

the PRACTICAL FARMER

SUMMER 2024



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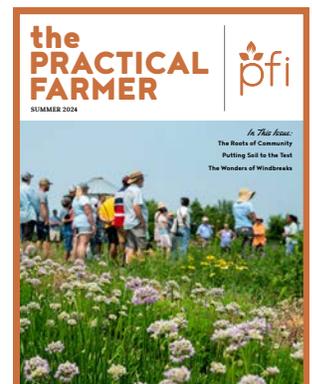
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ON THE COVER:
PFI's 2024 field day season is in full swing! Find a few events to attend over the summer, learn something new and meet other attendees. The cover depicts a field day from July 16, 2023, at Hannah Scates Kettler and Kurtis Kettler's farm, Minerva Meadows, near State Center.



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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PFI's History of Continual-and Intentional-Change

Since the birth of the organization, Practical Farmers of Iowa has adapted its work to mirror members' evolving priorities and goals. At the same time, our commitment to farmers leading the organization has remained resolute. When PFI opened its doors in 1985, founding and early members were largely Iowa farmers who operated diversified crop and livestock farms. In the 1990s, more fruit and vegetable farmers joined the ranks. In the early 2000s, out-of-state and non-farmer members increased their presence.

As early as 2004, PFI started offering translation for Iowa farmers who didn't speak English as their first language. Sarah Carlson, then a graduate student at Iowa State University who now serves as our senior programs and member engagement director, remembers translating documents into Spanish. In 2018, with board and member input, we buckled down on reaching out to first-generation Iowans and have been adding seats to our table since.

At our founding, Practical Farmers' primary programs were farmer-led education and on-farm research. We started working on food system infrastructure in the late 1990s, with projects such as the Pork Niche Market Working Group and the Field to Family Project. In the early 2000s, we got involved with Buy Fresh, Buy Local to increase markets for local foods.

Around 2007, we started providing business services to beginning farmers and families working on farm transfer. In 2010, we launched our Savings Incentive Program, where beginning farmers participate in education, business planning and mentorship. At the end of this program, they receive a savings match to invest in a farm asset. In 2015, we offered our first cover crop cost-share program in response to farmers wanting to raise cover crops but saying financial investment and risk were barriers to adoption.

We know that farmers are successful at making farm improvements because of their connection to PFI's network. Yet Iowa



PFI's co-founders and some of its earliest supporters at PFI's first meeting in 1985. This meeting kicked off a statewide RV tour to recruit early inaugural members. From left to right: George Moriarty, an advisor with the Iowa Farm Business Association; Larry Kallem; Bill Liebhardt, with Rodale Institute; Dick Thompson; Sharon Thompson; Mike Herman; Wes Buchele, of ISU; and Ricky Volland. Photo taken by Rick Exner.

is still seeing farm consolidation, the demise of rural communities, rising rates of diseases linked to diet and lack of healthy foods, soil loss and decreasing water quality. These trends are going counter to the vision we want to collectively create: an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

Because we know that members are making changes to their farms, the strategic planning conversations we held in 2020 centered around how to expand our ranks. To gather feedback, we held listening sessions with members. Many shared that addressing barriers for farmers was vital. "Continue to remove barriers for farmers to make change," one person shared. Another asked, "What are the barriers for the 'silent majority' and how can we lessen those?" From those sessions, we learned (this is an excerpt from the summary of them) that: "There continues to exist conflicting desires for PFI to focus on reaching conventional farmers, versus focusing on reaching farmers who already exhibit a lot of 'PFI' behaviors: curiosity, diversity, etc. We need to balance doing both."

Guided by our current strategic plan, we are growing our programs to remove financial barriers to making change. We're

helping farmers make more informed decisions. We are also working hard to increase the number of farmers making positive changes on the landscape so we can see positive trends in Iowa's environmental, community and human health.

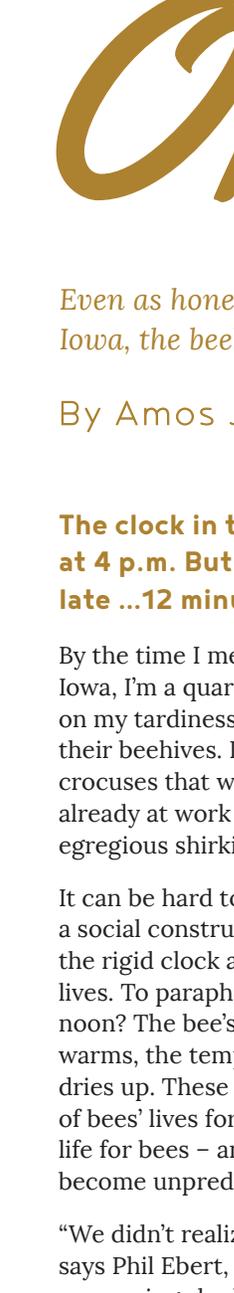
At the same time, we've taken great care to preserve, and grow, our original farmer-led education and research programs, and to continue cultivating an open and supportive community of farmers. Our field day season is in full swing, so please come out and see first-hand how farmers are teaching each other. Watch for the annual Cooperators' Program Report to get an update on the results of 2023 projects, and what's ahead for 2024.

While purposeful change is good, it can be hard to adapt to – and there are always kinks to work out. If there's anything from the past you miss, or anything you'd like to provide feedback on, please get in touch with me. We are making changes to serve you, and we always welcome your thoughts.

Thanks for being part of this adventure,

Sally Worley

Oh, for a Bee's Experience



Even as honeybees face more serious threats to their survival in Iowa, the beekeepers who tend them find purpose and joy in bloom

By Amos Johnson

The clock in the van's dashboard said that I'm 10 minutes behind schedule. I was meant to be at the farm at 4 p.m. But as each minute passed, the digital numbers changed, reinforcing anew that I am 11 minutes late ...12 minutes late.

By the time I meet Nathan Paulsen at Brun Ko farm near Exira, Iowa, I'm a quarter of an hour late. Generously not remarking on my tardiness, he and his wife Emily take me on a tour of their beehives. It's late March, and compared with the crocuses that were blooming a month early and the bees already at work bringing in nectar, 15 minutes isn't the most egregious shirking of the clock.

It can be hard to remember that time as we humans know it is a social construct. For the rest of nature, it is not measured by the rigid clock and calendar intervals that dictate our human lives. To paraphrase Emily Dickinson, what does a bee know of noon? The bee's world is a cycle of stimuli: The temperature warms, the temperature dips, the nectar flows, the nectar dries up. These seasonal signals have guided the ebb and flow of bees' lives for millennia. In the last 30 to 40 years, however, life for bees – and the beekeepers who tend them – has become unpredictable and challenging.

"We didn't realize how easy we had it before varroa mites," says Phil Ebert, of Ebert Honey. He's sitting in the honey processing shed near Lynneville, Iowa, the steady whir and plop of the pump he uses to fill jars punctuating his remembering as the rich smell of honey and wax fills the air. Phil started the business in 1980 with fewer than 10 colonies. Today, he has more than 1,800 hives – and he's experienced stark changes to bee health over the decades.

"If you had a 5% death loss over the winter, you'd gone incredibly wrong," he says. "Now, we're turning over at least 30% to 35% of our bees every year. It used to be how many

years would a queen live. Now you just hope they make it through the season. A lot of them don't."

The Four Horsemen

This mysterious, often drastic, spike in bee deaths – now known as colony collapse disorder – was first identified in 2006. Randall Cass, a bee specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, says scientists have been trying to untangle the mystery and tackle the reasons behind it for years. "The current scientific consensus," he says, "is that rather than a single cause, it's probably all the stressors honeybees face working together synergistically that bring down our colonies."

These stressors can be divided into four categories: poor forage, pests, pesticides and extreme weather. "We got what I think of as the four horsemen of the apocalypse for bees," Phil says. Mites, which arrived in the late 1980s, wouldn't upend a colony on their own. But Nathan says they are often the nail in the coffin for many hives weakened by other factors.

"Bees typically move through a progression of jobs," he says. New bees start out as nurse bees who clean cells and feed eggs and larva, he explains. After that, they move to undertaker, a job that involves removing dead bees. Some advance to guard bees. The final, and most dangerous, job is that of forager. When mites start weakening the colony, the foragers are recalled to fill nurse and guard bee positions. "Eventually," Nathan says, "there just aren't enough healthy forage and guard bees to take care of the hive, and it can spiral pretty fast after that."

Many of these beleaguered hives don't make it through the winter. According to Bee Informed Partnership, a nonprofit collaboration of university research labs across the country, Iowa consistently has among the highest winter hive loss rates. Each year since 2007, the group has surveyed beekeepers around the country. Between April 2022 and April 2023, Iowa beekeepers reported losing nearly 40% of their bees – a drop from over 50% in the previous two years.

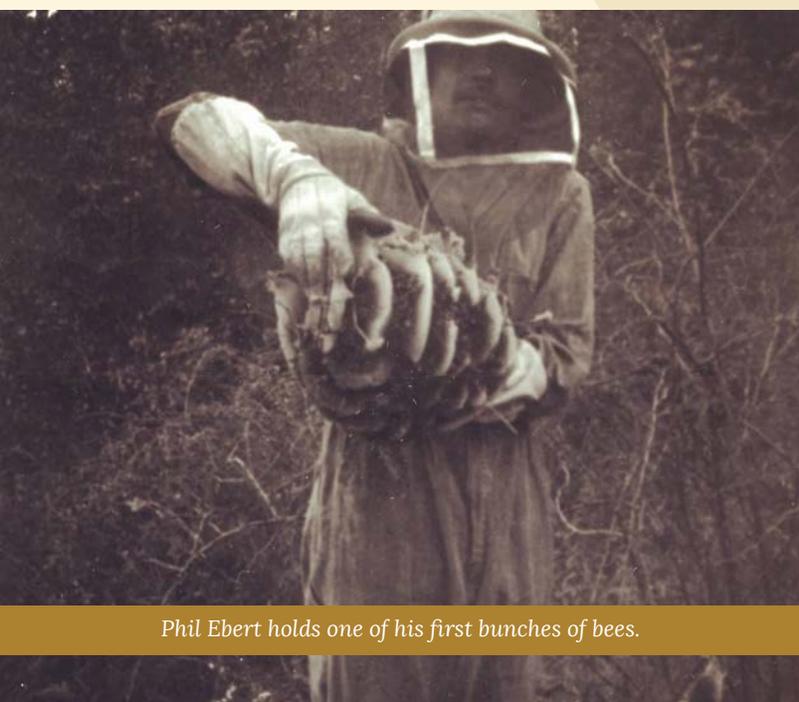
"The amount of stuff that happens in a hive is truly amazing and never fails to energize me no matter how tired I am."

- Phil Ebert



Native pollinator plantings help to provide critical forage for bees.

(All photos on this page are courtesy of the Ebert family.)



Phil Ebert holds one of his first bunches of bees.



A frame of comb glows gold and heavy with bees.

Randall chalks it up to Iowa having the “four horsemen” in the extremes. “I joke that we are in the ideal region of the United States to study sort of a worst-case-scenario landscape for our honeybees.”

One such extreme, Nathan and Phil agree, is the scarcity of diverse flowering plants honeybees need to sustain them. “We get calls from people who want to have bees and they’ll say, ‘I’ve got fruit trees,’” Phil says. “Well, what do you got for the other 50 weeks of the year?” In Iowa, quality bee foraging habitat has sharply declined as more land has been converted to development and agriculture. This has made it harder for Phil to find good sites for setting up his hives. “You hope to see some wooded area or pasture, something that’s not just row crops,” says Alex Ebert, Phil’s son.

While bees will forage in corn and soybean fields, these crops have short pollination windows. Soybeans, for instance, only bloom for about two weeks in July, Randall says, leaving bees hard-pressed for food at other critical times of the year. The poverty of choice also undermines bee health. “Pollen is where they get their protein, and different pollens have different makeups,” Randall says. “If it’s all coming from one source, that’s not as good for them.”

Phil puts it bluntly: “These bees are malnourished.”

Strained by poor diet, hives have difficulty weathering mites and other “horsemen” of the Iowa landscape – such as weather extremes unleashed by climate change and the ubiquitous use of chemicals in row crop fields that scientists now know are harmful to bees.

Of Flowers and of Noon

Despite this cavalcade of challenges, there is joy. For Nathan, the practice of checking his bees is meditative. “It’s a ton of work,” he says, as he suits up and carries his equipment kit, retrofitted from his grandfather’s toolbox, out to the hives. “But Saturday mornings, going out and getting in colonies, I like it. It’s calming and soothing.”

“Beekeeping is inherently scientific,” Randall says. “Everything you do is a constant process of trial and error.” Like farmers in PFI’s on-farm research program, beekeepers are innate enthusiasts who love to share what they’re learning. Conversations easily spiral down rabbit holes of mite control, what’s in bloom and techniques for capturing colonies. Not one to overstate, Nathan expresses his rousing endorsement of the community: “For the most part, beekeepers are generally acceptable people.”

Beekeeper organizations across the state are thriving. Both Nathan and Phil say they see more people going to classes and joining the community. “Hobby beekeeping is one of the hottest things going on right now,” Phil says. “You see a lot of people coming into this with a high degree of enthusiasm.” That sentiment ebbs and flows with the seasons just as honey comes in and hives die in winter. Beekeepers find solidarity with others who have gone through the same highs and lows. “It’s nice to talk about bees at our bee club,” Nathan says. “They’re good people to talk to.”

I think it must be nice to live without a clock ticking down the precious moments of life. If we worry always about being late, we might miss the beauty of those early crocus blooms.

- Amos Johnson

“The amount of stuff that happens in a hive is truly amazing and never fails to energize me no matter how tired I am,” Phil says. We look on as Alex pries open the lid of the hive. As he does so, the dull drone of thousands of bees inside becomes an acute chorus of strings tuning for a winged song whose loud humming modulates rapidly in pitch.

The buzz nestles into the brain, activating a primal instinct. While not overtly threatening, being so close to the thrum makes my hairs stand on end, and my ears perk up. An unconcerned Phil scratches his back on a truck like a bear waiting for honey, while Alex moves with a practiced tranquility that calms both the hive – and my nerves. I watch as Alex’s farm-worn hands slowly lift a frame from the box. With delicate precision that bespeaks his years of experience, he avoids crushing the fragile bees.

Maneuvering the frame into the sunlight, the comb glows gold and heavy with bees as Alex explains the organized chaos of activity. Finally, a bee dangles from his pinky, its stinger embedded in the sensitive pad. “I think it’s time we let them be,” Alex says quietly as he lowers the frame back into the hive and closes the lid. Instead of anger at being stung, he simply accepts it as the price of honey, and pities that the bee had the worse day.

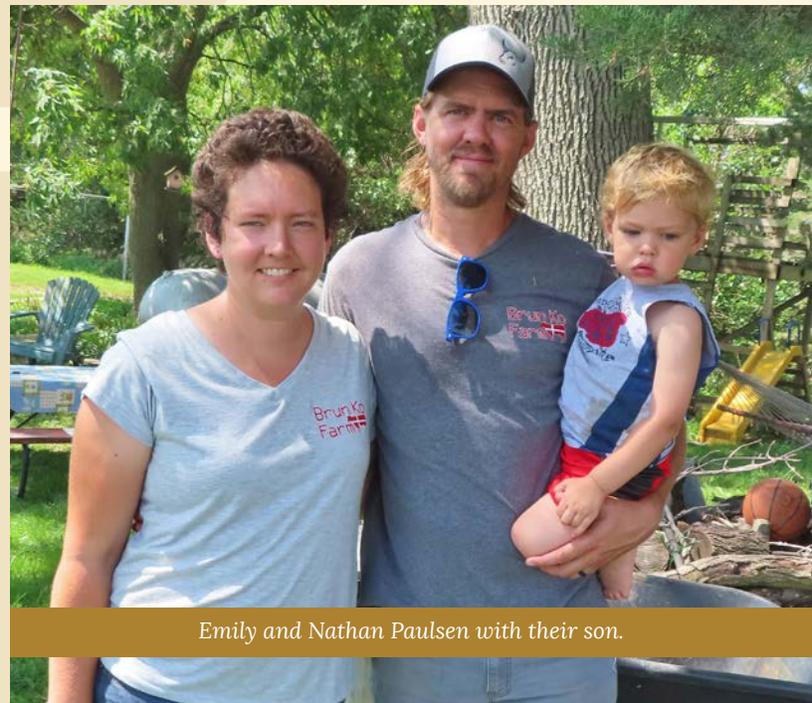
He is attuned to the moment – to what the bees are signaling – just as bees live in moments. For bees, those moments are full of flowers, pieced together one after the other. I think it must be nice to live without a clock ticking down the precious moments of life. If we worry always about being late, we might miss the beauty of those early crocus blooms. Amid the work, and challenges, of caring for hives, processing honey and contemplating the future of Iowa’s landscape, beekeepers live in tune with their six-legged flocks. It’s not a vocation for the faint of heart. But for those drawn to its wonders and its woes, echoes of this line from Emily Dickinson abound:

*“Oh, for a bee’s experience
Of clovers and of noon!”*



Nathan Paulsen shows the author his apiary equipment.

(All photos on this page are courtesy of the Paulsen family.)



Emily and Nathan Paulsen with their son.



The Paulsens adapted their farm logo to fit the theme on their hive boxes.

The Bee

by Emily Dickinson

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush
I hear the level bee:
A jar across the flowers goes,
Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault
Their chivalry consumes,
While he, victorious, tilts away
To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,
His helmet is of gold;
His breast, a single onyx
With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon!



Moving the Feast

In 2023, a team of farmers and community advocates tested mobile markets as a way to help low-income seniors access fresh, local food

By Jacqueline Venner Senske



Seniors line up to use FMNP vouchers at the first mobile market in July 2023, despite triple-digit temperatures.

In 2022, Karen Tellin saw a need and knew she was uniquely positioned to address it.

As the service coordinator for two low-income senior housing complexes in Cedar Rapids and Marion, Iowa, Karen's responsibilities include connecting residents with community resources and advocating for the residents' wellness. Karen saw that the seniors she served were unable to buy food for a healthy diet on their limited fixed incomes. "As you get older, you can't get all the nutrients that you need because you have to go by your budget," Karen says.

Through the regional Heritage Area Agency on Aging, Karen knew about a program designed to make fresh, local food accessible to low-income aging adults: the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This federal program provides eligible low-income seniors with fresh, locally grown produce, herbs and honey. Those who sign up receive a benefits card, sometimes referred to as a voucher, they can use at approved farmers markets and farm stands. Because of their low-income status, all of Karen's 108 residents qualified for the program, yet voucher usage remained low.

When Karen asked why, she learned that issues like transportation to the farmers market, accessible spaces within the market and chronic health and aging conditions were all barriers. Luckily for these seniors, Karen is in the business of addressing barriers. "You just have to start asking until you

figure out something," Karen says. "I'm just a big advocate when I see a need like that."

She started making calls, beginning with Feed Iowa First, a Cedar Rapids-based nonprofit whose mission is to combat food insecurity by growing food and farmers. Karen asked the group's director at the time, Emmaly Renshaw, what it would take to get farmers to sell to seniors right in the parking lot of the housing complexes.

"Answering that question wasn't really within our scope of work at Feed Iowa First," Emmaly says. "But Karen was very persistent, and the need really was clear."

In early 2023, Emmaly reached out to local farmer Carmen Black, of Sundog Farms, who raises produce near Solon, Iowa. Carmen had just attended PFI's annual conference, where she heard Kansas-based keynote speaker Donna Pearson McClish discuss this very topic – serving low-income seniors through mobile markets via Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers. "Hearing Donna really helped me make the connection," Carmen says. "Previously, customers tried to pay with senior vouchers and I didn't know what they were."

"As you get older, you can't get all the nutrients that you need because you have to go by your budget."

- Karen Tellin

But this federal program works differently in different states. As Donna shared in her conference presentation, the rules guiding FMNP in Kansas let seniors use their vouchers at mobile markets. In Iowa, by contrast, FMNP vouchers could be accepted only at authorized farmers markets or farm stands that met specific criteria, such as a minimum number of operating hours most days of the week during the summer. The rules at the time also allowed just one farmers market or farm stand to be authorized within a 10-mile radius. While the original aim was to support farmers selling at farmers markets, Iowa's more restrictive rules meant that mobile markets didn't qualify. They also meant that people wishing to use FMNP vouchers had to travel farther to access an approved site.

"Of course we want [state programs] to support farmers markets, but in this case, it was at the expense of seniors," says Emmaly. Implementing the mobile market model in Iowa would require special permission from the state.

"If we are going to feed our communities, we have to provide access to healthy foods."

- Carmen Black

Undaunted, Emmaly reached out to John Krzton-Presson, who heads the Farmers Market Nutrition Program for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. "I pointed out that the program wasn't serving the seniors it intends to reach because of so much red tape," Emmaly says. She proposed doing a pilot program with a mobile market and collecting data at the two low-income apartments she works at. The proposal turned out to be well-timed. Iowa's FMNP rules were due for a refresh in early 2024, and John agreed that piloting the mobile market made sense.

Filling a Gap

After months of back-and-forth discussion, navigating rules, compromise and troubleshooting, mobile market days at the two senior housing complexes launched in July 2023, with support from IDALS. In addition to Carmen, Emmaly had also recruited Mari Hunt Wassink – who farms in Cedar Rapids on land owned by Feed Iowa First through its Equitable Land Access program – to take part in the market pilot. A third vendor – Fuzzy Bees Honey, LLC, owned by Darin and Michelle Yauslin – learned about the mobile market opportunity while selling at their usual weekly market at Taube Park in Marion.

For six weeks in July and August, the farmers set up shop each week in the buildings' parking lots. "The first week we pulled up, there was a line of wheelchairs waiting for us. It was really



Seniors socialize at the mobile market held in the parking lot of their apartment building while Darin and Michelle Yauslin of Fuzzy Bees Honey set up in the background.

sweet, and they were so excited," Carmen says. "The [mobile] farmers market became a huge highlight for the seniors each week – it was like an event!"

Darin recalls how the seniors who attended all looked forward to the weekly opportunity. "They connected with one another and with us," Darin says. "It was neat to see on their faces that they genuinely were excited to share their memories and experiences."

The market felt particularly impactful to Mari because it powerfully aligned with her farm's core values. "After working on other farms, I started my own farm, Black Earth Gardens, in 2023 with a focus on regenerative agriculture, foods that are culturally important for Black communities and increasing access to healthy local food that's sustainably grown," Mari says. "All people deserve food like that, not just people who are from the right neighborhood or who are at the top levels of financial status."

Mari was able to build relationships with customers through the mobile markets. She recalls a couple of men who were enthusiastic about the hot peppers. "Carmen and I consulted with them about what peppers were best for what uses," Mari says. "One woman and I bonded over the melons I grew. Her father had grown yellow watermelons, and she hadn't seen one since she was little. Everyone was so excited about having fresh fruit, so the melons were popular."

Carmen's experience was similar. "It wasn't even about the food. It was about that sense of connection, which I wasn't expecting."

And as compelling as community connections are, financial viability is another key concern for farmers. Mari and Emmaly both highlighted the profit potential of the mobile market

(Continued on page 12 →)



The pilot was a clear success, increasing senior voucher use at these two complexes by 218%

model. “It was actually pretty great for me,” Mari says. “The market usually took 30–45 minutes, and I would make the same amount that I would make in three hours at a [regular] farmers market.”

In November 2023, Carmen, Mari, Emmaly and Karen met with John from IDALS to share their data. The pilot was a clear success, increasing senior voucher use at these two complexes by 218% while yielding physical and mental health benefits. “John was really interested in the mobile market pilot, and he agreed to try to keep that model in mind through the process of updating the FMNP rules,” Carmen says.

In 2024, Iowa’s Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program rules were expanded to allow seniors to use vouchers for CSA shares and at approved farmers markets, farm stands, movable farm stands and mobile markets. Mobile markets still require special permission, but the model is now proven and replicable in other locations, opening doors for both farmers and seniors around the state.

Back in Cedar Rapids, Carmen, Mari and Karen are excited about plans for their mobile markets in 2024, which include increasing the number of mobile market sites and dates. “Moving food to where it needs to go is critical,” Carmen says. “If we are going to feed our communities, we have to provide access to healthy foods.”

Mari agrees. “When local food gets into the hands of seniors who have these vouchers, it’s good for young farmers, and it’s good for seniors, too.” ■

Learn More

- **Watch Donna Pearson McClish’s keynote presentation at PFI’s 2023 Annual Conference:** bit.ly/donnakeynote
- **Find your Area Agency on Aging:** hhs.iowa.gov/programs/programs-and-services/aging-services/aaas
- **Learn how to get approved to accept SFMNP vouchers:** iowaagriculture.gov/agricultural-diversification-market-development-bureau/farmers-market-nutrition-program



Curious about how to support seniors in your community?

- Connect with organizations working with seniors in your community to identify the gaps you may help fill.
- Consider if and where a mobile market might make fresh produce more accessible to seniors.
- Reach out to state agencies and elected officials to share your story and advocate for your community.
- Get approved to accept FMNP vouchers.

PICKING UP ROCKS

By Rachel Burke



For one group of young future farmers, care for land and community is one of many lessons learned from their farm upbringing

On a rainy day in March at Bishop Garrigan Catholic School in Algona, Iowa, Beany Bode dismisses his biology class and selects a few students who farm with their family to stay behind and talk with me about their perspectives on farming. As PFI's beginning farmer engagement coordinator, I'm here to learn more about what young people today think about farming, and what their farming interests and concerns are.

The students, while taking their seats, tease one another to normalize the strangeness of my presence. As they grow comfortable, they share stories, lessons learned and answer questions about their farming goals.

Hanna Merron, a junior, reflects for a minute before saying, "My dad started planting cover crops a few years ago. That way, we aren't working the ground and only taking things [nutrients] out." Hanna farms with her dad, drives by their fields every day on her way to school and observes them as they change daily. "The first year, he didn't know when to terminate the cover crop. It was choking out the beans, but he didn't want to get rid of it too soon, so it was definitely a learning process," Hanna explains.

Alaina Bormann, also a junior, reflects on the benefits of being born into a farming family. "We definitely have an advantage growing up like we are," she says. "To have parents, grandparents and great-grandparents farming before us, so we can start learning from the age of five."

Learning is the topic of the hour, not just because we are in a classroom, but because every on-farm experience the kids recount is a teaching moment meant to be filed away and recalled in their future endeavors, whether they decide to farm or not.

"We call that shotgun learning," Beany says. "You ride shotgun in the truck with your dad and pick things up." To his students, Beany is known as Mr. Bode. But to many PFI members, he's known as a fellow member who owns and runs Bode's Moonlight Gardens with his partner, Joanne Roepke Bode, near Algona. Together with their children, they grow a range of vegetables and pumpkins that they sell at the Kossuth County Farmers Market, and through a fall pumpkin, gourd and squash U-pick on their farm.

Beany also teaches science full-time at Bishop Garrigan, and is clearly beloved and admired by his students. They tell me

(Continued on page 14 →)



Students Nick Laubenthal, Logan Nemmers, Ethan Marso, Caden Roethler, Alaina Bormann and Hannah Merron in their science classroom at Bishop Garrigan in Algona, Iowa.

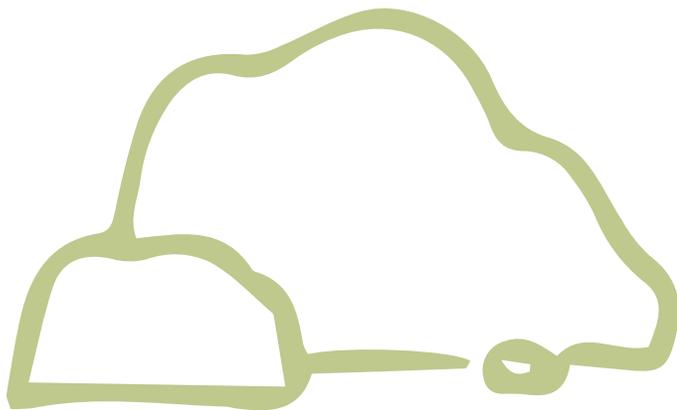
about all the extra work Beany puts in, how he goes on nature walks before class to gather specimens and how he goes the extra mile by planning hands-on activities and field trips so everyone can learn in their own way.

“You almost learn more from doing it wrong than you learn from doing it right,” says Logan Nemmers, a loquacious and quotable senior. “You have to take risks in farming. If you don’t take risks, you’re not going to get anywhere.” The students have a lot to say about taking risks on the farm. Issues like trying to go organic, using new equipment and testing different species of cover crops are on their minds every season. “Farming is trial-and-error,” Logan continues, “and it’s scary.”

The other students nod in agreement – but are also quick to point out how rewarding their time on the farm has been, despite the risks. They tell me about the positive impact they make on their community and beam with pride while sharing their contributions. “Everyone needs a farmer,” Logan says, smiling. “Without us farmers, there wouldn’t be food on anyone’s plates.”

Ethan Marso, a sophomore balancing on the two back legs of his chair, takes pride in the way farmers in his area support one another: “Everybody helps everybody,” he says. “You help your neighbor out.” He also tells a story about a man who, while helping on his farm, removed the cap of the manure pump while it was running. Through giggles, he says the man was hit with firehose force, throwing him back 20 feet and soaking him from head to toe in manure.

The other students laugh at this tale, and I am suddenly reminded of their youth. These youngsters are so full of wisdom and confidence that it’s easy to forget they are still children who can revel with such youthful glee at stories of manure mishaps. Maybe their mix of maturity and modesty stems from growing up on a farm.



Beany Bode and Joanne Roepke Bode

As if reading my mind, a student says, “Picking up rocks puts people in their place” – a tedious chore, they tell me, I should avoid at all costs. Yearly, the kids walk their family fields and pick up stones the size of baseballs, or bigger, so they don’t interrupt field work or damage equipment later. (I’m told if there is a small stone next to the baseball-sized one, you must grab that one, too.) Hanna says when the fields get prepped for planting, you can see the rocks that were missed. She recalls driving in the field with her dad. “He noticed a rock left behind,” she says. “I guess I will get that one next year.”

As they reflect on what they’ve learned from their time on the farm, the students also share their plans and worries for the future. Some will pursue farming, some will work in the world of agriculture and others are still unsure. “It’s nice to know that your family has been doing it for generations,” Ethan says of his family’s farming history. “Keeping it going is something that you need to see. But you don’t want to see the farm go to crap during your time.”

In addition to feeling pressure to sustain their family’s farm legacies, land prices are a stressor for more than one student. “Land ain’t cheap,” Ethan says. “You have to buy more land, grow on it so you can pay it off and then make money off that land. The idea is to expand so that when I pass the farm to the next generation, they have the land they need to keep the farm going.” Reflecting on the subject, Logan adds, “All the big corporations can afford it and we can’t.”

The discussion shifts to the fluctuating price for corn, soybeans and beef. “It’s concerning how the prices of beef

*“We definitely have an advantage growing up like we are,” **Alaina Bormann** says.*

*“To have parents, grandparents and great-grandparents farming before us,
so we can start learning from the age of five.”*

“Farming is a community and we have to keep in mind we are responsible for Iowa,” Nick Laubenthal says. “We need to keep the soil healthy so our community can keep farming.”

keep going down and changing drastically,” says Caden Roethler, a senior and cattle enthusiast. “I don’t know how good it’s going to be by the time I get to the point when I own cattle and will be in business.”

Beany, who has largely been listening up until now, jumps in to ask the group a question. “Do you think you will get the farm? Most of you have siblings in the family and you will be in competition with them because your farm likely can’t provide for all of you.” A lot of heads nod, but no one opts to respond – possibly because it’s hard to know the answer. Or, it’s hard to say aloud.

Despite the stresses and the uncertainties, many of these students feel called to farm. “Vocation is a good word for farming,” Caden says, “because when you vocate yourself to something, I think that means you give something up and gain something from that sacrifice.” I wonder, but don’t ask, what he sees as the elements of that exchange. Is the stress and work the sacrifice and the harvest what’s being gained? Or, is the harvest the sacrifice and the gain the sustenance of a community?

Nick Laubenthal, a senior who’s been listening to the discussion, sees the exchange differently – as one of care for land and community. “Farming is a community and we have to keep in mind we are responsible for Iowa,” he says. “We need to keep the soil healthy so our community can keep farming.”

The theme of responsibility to Iowa, their community and the land runs throughout our conversation. What’s clear is that these students – the next generation of farmers – are invested in keeping their farms and communities resilient and healthy. I’m heartened to think that these young people are the ones who will steer the conversation on farming when it’s their turn at the helm. They are the kind of kids who pick up rocks rather than throw them. ■



Alaina Bormann and Hannah Merron



The Future For Young Farmers

Getting started farming is hard no matter one’s background. For many young farmers, the primary obstacles to starting a farm are access to land, housing and water. While those who grow up on farms, like the students featured in Rachel Burke’s story, may have a land access advantage, that’s not always guaranteed. According to Elston Tortuga, an Iowa organizer for the nonprofit National Young Farmers Coalition, young farmers are often unable to access funds to start and grow their operations.

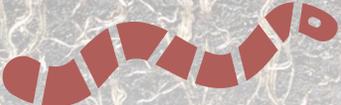
“They also experience difficulty with healthcare access, and are impacted by the student loan debt crisis,” Elston says, adding that these issues disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, Latino, LGBTQ+ and other farmers who have been historically marginalized.

But what of the issues that motivate young people to start farms? Citing findings from the coalition’s 2022 National Young Farmer Survey, Elston – who uses the pronoun they – says 83% of respondents identified conservation as a primary purpose of their operation.

“Young farmers recognize that farming is a public service and are motivated to solve social and environmental issues through their farming practices,” they say. “These farmers are increasingly aware of the ways that agriculture can contribute to solving the climate crisis by restoring carbon to the soil, reviving local food economies and so much more.”

Aware of the barriers young farmers face, PFI offers a range of programs, events and outreach designed to address these barriers. Learn more about our beginning farmer work at practicalfarmers.org/beginning-farmers.

The Roots of Nitrogen



From cover crops to cost-share, PFI farmers are working to build soil health and reduce inputs in hopes of stabilizing nutrient cycles – and farm economics

By Solveig Orngard

Kevin Veenstra has been farming in central Iowa since 1993. Nearly 20 years ago, he switched to no-tilling his farm acres – something he says made life easier when he also had a factory job. Ten years ago, he left that job to farm full-time, and since then, has focused his energy on planting cover crops in all his fields.

He got started in 2013 when he received funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to plant cover crops on land he farms near Reasnor, Iowa. “The farm is in a watershed, so there was a lot of cost-share available for that. And that’s when I really started doing [cover crops] every acre every year.”

The benefits are not just financial – one clear advantage was on display this spring, when drenching rains soaked much of Iowa in late April and May. The moisture was much-needed, after multiple seasons of drought. But the rains also turned many bare fields into vast pools of water – reminders of the land’s long-ago wetland disposition. For some farmers, the standing water prevented field access for planting. For others, newly planted seeds were destined to be drowned.

In Kevin’s cover cropped fields, however, the water soaked in more quickly and never gathered into standing ponds. A worm’s-eye view (if worms had eyes) would show why: a tangled web of roots, mycorrhizae, nematodes and other invertebrates moving in a cushion

of moist, sponge-like soil. With plenty of open space, water drained more readily while holding some of that hydration for later in the season.

“My fields were definitely muddy. But I could still get out there and leave few tracks,” Kevin says. “I didn’t have any standing pools of water and I think the cover crops helped with that.”

In contrast, a closer look at the soil in fields without cover crops would show a dense crust of particles with no pores for water to drip through. Trapped on the soil surface, the water lingered in fields, providing makeshift marshes for kildeer and migrating ducks. Or it ran off into nearby drainages ditches, taking some of the soil and nutrients along for the ride.

“If you want to try to build your nitrogen levels up, cover crops are going to help keep them from washing away,”

- Kevin Veenstra

For Kevin, keeping nutrients in his soil – and out of waterways – is another reason for his interest in cover crops. Besides saving money on fertilizer that might get washed away, cover crops can help build the soil’s nitrogen stores – which are important for plant nutrition – while safeguarding the environment. “If you want to try to build your nitrogen levels up, cover crops are going to help keep them from washing away,” Kevin says.

“The Gulf of Mexico doesn’t want your nitrogen,” he adds, referring to the annual, and growing, “dead zone”



Consistent moisture levels, organic matter and invertebrates are all signs of healthy soil.

off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas that holds too little oxygen to support marine life. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus entering the Gulf trigger algal blooms that snuff out oxygen, forcing some species to flee and killing those that can't get away.

Kevin's interest in cover crops, and in being efficient with nitrogen, led him to connect with PFI. He first got involved in 2018 after learning about PFI's cover crop cost-share program. Soon after, he learned about PFI's Cooperators' Program, and that he could be reimbursed for his time to conduct on-farm research. In 2022, he joined other farmers in a trial exploring the impacts of reducing nitrogen inputs on farms that had been using soil health practices, a project supported by both the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research and by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"I was putting down 200 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer, but I thought I should be able to cut my inputs back if I was actually capturing some nitrogen with my cover crops," Kevin says. "So I just started playing with different application methods and amounts."

(Continued on page 18 →)

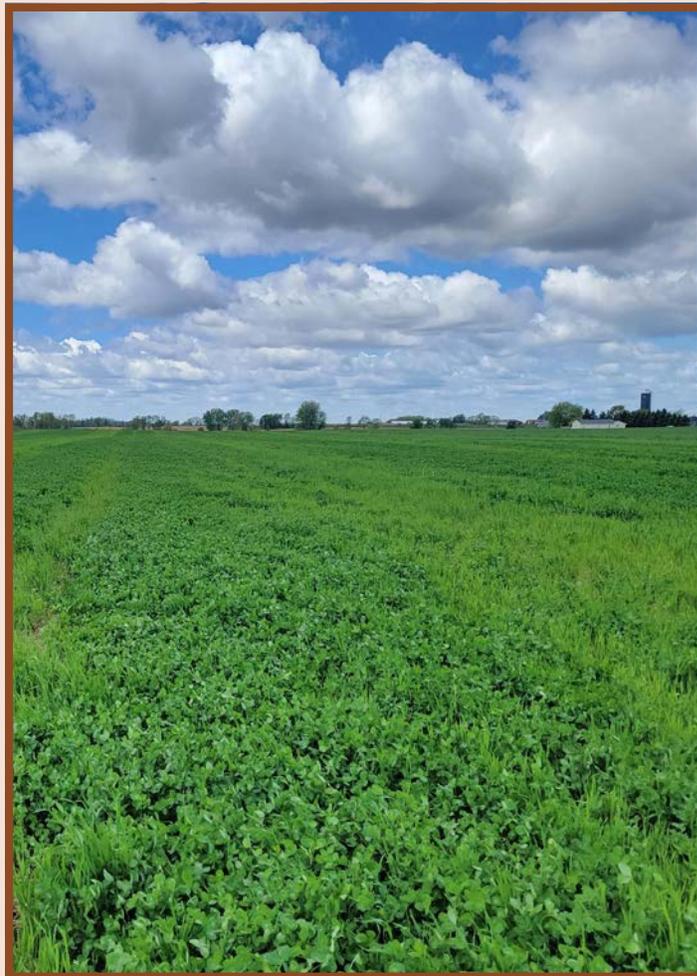


The soil in Josh's cover cropped fields retained moisture through the winter despite below-average precipitation.

As part of the PFI trial, he planted corn in eight 1-acre strips. Half received his normal fertilizer rate, while half received a reduced amount of 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre. "I've slowly been working my way back," he says. "With the help of some test strips, I got my rate down to 160 pounds per acre – and my corn yields were around 220 bushel per acre."

After a second season participating in the PFI trial, Kevin is pleased with the progress on his farm. But he advises other farmers thinking of reducing their nitrogen rates to first work on building soil health. "From my experience, you would want to be no-tilling and doing cover crops for at least five years before even thinking about experimenting with reducing nitrogen inputs," he says. "You need to get your soil health to where it needs to be so that the biology can do its thing."

So how do soil-health practices truly function to help limit nutrient loss? Steven Hall, assistant professor and extension specialist in the Department of Plant and



Clover fixes nitrogen as a cover crop and also provides nutritious forage on Josh's farm.

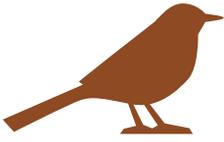
Agroecosystem Sciences at University of Wisconsin-Madison, has spent many years exploring how management practices affect soil chemistry and the flow of nutrients.

"It's long been assumed that diversified rotations can help store additional carbon in organic matter," Steven says. "At the same time, we know anecdotally and through [research-based] evidence that those rotations can also supply nitrogen, but those two parts hadn't necessarily been well linked before."



Interested in learning more?

See a list of resources in the online version of this story at practicalfarmers.org/magazine-articles.



While studying carbon cycling, Steven was intrigued to find no significant increase in soil organic carbon when farmers used three- or four-year rotations. He did, however, find that nitrogen mineralization – the process by which microbes convert organic nitrogen in the soil to plant-available forms – significantly improved in the extended rotations. More nitrogen in the soil means less need for synthetic nitrogen.

“Looking at soil carbon, these diversified rotations wouldn’t necessarily be eligible for any kind of [carbon] credits,” Steven says, referring to programs that pay farmers for practices that capture carbon in the soil. “But we can see they [diversified rotations] have tremendous environmental and water quality benefits when we look at the ability to decrease inputs of synthetic nitrogen and herbicides.”

Steven hopes his research will help farmers make more informed decisions for their farms, but he also seeks to learn from their contexts. “We have a tremendous opportunity for researchers to work with farmers to jointly improve our knowledge,” he says. “Ideally, it’s a circular relationship where farmers tell us what’s feasible or interesting to them and we can try to evaluate what’s happening in these systems and bring it back to the farmers for the next step. That’s where partnerships like PFI can be really useful.”

Empowering farmers to test lower nitrogen rates through on-farm research is one way PFI supports farmers looking to reduce their nitrogen inputs. Another way is through its small grains cost-share.

To help farmers improve the health of their fields, Practical Farmers offers \$20 per acre for growing a cover crop containing a legume, planted either at the same time as or following a small-grain crop. Farmers enrolled in this program can add on another cost-share option and receive an additional \$20 per acre on fields where they reduce nitrogen rates on corn that follows their small grain-legume cover in rotation.

Wisconsin farmer Josh Hiemstra learned about Practical Farmers through his county agronomist, who shared information with him about the small grains cost-share. Already looking to reduce his inputs, he jumped at the chance to apply for the program and tack on the fertilizer reduction option. “I don’t want anything that

I’m applying or using on my farm to leave,” he says. “That’s better for the environment, and it’s good for my bottom line because it’s efficient.”

“I don’t want anything that I’m applying or using on my farm to leave. That’s better for the environment, and it’s good for my bottom line because it’s efficient.”

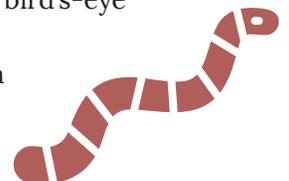
- Josh Hiemstra

Josh is now in his third season taking part in PFI’s cost-share, and he has started to see some changes. “You have to trust that even when putting less fertilizer on, you will maintain the same level of yield and profit,” he says. “It’s very gratifying. But getting to that stage doesn’t happen overnight.” Josh credits his diversified rotations – which include small grains like winter wheat, rye and triticale, and an array of cover crops – for making his input reduction possible.

“The most important thing to do is plant cover crops,” Josh says. “Everything I plant that’s not small grains for harvesting is followed by winter rye or winter triticale in the fall to help prevent nitrates from leaching.” The presence of living roots in the soil retains moisture that would otherwise slip down into groundwater, taking many important nutrients along with it.

Josh is grateful for what he’s gained by participating in the cost-share. The program helps protect his bottom line, he says. But it also provides access to all the other benefits included with a PFI membership – like easy access to an abundance of resources and the opportunity to connect with a like-minded community of farmers. “There’s nothing that convinces other farmers to try something different than hearing it from others that have been in their shoes and done it themselves,” Josh says.

As word spreads about the benefits of cover crops, extended rotations and reduced tillage, he and others investing in these practices hope more farmers will see the benefits: fewer ponds in fields after spring rains, greener fields, less erosion, more trafficable fields year-round. When we get there, a bird’s-eye view will show a vibrant, quilted landscape of resilient farms – with plenty of worms for them to feast on. ■





**THE “TINE”
HAS COME...**



...FOR FIELD DAY SEASON!



GO WITH YOUR PALS,



AND MEET NEW FRIENDS!



RAIN OR SHINE...



EXPLORE THE LANDSCAPE,



**AND GIVE NEW IDEAS
TIME TO DISTILL.**



**MAYBE YOU'RE JUST
GETTING STARTED...**



**OR YOU ALREADY HAVE
YOUR HANDS FULL!**



**EVERYONE IS WELCOME
TO JOIN THE RIDE...**



**FOR A SEASON OF
FARMER-LED LEARNING.**

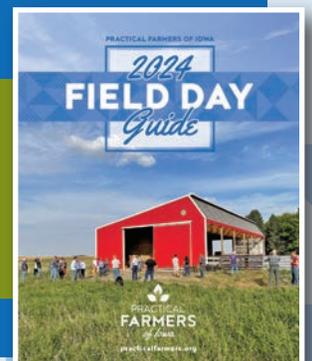
JOIN US AT A FIELD DAY!

Field days remain a foundation of PFI's mission to equip farmers to build resilient farms and communities. We invite you to attend field days similar to your own production, or to explore topics and farms new to you. This summer, PFI members are hosting 59 field days across 36 Iowa counties and five neighboring states.

All PFI field days are free for anyone to attend. RSVPs are appreciated, but show up anytime!

See the full line-up of field days, RSVP and learn more at practicalfarmers.org/field-days.

Want a PFI Field Day guide mailed to your house? Or a stack to share with others? Call us at (515) 232-5661 or email debra.boekholder@practicalfarmers.org.





Funding Resilience

PFI's robust funding streams are helping farmers achieve their goals

By Sally Worley

Farmers engaged in PFI's network are successfully reaching their multifaceted goals of increasing farm conservation while increasing farm profits. In 2023, for instance, 79% reported making improvements to their farms due to their involvement with PFI. To build on these successes, you shared in our most recent strategic planning process that we needed to scale up our efforts. Your input led to some bold visions of what we want to see in place by 2026 because of our collective actions.

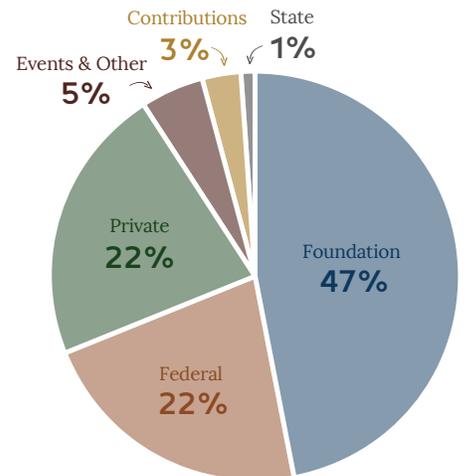
2021-2026 Practical Vision

“What do we want to see in place in three years as a result of our collective actions?”

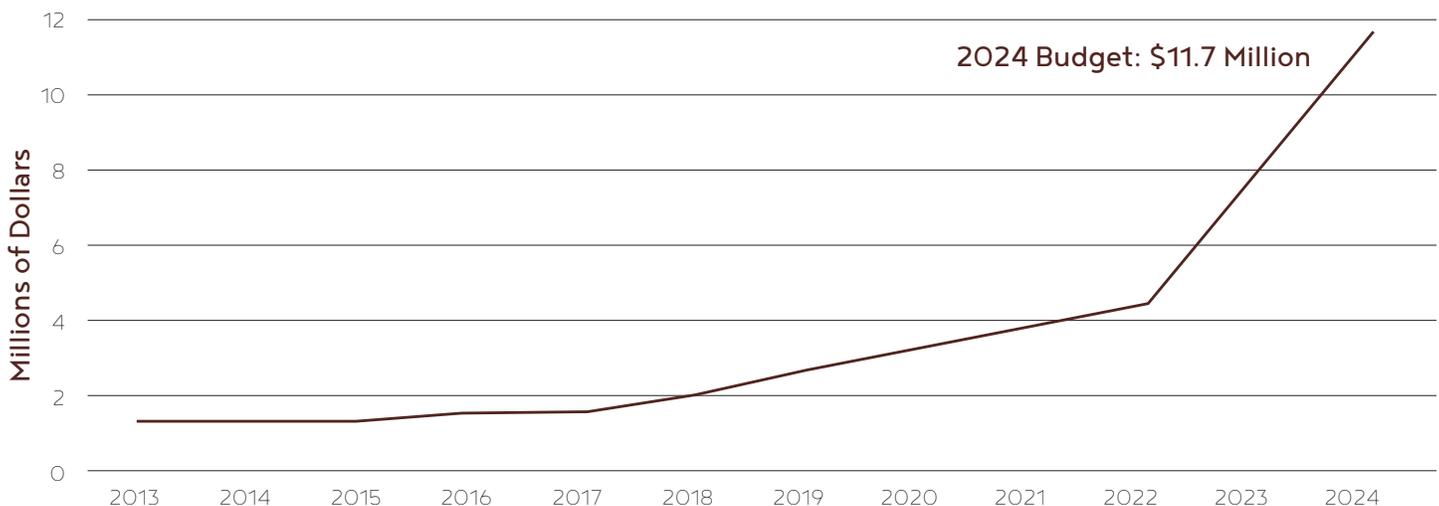
Many voices driving Iowa's agriculture narrative	Effective leaders creating positive change for our food and farm systems	PFI well-positioned for success, impact, and growth	Robust markets for a diversity of farm products	Healthy environments stemming from responsible land stewardship	Thriving rural communities filled with resilient and profitable farms	Farming is a desirable vocation and new farmers are equipped to succeed	A diverse and inclusive PFI network
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You will see these increased efforts reflected in our budget. In fiscal year 2023 (Oct. 1, 2022-Sept. 30, 2023), Practical Farmers received \$11 million in revenue.

Revenue 2023



Annual PFI Budget 2013-2024





From left to right: Margaret Henry, Adam Kiel, Sally Worley and Laura Gentry. Photo courtesy of Soil and Water Outcomes Fund.

Our strategic plan provides a compass to help us secure grant funding. We use our strategic plan to vet every grant opportunity and ensure each grant is guided by priorities you, our members, share with us in our member survey, program evaluations, conversations and more. We have worked to create relationships with funders so we can serve as a conduit between farmer and funder priorities to mutually meet goals. For example, PepsiCo is a major funder of our cover crop and small grains cost-share programs. These programs help PepsiCo support farmers in their supply chains.

Margaret Henry, PepsiCo's vice president of global sustainable agriculture says, "PepsiCo is an agricultural company at our core and our growth and success relies on the success of the farmers we source from. We want to partner with farmer-centered groups like PFI who have the farmer interest at their core. PFI is a critical partner for PepsiCo in hitting our goals and we have appreciated their partnership and contribution to developing our strategy in how we work with farming communities around the world."

At the same time, these programs help farmers reduce the financial burden of adopting new practices, which helps meet PFI's strategic plan vision of healthy environments stemming from responsible land stewardship.

PFI Received Funding From the Following Sources in Fiscal Year 2023

Federal Funding Sources

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture - Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
 USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (The 2501 Program)
 USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative- Critical Agricultural Research and Extension
 Natural Resources Conservation Service Iowa Conservation Innovation Grant
 North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program
 USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program Sustainable Agricultural Systems
 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
 Natural Resources Conservation Service Federal Conservation Innovation Grant
 USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Farmers Market Promotion Program

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Specialty Crop Block Grant
 USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program
 USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico Program
 National Institute of Food and Agriculture - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program Sustainable Agricultural Systems
 Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Midwest Cover Crop Initiative

State Funding Sources

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
 Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Water Quality Initiative

Foundation Funding Sources

Builders Initiative
 Cargill
 Cedar Tree Foundation

Ceres Trust
 Clif Bar
 Community Foundation of Johnson County
 Farm Aid
 Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research
 PepsiCo
 RE-AMP
 Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation
 Stranahan Foundation
 Walmart Foundation
 Walton Family Foundation
 W. K. Kellogg Foundation
 Ziff Foundation

Private Funding Sources

ADM
 Apex Clean Energy
 HSBC
 Keurig-Dr. Pepper
 Lifeline
 Oatly
 PepsiCo
 Smithfield Foods Inc
 Unilever
 Walmart

(Continued on page 24 →)

Unrestricted Contributions Are Essential

We are extremely grateful for the funding we get through donations and memberships. Last year we received \$148,740 in donations from 355 donors, and \$171,000 in membership income. This pool of funding is the most important source of funding we have. Why? It helps us fund things that aren't written into grants. Donations fund on-farm research, field days and conference sessions that we don't have grants for, including a member favorite: Storytelling at the annual conference. Unrestricted funds support multiple programs and allow us to be flexible in funding areas that are most in need.

Convergence Ciderworks is one such funder. Natalie and Chris Naber have been following Practical Farmers since they moved to the Midwest from California in 2020 to establish their hard cidery business. From the start, they made a commitment to support organizational partners that have complementary goals to their business. Natalie says, "As we craft our locally focused ciders, we work in support of the revitalization of regional agriculture in Iowa while engaging with our community of growers through a mobile fruit pressing service." In 2023, Convergence committed to donating a percent of proceeds from their award-winning Moonglow Ginger Pear hard cider to PFI. In addition to the financial contributions they are making to PFI and other partner groups, Convergence has created a mobile processing station to help revitalize the apple industry their region.

"In our area of northeastern Iowa, we are so near Minnesota and Wisconsin – who have retained their large apple-growing regions – that most folks in our area tend to venture out of state for apple adventures," Natalie says. "Our goal is to bring some of that apple-icious joy back to this corner of the state in the form of more apple trees.

"We are hopeful that by providing a middle-chain service with the Driftless Mobile Juicing Service trailer, it will mean folks will have a local resource for their juicing apples (and other fruit) and it will open opportunities for more apple trees to be planted. We are also hopeful to expand the program to help new orchards as they plan, as well as providing annual pruning and harvest support."

Many thanks to Chris, Natalie and all of the supporters who made our work in 2023 possible.

Donations Above Membership in Fiscal Year 2023

Planned Givers – Legacy Society

Jill Beebout and Sean Skeeahan
Tom and Irene Frantzen
Helen Gunderson
Larry and Ruth Neppi
Tom Neuberger
Teresa Opheim and Rich Schuler
Rich Pirog
Ann Robinson

\$5,000 and Above

Steve Beaumont
The Hope Foundation
Diane Horn
Fred and Charlotte Hubbell
Midwest Insurance Corporation
Schnieders Family Foundation
Mikol Sesker
T. Rowe Price Charitable

\$1,000 – \$4,999

Discover Ames
Arthur and Colette Dunham
Robert and Susan Fleming
Liz Garst
Helen Gunderson
Mike and Barbara Henning

Gail Hickenbottom
Paul Hoffman
Kyle & Sharon Krause Family Foundation
Lisa Schulte-Moore and Peter Moore
Carol Sherman
Ryan Story
Diane and Robert Weiland
James and Mary West
Donald Whittaker

\$500 – \$999

Nathan and Sarah Anderson
Claire Andreasen and Steve Pecenka
Mike Arnold
Lisa and Andy Bean
Carol Bouska
Sarah Bull Delati
Gary and Carol Gadbury
Matthew and Michele Hackwell
Chris Henning
Cathy Irvine
Lois and David Kail
Peter Lammers and Jen Filipiak
Beth and Randy Larabee
Mark and Deb Lassise

Wes and CJ Niles
Darwin Pierce
Thomas Pyfferoen
Jane and Elizabeth Richards
Dick and Diana Sloan
Tim Swinton
Kelly and Angie Tagtow
Sharon Tinker
Robert Waterman
Steve and June Weis
Witteberg Grange
Sally and Chris Worley

\$250 – \$499

Paul Ackley
Amber Anderson
Vaughn and Julie Borhardt
Duncan Campbell
Steven and Ethy Cannon
Bruce and Connie Carney
Jim Dillavou
James Dyreby
Kamyar Enshayan and Laura Jackson
Nancy and Michael Forrest
Tom and Irene Frantzen
Wayne and Ruth Fredericks
Steve Freund



Linda and David Gobberdiel
Glen and Jeanine Halva-Neubauer
Mark Halverson
Susan Jesuroga
Tom Kaspar
Kevin and Susan Kolbe
Krumm Family Foundation
Timothy Landgraf and Jan Libbey
Matt Liebman and Laura Merrick
William and Robin Matthews
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Nolan Patterson
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Riley Family Fund

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Roger and Barbara Thompson
Dave and Tracy Van Arkel
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E Paige Weston
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Jack and Marion Boyer
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Bryce Carlson
Jen Colby
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Steve and Janet Cornelius
Tim and Maureen Daley
Chris Danner
Jerry DeWitt and Kathy Beery
Erik Eastman
Si M Eiklenborg
Margo Eness
Rob and Tammy Faux
Rachel Garst
Don Getting
Andy and Cindy Goodner
Andrew and Kelley Grevas
Gary Gronewold
Richard Groux
Nancy Grudens-Schuck
Theo Gunther
Gary A.T. Guthrie and Nancy J.T. Guthrie
Gerry Hanson
Dennis Harkrader
Helene Hembreiker
Tom Hertz
David and Pat Hogan
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Clara and Harold Hoover
Steve and Sara Hopkins
Heath and Katie Hoppes
Bill Hotchkiss
Jeff Hughes and Lori Christensen
Deborah Jacobi
Blake Jacquot
Dennis Jennings

The Jensen Family
Craig Johnson
Larry and Donna Kallem
Chuck Kelly
Erwin Klaas
Don Kolbe
David and Marilyn Kraber
Ted Krauskopf
Tracy Kroeger
Robert and Beth Kundert
Kristine and Bret Lang
Emma Liddle
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Shami Morse and Tom Lundahl
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Jim and Heather Penney
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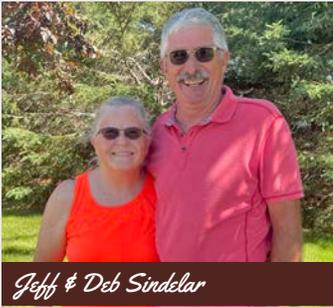
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Make This Garden Grow



Steve and Ethy Cannon have transformed a formerly barren plot into a community garden space

By Emma Liddle

If you live in Ames, Iowa, you've likely driven past the home of Steve and Ethy Cannon – and the community garden, with its Practical Farmers of Iowa sign on the gate, they started across the street. What began as a barren plot by a railroad track at the corner of Ridgewood Avenue and 13th Street has turned into a bountiful growing space. The variety of crops is staggering and includes everything from apricot trees to lima beans and pawpaws.

In the summer, the community garden bursts with color from roses, zinnias, cosmos and gladiolus flowers. The Cannons have about a century of gardening experience between them, and they have honed it to the benefit of the surrounding area. "There are seven or eight households that we share the garden with," Ethy says. "Most of our garden partners are neighbors and friends looking for growing space."

The community garden is an outgrowth of Steve and Ethy's passion for plants, which manifests in their personal and professional lives, (they both work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where Ethy researches maize and Steve, soybeans and legumes). Their home's backyard faces out onto busy 13th Street, a major road that spans the entire city and connects to Interstate 35. To create more space for plants, the Cannons first turned the street-facing yard and driveway into a large garden, using the sunny spots to grow food. To reduce noise, they installed a fence that uses semi-translucent panels set in custom wooden frames. Trees and flowers blooming along the edges add to the beauty and sense of serenity within.

Steve and Ethy quickly used up every possible inch of yard for their personal garden. In 2008, they found a one-sixth-acre lot across the road, situated next to Ames' north-south railroad track. Upon asking around, they discovered the land belonged to a neighbor who had since moved away. The space was unassuming and there was potential for heavy compaction from decades of trains rolling in and out. The Cannons, eager to transform the barren ground, bought the lot and broke ground soon after. As they began to sow and cultivate, they were pleased to find the soil instantly receptive to gardening. Now, it grows a bounty of vibrant berries, orchard

fruits, greens and legumes. The extra space lets them experiment. "We often try crops that aren't usually grown in Iowa, just to see what happens," Ethy says.

Potato bean, a perennial legume that yields potato-like tubers and beans, is one such plant. Despite the name similarity, it's not related to potatoes, which are in the nightshade family. Steve is interested in potato bean's potential as a staple food crop. As a legume, it fixes its own nitrogen. It's also high in protein – about 15%, compared with 4% protein for potatoes. The Cannons found that potato bean grows well in Iowa soil, and the pound they harvest turns into potato chips, curry and hearty soup for them to enjoy.

Coming Together

The Cannons decided almost from the get-go that they'd make plots in the 13th Street garden available to others. But before they could do that, they had to do the work of preparing the land for gardening. "For the first couple of years, we worked ourselves to convert it from a fallow, grassy plot, to fence it to keep animals out and to plant trees and lay out paths," Steve recalls. Once the garden was fully realized, they gradually opened the space to others. Most of the plots belong to fellow garden partners, but the garden's reputation has grown such that people occasionally contact the Cannons to apply for space – in some cases, even sending a resume of gardening pictures. There's no charge for a plot, but Steve and Ethy ask for occasional help with harvesting, path maintenance, watering and weeding the shared strawberry beds.

While they can't offer space to everyone, the Cannons love sharing their story and knowledge. In 2010, they showed off the garden's transformation during a PFI field day called "Finding Civilization in the Age of Lawnlessness." Pictures of the event show the garden bursting with sunflowers, tall grasses and flowers. These days, the Cannons don't host many formal events, but people who walk by often comment on the garden, so Ethy will invite them in for a tour. As frequent donors to PFI, the Cannons also help support other growers who share their stories and farming knowledge.

Steve and Ethy grow food from April to November, often walking to the garden for lunch. They eat their harvest year-round in preserves – juicy apricots, tart aronia berry juice and green peas during the cold, drab winter months. Planting, watering, cultivating and harvesting keeps them fit. Plus, gardening provides a creative outlet – like planting zinnias between onion rows for shading. The Cannons advise beginning gardeners to start small. "Gardening is more than tending the soil, preparing beds, planting seeds, nurturing plants and harvesting," Ethy says. "One must also learn how to cook from the garden."

Transformation is a risk that has paid delicious dividends for themselves and their community. ■



A view of the community garden the Cannons started in Ames, Iowa.

Sharing the Space

As urban zones expand, preserving pockets of pollinator habitat is paramount

By Vanya North

Beth and Rick McGeough own and operate Edge of the Woods Raspberry Farm, a 65-acre farm just a few miles north of Indianola, Iowa. The farm specializes in growing a variety of berries, including raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, currants and gooseberries. The McGeoughs sell their products, along with gifts, crafts and value-added products by other local businesses, through an on-farm store they call the “Berry Building.” They also hold seasonal berry-picking opportunities for area residents.

As its name suggests, most of the farm is mature timber, though Beth and Rick also have 6 acres in prairie. Standing on the farm, the setting feels remote and rural. To access the farm, a visitor would exit paved roads for gravel and pass a patchwork of farm fields and acreages. Once there, surrounded by trees, prairie and open fields of berry plantings, it could be easy to imagine urban life a faraway prospect.

Yet urban zones are a figurative stone’s throw away. “We’re just outside Indianola and only 12 miles outside of Des Moines,” Beth says. “So we’re kind of riding between the two.” Sandwiched between these two cities, the McGeoughs are seeing development creep closer to them.

While the farm hasn’t been isolated – one neighbor, Summerset Winery, has been a popular destination for events, weddings and tourists since 2001 – it’s only recently that urban growth has started visibly expanding outward. A year ago, Beth says, the cropland across the road from them was bought by a developer to turn into a housing development. “Their first phase involves building 18 to 20 spacious lots spanning 2 acres each,” Beth says. “Currently, excavation and tree removal are underway, with future plans for lot layouts and potential expansion of the housing development.”

The Habitat Toll of Urban Sprawl

Why does this matter? From a habitat perspective, development like this signals the potential loss of more habitat for

wildlife – especially pollinators. Habitat in Iowa has already been profoundly altered. Prairie once covered up to 80% of Iowa’s landscape, supporting an abundance of pollinator species – bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles and others. Today, roughly 85% of Iowa’s land is farmed, while just 0.1% of the state’s prairies remain.

“If we are able to diversify our cities, towns and farms, we all benefit ecologically and socially.”

- Sarah Nizzi

That’s not to say farms can’t support pollinators – they can, for instance, by adding more diverse crops or devoting some acres to habitat. The problem is there’s not enough habitat on farms right now to address the sharp decline of many pollinator species. And, because cropland has the potential to support pollinators in various ways, once it’s paved over, that potential is lost – along with the possibility of farming the land in ways that benefit the landscape more broadly, according to American Farmland Trust.

Meanwhile, many of Iowa’s urban areas continue to grow. Recent U.S. census figures revealed the six-county Des Moines metropolitan area – which includes Warren County, where the McGeoughs’ farm is located – to be the Midwest’s fastest-growing large metro. Between 2020-2023, the area grew by



Beth and Rick McGeough

3.1%, according to a story published in March by the Des Moines Register.

Indianola is a microcosm of that growth. In the last four years alone, the city’s population has increased by nearly 2.7%, creating a need for more housing and services. As once-rural areas like these develop, preserving existing on-farm pollinator habitat – and creating new habitat on farms and within urban zones – is crucial.

A Butterfly-Friendly Farm

At Edge of the Woods Raspberry Farm, Beth and Rick are doing what they can. On land once used to grow corn and soybeans, they planted a variety of native prairie plants, including butterfly milkweed, pale coneflower, purple prairie clover and rattlesnake master. “We were really striving for diversity, a place where butterflies and bees could find a home,” Beth says. “In the summer, when we have berry-picking, it smells like a perfume factory out here. Our customers call it a magical place.”

The McGeoughs are now focusing on a new habitat project that involves planting native eastern red cedars. “We wanted to create a new ecosystem of habitat for pollinators as well as other wildlife like owls,” Beth says. It will add to the other trees they have on their land, ranging from chestnuts and hazelnuts to oaks and maples, which can serve as both food and shelter for overwintering beneficial insects.



Clockwise from top left: A spangled fritillary. Monarch caterpillars benefit greatly from even the smallest provided habitat. Rick McGeough looks for pollinating bees in the 6-acre established prairie on Edge of the Woods Raspberry Farm. Prairie habitat at the McGeough's farm. Monarch butterflies on trees. Photos courtesy of Beth and Rick McGeough.

In 2020, Beth and Rick also took part in a three-year monarch butterfly project organized, in part, by the Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Monarch Joint Venture at the University of Minnesota. As part of the citizen-science project, Beth and Rick recorded monarch eggs, larvae, caterpillars and flying or feeding monarchs at six sites around the farm. By the end of the project in 2022, they had found an abundance of monarchs on the farm.

The study highlighted for them why it's so important to create pollinator habitat – and how even small pockets of habitat can serve as vital oases amid urban growth. Monarchs, known for their vivid orange, black and white color pattern, migrate up to 3,000 miles each year on

their way to and from central Mexico. The iconic insects pass through Iowa on their epic journey, and need a mix of nectar-rich flowers for food and milkweed to lay their eggs on.

As these plants have disappeared from the landscape, monarch numbers have plummeted. According to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, the population of monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains has dropped by more than 80% since the 1990s. "Habitat loss of any kind is a significant driver of pollinator decline and wildlife generally," says Sarah Nizzi, an Iowa-based pollinator conservation specialist with Xerces Society.

"Pollinators, like any other group of wildlife, have habitat needs in order to be successful," she adds. "Native flowering plants and host plants, nesting and overwintering areas and protection from pesticides are all key components of pollinator habitat. This holds true whether we're thinking about habitat in cities and towns or in our rural landscapes."

Every Little Bit Matters

So what can farmers in urban zones do?

Sarah says there are a variety of ways to supply habitat, regardless of farm size or location. "Pollinators are capable of

thriving in large or small areas," she says. "In my experience working within residential spaces and on urban farms, if we build it, they will come." Sarah advises those looking to support pollinators to consider planting native wildflowers, grasses, trees or shrubs.

While some urban and suburban areas have local ordinances banning tall prairie species, adding smaller flowering plants – such as milkweeds, bergamot and coneflowers – along the edges of primary crop areas can still provide much-needed nectar.

"Wherever we are able to implement habitat counts, regardless of size," Sarah says. The advice applies to farms of any size. Those with more acres can consider integrating prairie strips, planting trees or identifying marginal areas to convert to habitat. All farms could look to add flowering plants along field edges or leave some areas in grasses. Even some weeds, so long as they don't affect crop growth, can provide shade and shelter for many pollinator species.

"It's important to remember every living thing benefits from diversity," Sarah says. "Monocultures, whether it be mowed turf grass or row crop production, offer little to wildlife. If we are able to diversify our cities, towns and farms, we all benefit ecologically and socially." ■



Get Help With Habitat From PFI

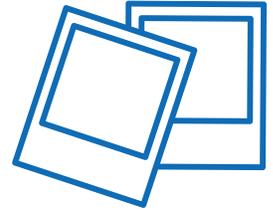
If you're interested in adding habitat to your farm, PFI's Habitat Incentive Program offers technical and financial support for adding prairie strips or having a precision conservation analysis of your farm to identify conservation opportunities.

Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/habitat-incentives-program.

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.



Beekeeper Joe Klingelhutz points to a honeybee swarm ready to establish a new colony. (Kathy Dice, Red Fern Farm, Wapello, Iowa)



A crop of organic oats is off to a great start. (Eric Mahaney, Grazn, Arion, Iowa)



The last rays of a sunset over the nose of a tractor during fieldwork in early April. (James Frantzen, Frantzen Farm, New Hampton, Iowa)



Piglets born in April learn to pile up and latch on to get a bellyful of milk. (Anna Pesek, Over the Moon Farm, Coggon, Iowa)



Seedlings soak in the rays of the setting sun in early spring. (Angie Scharnhorst, Bountiful Harvest Farm, Solon, Iowa)



Frequent farm visitor Aolani visits with her friends, Max the cat and Milky Way the nanny with one of her triplets. (Jenny Horner, Spring Lake Organic Farm, Red Oak, Iowa)



A great horned owlet rests in the shelter of a tree in a woodlot. (Mike Feldpouch, Roger Homan's farm, Waterloo, Iowa)



Striking a pose in amongst the apple blossoms. (Mayo Fottral, Plum Creek Orchard, Swisher, Iowa)



Grape hyacinths marching in a row. (Nancy Brannaman, The Lavender Farm at Sutliff, LLC, Lisbon, Iowa)



Scottish Highland cows from Mud Ridge Ranch near Red Oak, Iowa, team up with Pottawattamie County Conservation to stress invasive cool-season grasses to restore warm-season prairie at the Hitchcock Nature Center near Crescent, Iowa. (Lance Brisbois, Golden Hills RC&D, Crescent, Iowa)



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

Meet the Newest Members of PFI's Team

Bria Holthe | Grants Manager



Bria Holthe joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa staff in April 2024. As the grants manager, she ensures that PFI's grant proposals and administration are managed efficiently, consistently and effectively so that the organization can sustain our funding and further our mission. Bria works with all PFI programs to manage existing funding and obtain new funding.

Bria graduated from Central College with bachelor's degrees in environmental sustainability and English, with a global health minor.

While in college, Bria discovered her passion for sustainability and conservation efforts while learning about Iowa's native prairie habitat. During that time, she worked with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to write grants, research environmental justice in Iowa and create bat survey routes. Following graduation, she worked for Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin as the grants and development coordinator, where she developed equitable local foods programs and secured funding for the organization.

Bria was born in Iowa and lived in North Dakota, Wisconsin and London before returning to her home state. She loves reading, cooking, sketching and anything outdoorsy with her dog Mabel. ■

Norah Hummel | Field Crops Outreach Coordinator



Norah Hummel joined the PFI staff in April 2024 as a field crop outreach coordinator. In this role, she works to plan events and outreach programming in northern Iowa, northwestern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin. Norah is thrilled to join the PFI team and is passionate about supporting resilient rural communities and farmer-led education.

Norah grew up in Seattle and graduated from the University of Washington in 2015 with a degree in environmental science and resource management. In search of new experiences, she moved to Decorah, Iowa, in 2016 where she spent over five years working at Seed Savers Exchange in seed production, collection management and community outreach. Norah fell in love with northeast Iowa and strives to tell her West Coast friends how magical the Midwest can be.

Norah enjoys exploring small towns across the Midwest, hiking, bicycling, gardening, playing with her cats and hosting dinner parties with friends and neighbors. ■

Ann Krause | Senior Cover Crop Business Coordinator



Ann Krause joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa staff in May 2024 as the senior cover crop business coordinator. In this role, Ann oversees the Cover Crop Business Accelerator program and works to ensure the ongoing success of its participants.

Ann grew up on a farm in rural Pottawattamie County, Iowa, and travels

back from time to time to enjoy the rolling hills of western Iowa. After earning her bachelor's degree in finance from Iowa State University, Ann settled in Slater, Iowa, where she currently farms alongside her husband and children. She is passionate about helping farmers grow their business and is excited to bring this enthusiasm to PFI programs.

In her spare time, Ann volunteers for several community organizations and enjoys gardening, campfires and traveling. ■

Savanah Laur | Business Viability Manager



Savanah Laur joined the PFI staff in March 2024 as the business viability manager. In this role, she works to find access to capital for farms and farm-based businesses. She also offers business coaching for farmers of all experience levels and backgrounds and oversees the Savings Incentives Program.

Before going to college, Savanah spent time in the Willing Workers on Organic Farms program, also known as WWOOF, working on farms in New York, North Carolina and Virginia. During this time, she got to travel and see a variety of agricultural systems and learn from some interesting and inspiring farmers.

Savanah received a Bachelor of Science in agricultural studies from Iowa State University, where she had the chance to explore topics from agronomy and animal science to financial management and

ag economics. Ultimately discovering a love of horticultural crops (specifically fruits and vegetables) while on a study abroad trip in Germany, she decided to get a Master of Science in horticulture from University of Georgia. Her graduate research looked at the effect of the high tunnel microclimate on crop development and quality as well as cover crop decomposition and available rates of nitrogen.

Most recently, Savanah served as a county horticulture agent for North Carolina Cooperative Extension. In that role, she worked with established and beginning farmers to offer educational programs, networking opportunities, and technical assistance for crop production.

Growing up in Georgia, Savanah developed her deep love of the outdoors, hiking and camping. When the weather is nice, she loves to hitch up her tear-drop camper, load up her dog, Irene, and head out to find a cool new camping spot. ■

Elizabeth Schnicker | Field Crops Outreach Coordinator



Elizabeth Schnicker joined Practical Farmers of Iowa as a field crops outreach coordinator for the southern region in April 2024. In this role, she works with the farmer-led education and field crops departments to engage farmers and coordinate educational and outreach opportunities in southeastern Iowa, southern Illinois and northern Missouri.

Elizabeth's passion for agriculture started on her family's farm in Washington, Iowa, where her father and grandfather taught her the ins and outs of the operation – and, most importantly, how to be good stewards of the land. She pursued a degree in agronomy from Iowa State University, where her interests in world food issues and sustainability continued to grow.

A six-month internship at Walt Disney World in its hydroponic greenhouses ignited a passion for hydroponically growing food crops, and for thinking outside the box when looking for solutions to local food and sustainability issues. Elizabeth went on to work as an assistant grower at a hydroponic tomato facility in Iowa, and then as an integrated pest management specialist at a hydroponic leafy green facility in California. Elizabeth's love for Iowa agriculture brought her back home near the family farm. Before joining the PFI staff, she worked as a sales support agronomist. This position opened her eyes to shifts in how farmers view community, sustainability and the resiliency of their operations.

Outside of work, Elizabeth loves all things outdoors, gardening, crocheting, picking up new hobbies, trying new foods and spending as much time as she can with Jax, her California stray who's turned into an Iowa farm dog. ■

2023 PFI On-Farm Research Features Roll-Crimping Cover Crops

A roller-crimper presents the opportunity to mechanically terminate cover crops with less herbicides or tillage by simultaneously laying the cover crop flat on the ground and crushing the stem. Determining when and how is best to use roller-crimpers has been a subject of interest in PFI's Cooperators' Program for the past seven years. In 2023, five cooperators conducted on-farm research on roll-crimping a cereal rye cover crop ahead of soybeans.

In one project, Fred Abels, Jon Bakehouse, Keith Gorham and Kevin Veenstra investigated roll-crimping a cereal rye cover crop at two stages in the rye's development: anthesis (flowering) in late May and grain-fill approximately seven to 14 days later. In both cases, soybeans were no-till drilled into the rye cover crop prior to roll-crimping. None of the four cooperators found that roll-crimp timing significantly affected soybean yields. Kevin feels that the "results let me open up a bigger window for crimping."

In another project, Michael Vittetoe tested how roll-crimping a cereal rye cover crop at boot stage and then chemically terminating it shortly after affects soybean yield compared to chemically terminating the cover just after boot stage and letting the rye stand while partially shading the young beans. Michael found that soybeans in his roll-crimped system out-yielded the system where he left the rye standing. The yield advantage was also enough to pay for the extra pass of the roll-crimping. Michael is glad he did this trial because "it is helpful to have the more detailed analysis of yield differences, etc. to help make decisions moving forward."



Fred Abels using his roller-crimper to terminate cereal rye at grain fill. Photo taken June 14, 2023 by Brady Appel.



Michael Vittetoe's in-row roll-crimper in action crimping rye with undisturbed soybean rows in between the rollers. Michael seeded a cover crop in 10-in. twin-rows on 30-in. centers so that he can plant soybeans between cover crop rows. Photo taken May 16, 2023.



Want to dig deeper?

Learn more about these projects and PFI's Cooperators' Program in the soon-to-be published 2023 Cooperators' Program Report (delivered to the mailboxes of all PFI members!). To learn even more about these projects and other projects, we encourage you to explore the research reports on our website at practicalfarmers.org/research.

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PFI Field Days

Find out more at practicalfarmers.org/field-days.



JULY

JULY 2 | MAYNARD

Nutrient Management Using Intercropping in an Organic Operation
Hosted by Scott & Catherine Wedemeier | Grassway Farm

JULY 10 | FERTILE

Growing, Processing and Marketing Onions and Potatoes for Wholesale Outlets
Hosted by Steve Rachut, Kittleson Brothers & Ron Rachut | Fertile Valley Gardens

JULY 10 | CORNING

Innovative Strategies for Diversifying a Row Crop Operation
Hosted by Chris & Shannon Gaesser | GX Agriculture

JULY 11 | CHELSEA

Year in the Life With Adam: Goat Health & Management
Hosted by Adam Ledvina

JULY 11 | BRIGHTON

Organic U-Pick Blueberries and Day-Neutral Strawberries at Blueberry Bottom Farm
Hosted by Kim Andersen | Blueberry Bottom Farm

JULY 13 | SPRING GROVE, MN

Communicating Cuts: From Carcass to Consumer

JULY 16 | OCONOMOWOC, WI

Setting Up a Multi-Species Grazing Operation
Hosted by Michael & Courtney Gutschenritter | Three Brothers Farm

JULY 18 | GRUNDY CENTER

Grundy County Workshop: Biologicals, the Hot Topic
Hosted by Fred Abels, Courtney Myers & Grundy County SWCD

JULY 19 | PECATONICA, IL

Going With the Grain: Diversified, Small-Scale Grain Farming With On-Farm Processing
Hosted by Andrea Hazzard | Hazzard Free Farm

JULY 20 | WATERLOO

Growing Food for Habitat: Supporting Pollinators and Beneficial Insects in a Community Garden
Hosted by Kamyar Enshayan

JULY 23 | KERKHOVEN, MN

Centering Sustainability From Farrow to Finish
Hosted by Andrew VanDerPol | Pastures A Plenty

JULY 24 | OSAGE

Improving Soil Through Nitrogen Reduction and Conservation Practices
Hosted by Alec & Rachel Amundson

JULY 28 | BRIDGEWATER

Growing Opportunity: Season Extension, Organic Production and Scaling Up at Bridgewater Farm
Hosted by Dale Raasch | Bridgewater Farm

JULY 30 | STANLEY

Establishing and Growing a Cover Crop Seeding and Service Business
Hosted by Dan & Jessica Bahe | Bahe Cover Crops

AUGUST

AUG. 4 | CENTRAL CITY

Adaptive Marketing Through a Collaborative CSA, Value-Added Products and On-Farm Sales at Buffalo Ridge Orchard
Hosted by Marcus & Emma Johnson | Buffalo Ridge Farm

AUG. 9 | SARTELL, MN

Boots on the Ground: Tips for Transitioning to No-Till
Hosted by Alex & Krissy Udermann, John Udermann and Jake Udermann | Meadowbrook Dairy, Inc.

AUG. 10 | HARLAN

Honing Pasture Management With Rotational Grazing + Cover Crops
Hosted by David Rosmann & Becky Tompkins-Rosmann, Ron Rosmann & Maria Vakulskas Rosmann, Daniel Rosmann & Ellen Walsh-Rosmann, Mark Rosmann & Virginia Lehner-Rosmann

AUG. 16 | ILLINOIS CITY, IL

Relay-Cropping and Reducing Inputs to Achieve Regenerative Resilience
Hosted by Keith Gorham & Blain Gorham | Gorham Family Farms

AUG. 21 | LAKEFIELD, MN

Make Way for Pheasants: Assessing Habitat Potential on Marginal Acres
Hosted by Jerry & Nancy Ackermann

AUG. 23 | LOGAN

Scaling Up Custom Cover Crop Application
Hosted by Mike & Kara Dickinson, Mark Unruh | Mike Dickinson Farms, East Valley Poultry & CoverPro 365

AUG. 24 | RED OAK

Year in the Life With Jenny & Emilio: What to Expect From Rotational Grazing
Hosted by Jenny Horner & Emilio Moreno

AUG. 25 | GLADBROOK

Hands-On Poultry Processing at Mad Acre Farms
Hosted by Ryan & Jamie Madison | Mad Acre Farm

AUG. 27 | PARNELL

Getting Started With Chestnuts
Hosted by Elana Gingerich | Olivia's Orchard

AUG. 29 | STORM LAKE

Adding Produce to the Mix at Hayes Farm
Hosted by Tate Carlson | Hayes Farm

AUG. 30 | MARENGO

Reducing Nitrogen With Rotational Cover Cropping and Biologic Additions

Hosted by Ross McCaw

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 1 | CALMAR

Mindful Growth at Sweet Season Farm

Hosted by Carly & Ethan Zierke | Sweet Season Farm

SEPT. 3 | RED OAK

Transitioning Ground and Changing Generations

Hosted by Matt & Jocelyn Vermeersch, Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman | Mud Ridge Ranch

SEPT. 4 | MOUNT PLEASANT

Fitting Farming Into Life at Mogo Farms

Hosted by Morgan Hoenig | Mogo Organics

SEPT. 7 | WINTERSET

Cattle Handling and Grass-Based Genetics

Hosted by Jake & Crystal Bigelow | Bigelow Family Farm

SEPT. 7 | CAMANCHE

Establishing New Prairie for Endangered Beneficial Insects on a Century Farm

Hosted by Julie Martinez

SEPT. 12 | BOUTON

Making a Livelihood With Livestock: A Whole-Farm Approach With Forage Crops and Cover Crops

Hosted by Dan & Ila Taylor, Noah, Sarah and Todd Taylor

SEPT. 13 | MARION

Equitable Land Access and Culturally Relevant Vegetable Production at Feed Iowa First's Wanatee Farm

Hosted by Feed Iowa First | Wanatee Farm

SEPT. 13 | ELMO, MO

Multi-Species Cover Crops

Hosted by Tim Kelley & Brent Nold

SEPT. 15 | WAVERLY

Diversifying the Farm by Integrating Pastured Poultry With Tree Fruit and Berries at Solstice Farm + Paha Cider Co.

Hosted by Mark Westbrook | Solstice Farm and Paha Cider

SEPT. 20 | EXIRA

Developing Infrastructure on a Diversified Farm One Project at a Time at Brun Ko Farm

Hosted by Nathan & Emily Paulsen | Brun Ko Farm

SEPT. 26 | WASHINGTON

Sheep, Dogs and Sheepdogs

Hosted by Fiona Harrar



Other 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.

JULY

JULY 12 • Small Grains Shared Learning Call

Online | Free | practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls

AUGUST

AUG. 2 • Small Grains Shared Learning Call

Online | Free | practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls

AUG. 6 • Central Nebraska Cover Crop Workshop

Gothenburg, NE | practicalfarmers.org/events

AUG. 13 • PFI Member Day at the Iowa State Fair

Des Moines, IA | practicalfarmers.org/events

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 6 • Small Grains Shared Learning Call

Online | Free | practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls

SEPT. 13 • Farmland Owner Legacy Award Celebration with

Tim Kelley

Elmo, MO | practicalfarmers.org/events

EVENTS IN SPANISH

Stay tuned to our e-news and website for information about the ongoing “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.

PFI Current Enrollments

From July - September 2024

Habitat Incentives Program

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/habitat-incentives-program

Grazing Consultations

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/grazing-consultations

Grazing Infrastructure Cost-Share

OPENS SEPT. 15; APPLY BY SEPT. 30

practicalfarmers.org/grazing-infrastructure-cost-share

1 on 1 Land Matching

ROLLING APPLICATION

Contact Martha McFarland at [martha.mcfarland@](mailto:martha.mcfarland@practicalfarmers.org)

practicalfarmers.org or call our office at (515) 232-5661

Labor4Learning Program

OPEN UNTIL ALL POSITIONS ARE FILLED

practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning

Cover Crop Cost-Share

SIGN UP DEADLINE: DEC. 2, 2024

practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share

Cover Crop Business Accelerator

ROLLING APPLICATION

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

N Rate Risk Protection Program

OPENS SEPT. 1

practicalfarmers.org/n-rate-risk-protection-program



Find PFI At

JULY

JULY 22 • 2024 Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Conference

Myrtle Beach, SC | [Learn more at swcs.org/events/conferences/2024-annual-conference](https://swcs.org/events/conferences/2024-annual-conference)

AUGUST

AUG. 1 • Iowa Women in Ag Conference

Ankeny, IA | [Learn more at iowawomeninag.org/annual-conference](https://iowawomeninag.org/annual-conference)

AUG. 11 • Cedar Valley Farm Crawl

Waterloo, IA | [Learn more at ceee.uni.edu/farm-crawl](https://ceee.uni.edu/farm-crawl)

AUG. 27-29 • Farm Progress Show

Boone, IA | [Learn more at farmprogressshow.com/en/home.html](https://farmprogressshow.com/en/home.html)

AUG. 28 • Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center's 2024 Soil Health Field Day

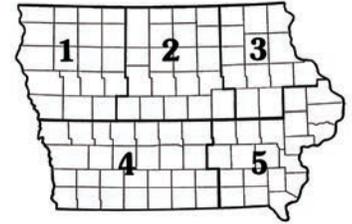
Ithaca, NE | [Learn more at events.unl.edu/2024/08/28/180036](https://events.unl.edu/2024/08/28/180036)

CORRECTION: In the print version of our Spring 2024 magazine, we misidentified Paul in the second paragraph, referring erroneously to a different Paul Thompson who is an emeritus senior scientist in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering at University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Paul featured in our story received a master's degree in architecture and traveled around the world for his career training humanitarian organizations how to prepare for or respond to a range of situations. The article also incorrectly referred to a single tenant farming Paul's land instead of "tenants," and stated that Paul and Elena's flex lease preserved a discount for acres planted to small grains. The flex lease does not include that discount. These errors have been corrected in the online version of the magazine.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome, New Members!

From Feb. 9, 2024 - May 2, 2024



DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Aaron Easton - Remsen

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Cameron Aker - Ames
- Robert Alert - Hampton
- Jon Hollatz - Garner
- Eric Neverman - Grundy Center
- Big Data in a Box Inc, Srini Reddy - Ames
- James Ryan - Buffalo Center
- Elliot Thompson - Ames

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Sara Davis - Guttenberg
- Emma and Steven Henry - Mt Auburn
- Brock and Becca Hermann - Manchester
- Growthland, Richard Issacson - Coggon
- Mark Klein - Durango
- Ryan Nelson - Cresco
- Don Putz - Cedar Falls
- Jody Rhoades - Maynard
- Steve Robisky - Cedar Falls
- Kyle and Jillian Slifka - Postville

DISTRICT 4 - SOUTHWEST

- Drew Fausch - Alleman
- Pat George Jr. - Milo
- Michelle Heap - Pella
- Lacy Jennings and Paul Ascheman - Van Meter
- MaKayla and Boone Lord - Des Moines
- Todd Matthes - Adel

- Dan Miller - Ankeny
- Matthew Miller - Silver City
- Charlotte Sears - Elkhart

DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST

- Scott James - Durant
- Sophie Neems - Iowa City
- Chad Petersen - Bennett
- Larry Schott - Riverside
- Timothy Shoemaker - Ottumwa
- Christina Sporer - Guernsey
- Dave Van Waus - Grinnell

DISTRICT 6 - OUT OF STATE

- Alexis Barnes - Bartlett, IL
- Steve Elmer - Geneseo, IL
- Andrea Hazzard and Dan Cole - Pocatonia, IL
- Corbin Steiner - Tremont, IL
- Ducks Unlimited, Liam Bonk - Winona, MN
- Mackenzie Bratsch - Le Sueur, MN
- Peter and Jessica Desens - Eyota, MN
- Eric Foss - Glenville, MN
- Glen Fredrickson and Mandi Goplen - Wanamingo, MN
- Tom Gerken - Lake City, MN
- Michael Johnson - Eagle Lake, MN
- Lorry Kispert - Kenyon, MN
- Peter Kramer - Gibbon, MN
- Robert Krocak - Montgomery, MN
- University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative, Matt Leavitt - Saint Paul, MN

- Julie Martinez and Jon Kramer - Minneapolis, MN
- Lisa Nelson and Scott Wakefield - Waconia, MN
- Chad Olsen - Hendricks, MN
- Claire Olsen - Hendricks, MN
- Josie Olsen - Hendricks, MN
- Casey Pearson - Roseau, MN
- Frank Pieper and Susan Maresch-Pieper - Jordan, MN
- Penny and Richard Priebe - Kenyon, MN
- Marty Reps - Lewiston, MN
- Michael Scheibel - New Ulm, MN
- Dean and Ryan Schuette - Mayer, MN
- Bailey Scott Hobbs - Dunnell, MN
- Sheldon Stevermer - Easton, MN
- Kevin and Meg Stuedemann - Belle Plaine, MN
- Andrew Wilhelmi - Mankato, MN
- Melanie Woodford - Austin, MN
- Dan Zander - Janesville, MN
- Joe Coffman - St. Mary, MO
- Doug Steffen - Crofton, NE
- Agassiz Seed & Supply, Kyle Alberty - Brandon, SD
- Doug Drape - Vashon, WA
- Cyrus Beckwith - Ettrick, WI
- Alyse Festenstein - La Crosse, WI
- Emilee Gaulke - Madison, WI
- Shelly Voight - Burlington, WI
- Jody and Aaron Wilhelm - Fall Creek, WI

Thank you

to our newest lifetime members!

From Feb. 9, 2024 - May 2, 2024

Cathy Irvine
Dysart, IA

Larry & Ruth Neppi
Marion, IA

Hannah Scates Kettler & Kurtis Kettler
State Center, IA

Christina Sporer
Guernsey, IA

Kevin Veenstra
Grinnell, IA

Christine & Evan Zrostlik
Des Moines, 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.



Goats enjoy a meal at Adam Ledvina's farm near Tama, Iowa. Adam is part of a series of Spanish field days and online classes called "A Year in the Life," focused on the experiences of two different goat farmers in Iowa. Find more information about PFI's Latino programming by visiting practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos.

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

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

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

JOIN OR RENEW

1. I am joining at the level of:

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

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

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

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

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

4. How did you hear about PFI?

MEMBER BENEFITS

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

- Announcements
- Perspectives
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock

Please add my farm to PFI's:

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

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DONATION

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

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

- \$1,200
- \$500
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- \$ _____

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

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

PAYMENT

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

Additional Donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

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

Name on card _____ Number _____

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

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

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Ames, IA 50010

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The Roots of Nitrogen

From cover crops to cost-share, PFI farmers are working to build soil health and reduce inputs in hopes of stabilizing nutrient cycles – and farm economics. Read more on page 16.

