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Agritourism, specialty crops will be highlights of two Practical Farmers of Iowa field days – Sept. 4, in Mount Pleasant and Donnellson – RSVPs requested

MOUNT PLEASANT and DONNELLSON, Iowa — As more consumers express interest in local food and agriculture, adding specialty crops or agritourism opportunities to a farm can be a profitable way to diversify and cash in on a growing market sector. To bring more attention to these opportunities, Practical Farmers of Iowa is hosting two related field days on **Wednesday, Sept. 4, at 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.** at Mogo Organic Farm in Mount Pleasant and Harvestville Farm in Donnellson, located about 22 miles apart.

The field days are being held in tandem to highlight strategies related to agritourism, specialty crops and related topics. Both events are free and open to the public. Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m. at Harvestville Farm. While you don't have to attend both events, they were planned to complement each other. RSVPs are appreciated for the lunch. Please reply to Lauren Zastrow at lauren@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661 by Monday, Sept. 2.

Event #1: The first event – “Collaboration as a Beginning Farmer Strategy” – will take place at Mogo Organic Farm, run by Morgan Hoenig, and will focus on growing specialty crops, unique collaborations and efforts to build an agritourism and retail barn featuring a walk-in cooler, Coolbot and vegetable preparation and retail areas. The event is sponsored by Iowa State University's Alliance for Cooperative Business Development. The farm is located at 2542 Iowa Ave., about 1 mile south of Donnellson. Look for two high tunnels and a large, brown barn.

Morgan, who has been farming since 2007, grows vegetables and flowers on 3 cultivated acres and wild-harvests on another 100 acres nearby, in addition to raising bees. She is also a current PFI Savings Incentive Program enrollee who is being mentored by Adam and Julie Hohl of Harvestville Farm. Recently, Morgan helped launch a three-farm marketing collaboration that resulted in Green Share Organic CSA as well as a shared-use equipment research project. In addition to providing an overview of the CSA and how it works, other topics will include: high tunnel production for late-summer and winter crops; vegetable land conversion and improvement with cover crops; getting started in agritourism; and specialty crop machinery sharing.

“Collaboration on the CSA has worked because so far, my farm has been a one-woman project,” Morgan says. “I got to the point where I realized I couldn't do so many different crops all myself. With Green Share CSA it's been 100 percent better. Earlier this spring we were all going to plant peas, but the other two farms had a lot more rain than I did and couldn't plant. But I still had peas, so we were still able to have peas in the CSA boxes.”

Additional speakers at Morgan's field day will include: Linda Naeve, ISU Extension value-added ag specialist; Georgeanne Artz, ISU Department of Economics; Laurie Roberts, of Long Creek Acres Organic in Ainsworth and one of Morgan's farm collaborators; and Lori Graber, of Providence Organics in Crawfordsville, and the third farm collaborator.

Event #2: The second event – “Dissecting the Specialty Farm Experience” – will take place at Harvestville Farm, run by Kathy Hohl, her son Adam Hohl and daughter-in-law Julie, and will explore the Hohl family's diverse on-farm strategies that integrate agritourism, value-added products and specialty crop production. The farm is

located at 1977 Iowa Route 2, about 2 miles east of downtown Donnellson on the north side of the road. The field day is sponsored by Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Lee County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Women, Food and Agriculture Network.

Topics covered will include: hosting field trips and business groups; liability and insurance issues; agritourism marketing methods; value-added practices; adding specialty crops to a row-crop operation; labor, economics and marketing efforts past and present; and planting techniques, insect control and harvest methods.

Guests can tour the Retail Barn with sales floor, play area, educational area and corn maze, as well as a design area where visitors can create wreaths, harvest baskets, scarecrows, birdhouses and more. The day will also feature a wagon ride tour of the fields that include 35 acres of pumpkins, squash and hard-shell gourds spanning more than 100 varieties, and attendees will hear the specifics of creating a destination farm and managing it over time.

“We’ll be glad to talk about what has worked for us, and what has not, how we have gradually added what we have, and our plans for additional venues and activities in the future,” Adam says, adding that “running a specialty farm takes a lot of hard work and dedication. There’s a big learning curve.”

Harvestville Farm is part of a fifth-generation family farm in southeast Iowa. A few years after converting a portion of their 700-acre row crop farm, the Hohl family now manages 45 acres of specialty crops and rents the remainder out.

Practical Farmers of Iowa’s 2013 field day season features more than 40 field days around Iowa. All field days are open to the public, and most are free to attend. For the entire field day schedule, visit www.practicalfarmers.org or call the PFI office at (515) 232-5661 to request a 2013 Field Day Guide.

Practical Farmers of Iowa 2013 field days are supported by several sustaining and major sponsors, including: Albert Lea Seed; Bio Till Cover Crops of Saddle Butte Ag; Calcium Products, Inc.; CROPP Cooperative of Organic Valley / Organic Prairie Family of Farms; Gateway Market; Featherman Equipment; Grain Millers, Inc.; Green Light Renewable Services; Harvest Innovations; Klinkenborg Aerial Spraying, Inc.; the Iowa Beef Center; Iowa Food Systems Council; Iowa Learning Farms; Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach; the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU; Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA); Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES); the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT); USDA North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE); Platinum Supplemental Insurance; SunRackSolar; and the Wallace Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU.

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Founded in 1985, Practical Farmers of Iowa is an open, supportive and diverse organization of farmers and friends of farmers, advancing profitable, ecologically sound and community-enhancing approaches to agriculture through farmer-to-farmer networking, farmer-led investigation and information sharing. Farmers in our network produce corn, soybeans, beef cattle, hay, fruits and vegetables, and more. For additional information, call (515) 232-5661 or visit www.practicalfarmers.org.

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