

The Practical Horticulturist - Share fresh ideas for conference sessions + Add to your small business toolbox with funding

Jacqueline Venner Senske <jacqueline.venner.senske@practicalfarmers.org>

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To:Anna Pesek <anna.pesek@practicalfarmers.org>



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*Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.*



**Meet a CoHort: Shad Swanson**

**Shad Swanson** farms at Garden of Paradise in Essex, Iowa. He is also a founding member and leader at Life5b, a nonprofit collaboration that serves low-income people in rural southwest Iowa.

**Why do you grow hort crops, in five words or less:** To feed people.

**What is something you're excited about this year:** I am excited about my expansion and transition. Last year I farmed 1/5 of an acre and this year I have an acre that I shifted from row crops to vegetables, so I can feed more people and

make the business more viable for myself. I would love to see that happen on a much larger scale not only on my farm, but across the state.

**What is one thing you would change about your industry:** I would love to see farmers get away from the USDA Certified Organic label. As a farmer living in a super rural area with many low-income folks, I want everyone to be able to eat healthfully, and to me, that organic label unnecessarily drives up prices and makes it harder for people to access healthy, high-quality food.

**Favorite PFI memory:** I went to my first conference in 2024, and it was amazing. There was so much information that it was almost overwhelming. I can't wait for the next one!

**Your favorite crop and why:** Carrots! They are my favorite to grow and to eat. I have like 10 different colors this year, and they all taste amazing. Carrots sell well at the markets, and restaurants love them too.

## PROGRAM UPDATES

### Tell us about your ideas for the 2025 annual conference!



Planning is underway for PFI's 2025 Annual Conference, and we want to hear your ideas for sessions and speakers.

The annual conference is scheduled for **January 10-11, 2025, in Des Moines, IA.**

Use [this form](#) to share ideas with PFI staff before August 23.

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## Under one tarp



Farmers **Hannah Breckbill** and **Emily Fagan** of Humble Hands Harvest near Decorah, IA, have used tarps for several years. In new videos from PFI, they show how they use silage tarps on their no-till farm and tarping for organic weed control.

For more on tarping at Humble Hands Harvest, check out their [2023 research report](#) "Tarping for No-Till Cover Crop Termination" and 2023 webinar "[Magic Tarping Ride: A System for Soil Quality, Weed Control and More on Vegetable Farms.](#)"

## IN THE FIELD

### New research report: "Covering Brassica Seeds When Starting Transplants"



Starting seedlings is a chore where repeated movements like covering seeds with soil add up to a lot of time. A group of cooperators – **Jill Beebout, Hannah Breckbill, Emily Fagan, Natasha Hegmann, Pete Kerns, Roxane Mitten, Carly Zierke** and **Ethan Zierke** - wondered if covering seeds is worth their labor and results in higher germination rates or healthier starts. They agreed to explore this question with crops common to each of their farms - brassicas.

[Read what they learned.](#)

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### Apply now: Business Builder Subaward Grant Program



The Heartland Food Business Center's **Business Builder Subaward Grant** Program is now open. Awards through this program may be up to \$50,000 to develop small- and mid-scale food and farm businesses.

**Savanah Laur**, PFI's business viability manager, is available to offer technical assistance for grant applications, which earns bonus points during the review process!

Visit the **HFBC website** and contact Savanah to learn more.

## Small Food Processing Cohort Program



ISU Extension is offering a program for small food cottage-based processing companies in Iowa to evaluate their entrepreneurial skills and learn from experts about basic food safety for the in-home processing kitchen.

The program will last from September 2024-March 2025 and include both in-person and Zoom sessions. Participating companies may be in the startup phase or have been selling at farmers' markets or from home, farm or online. **Learn more.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Field day: "Adding Produce to the Mix at Hayes Farm"



**Thursday, Aug. 29 | 10 a.m.-Noon | Storm Lake, IA**

*Host: Tate Carlson*

What if every farmer in Iowa grew just a couple acres of table food? Tate Carlson is using his expertise from ten years of work on vegetable farms to explore that question as he integrates growing produce into his family's row crops-and-cow-calf operation. Learn about Tate's approach to rehabilitating the soil, selecting crops, adapting equipment and marketing local produce in northwest Iowa. [Register today.](#)

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**Field day: "Fitting Farming Into Life at Mogo Farms"**



**Wednesday, Sept. 4 | 3-5 p.m. | Mount Pleasant, IA**

*Host: Morgan Hoenig*

Morgan Hoenig started Mogo Farms in 2008 to grow vegetables to feed her community. Over time, her farm has evolved to provide the boundaries and flexibility she needs to accommodate an off-farm job and other responsibilities. For Morgan, flowers have been the key to flexibility and profit on her farm.

[Plan to attend this event](#) to learn more about how Morgan has built a farm that supports her life, not the other way around.

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**Upcoming PFI events**

*All events listed in Central Time.*

**Aug. 27: Field Day – [Getting Started With Chestnuts](#)**

*Host: Elana Gingerich*  
9-11 a.m. | Parnell, IA

**Sept. 1: Field Day – [Mindful Growth at Sweet Season Farm](#)**

*Hosts: Carly & Ethan Zierke*  
4-6 p.m. | Calmar, IA

**Sept. 3: Field Day – Transitioning Ground and Changing Generations**

*Hosts: Matt & Jocelyn Vermeersch, Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman*  
10 a.m.-Noon | Red Oak, IA

**Sept. 13: Field Day – Equitable Land Access and Culturally Relevant Vegetable Production at Feed Iowa First’s Wanatee Farm**

*Host: Feed Iowa First*  
8-11 a.m. | Marion, IA

**Sept. 15: Field Day – Diversifying the Farm by Integrating Pastured Poultry With Tree Fruit and Berries at Solstice Farm + Paha Cider Co.**

*Host: Mark Westbrook*  
2-4 p.m. | Waverly, IA

**Sept. 20: Field Day – Developing Infrastructure on a Diversified Farm One Project at a Time at Brun Ko Farm**

*Hosts: Nathan & Emily Paulsen*  
4-6 p.m. | Exira, IA

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**Friends of PFI events**

**Aug. 28: Field Day – Wholesale Organic Vegetable Production with Organic Valley**

*Hosted by: Iowa Organic Association*  
Noon-3 p.m. | Decorah, IA

**Aug. 29: Field Day – Seed Savers Exchange Facility and Farm Tour**

*Hosted by: Iowa Organic Association*  
9 a.m.-Noon | Decorah, IA

**Sept. 11: Field Day – Midwest Mechanical Weed Control Field Day**

*Hosted by: The Land Connection*  
8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. | Lafayette, IN

**Sept. 28: Field Day – Cultivating Resiliency through Intergenerational Collaboration - Tour of Organic Greenhouse, Straw Bale House, and Farmer Panel**

*Hosted by: Iowa Organic Association*  
Noon-3 p.m. | Atlantic, IA

[View our events calendar](#)

**Contact our team**

**Jacqueline Venner Senske**  
*Senior Horticulture Education Coordinator*

**Natasha Hegmann**  
*Senior Horticulture and Local Foods Coordinator*

[jacqueline.venner.senske@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:jacqueline.venner.senske@practicalfarmers.org)

[natasha.hegmann@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:natasha.hegmann@practicalfarmers.org)

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