner Anderson – Plainview, NE
- Trent Asche – Columbus, NE
- Benjamin Barelman – Laurel, NE
- Mark Benes – Lincoln, NE
- Zachary Benes – Lincoln, NE
- Rodney Bergman – Ewing, NE
- Roger Bergman – Orchard, NE
- Brian Bowers – Wayne, NE
- Brian Brhel – Denton, NE
- Kirk Brozek – Plainview, NE
- John Catsinas – Waverly, NE
- Derek Dam – Hooper, NE
- Brad Dunbar – Eustis, NE
- Keith E Thomsen – Pender, NE
- Brandon Eusterwiemann – Howells, NE
- Ryan Freudenburg – Norfolk, NE
- Dennis Gengler – Roca, NE
- Rod Greenamyre – Brunswick, NE
- Andrew Harpenau – Springfield, NE
- Joe Keithley – Verdon, NE

- Vance Kraeger – Nebraska City, NE
- Tom Krause – Brunswick, NE
- Greg Kreikemeier – West Point, NE
- Joshua L Kuchta – Randolph, NE
- Todd Kudlacek – Brainard, NE
- Fred Lauenroth – Crete, NE
- Loren Lindahl – Wahoo, NE
- Taylor Lynch – Nora, NE
- Brett Mueller – Columbus, NE
- Gaylord Mussman – Fremont, NE
- Brian Oestreich – Pierce, NE
- Lathan Ohlrich – Belden, NE
- William Othmer – Unadilla, NE
- Jason Regier – Madrid, NE
- Scott Richert – Gresham, NE
- Jeffrey Rosenthal – Syracuse, NE
- Marlin Roth – Randolph, NE
- Lee Schacht – Orchard, NE
- Daniel Schneider – Kennard, NE
- Paula Sue Steffen – Humboldt, NE
- Fred Thiele – Clearwater, NE
- Kevin Uhing – Hartington, NE
- Wade Walters – Shickley, NE
- Cody Weitzenkamp – Hooper, NE
- Martha Cline – Hammond, NY
- Megan MacAlpine – Swarthmore, PA
- Kevin Van Beek – Hudson, SD
- Brian Verley – Sioux Falls, SD
- Calvey Household – Fond du Lac, WI
- John Lilja – Black Earth, WI
- Bradley Robson – Viroqua, WI
- Stuart Seffrood – South Wayne, WI

Thank you

to our newest lifetime members!

From August 9, 2023 – February 8, 2024

Marilyn Adam & Ralph Tauke
Viroqua, WI

Ron & Mary Barber
Stewartville, MN

Hannah Breckbill & Emily Fagan
Decorah, IA

Steve & Ann Hitt
Clarinda, IA

Wendy Johnson & John Rafkin
Charles City, IA

Sandy McAntire
Toledo, IA

Kate Mendenhall & Zachary Borus
Okoboji, IA

Diane VanDuzen
Burlington, IA

Kevin & Chelse Wagner
Platteville, WI

Dale Winkowitsch
George, IA

Bonnie Winslow-Garvin
North Liberty, IA

Linda Wormley
Newton, IA

Tim & Mandy Youngquist
Zearing, IA

Robert & Kaitlyn Zauche
Peosta, 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
- 6–10
- 1–5
- 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*

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101
Ames, IA 50010

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A Friendly Face

PFI's beginning farmer engagement coordinator, Rachel Burke, chats with attendees at a 2023 field day in Mitchell, Iowa. Read more about her path to PFI and her heart for Iowa farmers on page 9.

