



working together, always learning

the Practical Farmer

A quarterly publication of Practical Farmers of Iowa

Vol. 32, No. 1 | Winter 2016



**RESEARCH
EDITION!**

On the cover



Rob Faux, Lauren Zastrow, Neo Mazur and Vickie Arkema take a walk in the woods near Montour during the CSA workshop, which took place Feb. 5-6.

FIELD CROPS

The Art and Science of Cover Crops

6

HORTICULTURE

Behind the Research: What Drives a Cooperators' Project?

8

LIVESTOCK:

Sheep Dairying: Pioneering a New Niche in Iowa

12

In this issue

OTHER FEATURES:

- ➔ Meet the SIP Class of 2017 **4**
- ➔ Annual Conference Photos **14**
- ➔ 2015 Cooperators' Meeting Recap **26**

In This Issue

features

4 NEXT GENERATION :: SIP CLASS OF '17; EVERYTHING BUT THE LAND

Meet the newest enrollees in PFI's Savings Incentive Program; then read about one beginning farmer's efforts – and obstacles – to realize his farming dream.

6 FIELD CROPS :: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COVER CROPS

Jack and Marion Boyer have embraced on-farm research as a prime way to learn how to make cover crops work on their farm.

8 HORTICULTURE :: WHAT DRIVES A COOPERATORS' PROJECT?

We often hear the results of PFI on-farm research – but what's the back story? Read why three cooperators chose to undertake a project – and to collaborate on the process.

10 FARM TRANSFER :: LEGACY LETTER

Lisa French shares her memories of and hopes for her family farm in her farm legacy letter.

12 LIVESTOCK :: SHEEP DAIRYING – A NEW NICHE IN IOWA

Two PFI farm families are taking advantage of a market opportunity and pioneering sheep dairy enterprises in Iowa.

14 SPECIAL: 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE :: THE STORY IN PHOTOS

See some of the special moments and highlights from this year's annual conference.

18 SPECIAL: PFI LEADERS :: THE STATS

Get a glimpse of the many ways PFI members are stepping forward to serve, and meet some of these member-leaders.

20 FRIENDS OF FARMERS :: NON-FARMERS PLAY KEY ROLE IN SUPPORTING FARMERS

Non-farmers are a key link to forging stronger farms and communities. In this article, PFI farmers weigh in on different ways non-farmers can actively support farmers.

22 SMALL GRAINS :: DETAILS MATTER

When it comes to raising small grains successfully, management matters. Read some tips shared during the small grains short course.

24 ENERGY :: SOLAR POWER FITS "TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE"

Read about Tom and Maren Beard's recent experience with adding solar power to their farm.

26 COOPERATORS' MEETING :: RECAP

Read Jon Bakehouse's remarks, and see project ideas and photos from the 2015 meeting.

departments

3 TRANSITION COMMITTEE NOTE

25 YOUTH MEMBER BOOK REVIEW

"Tops & Bottoms"

– Read comments by Logan Erwin, Sadie Jimenez, and Cora and Margaret Lipes

28 PFI NEWS

30 WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

30 CALENDAR :: FEB. – APRIL

31 JOIN PFI

We love to hear from you! Please feel free to contact your board members or staff.

DISTRICT 1 (NORTHWEST)

Nathan Anderson
400 Locust St., P.O. Box 14
Aurelia, IA 51005
(515) 708-5199
n8andy@gmail.com

DISTRICT 2 (NORTH CENTRAL)

Wendy Johnson – Vice-President
2038 March Ave
Charles City, IA 50616
(562) 852-7044
207wendy@gmail.com

DISTRICT 3 (NORTHEAST)

Ann Franzenburg – Secretary
6925 19th Ave.
Van Horne, IA 52346
(515) 928-7690
eafra@netins.net

DISTRICT 4 (SOUTHWEST)

Mark Peterson – President
2311 N Ave.
Stanton, IA 51573
(712) 370-4004
markpete@myfmc.com

DISTRICT 5 (SOUTHEAST)

Ann Cromwell
3303 240th St.
Williamsburg, IA 52361
(319) 668-8248
anniowa@speedconnect.com

AT-LARGE FARMERS

Tyler Franzenburg
6915 15th Ave.
Keystone, IA 52249
(319) 721-2176
tfranzenburg@hotmail.com

Vic Madsen

2186 Goldfinch Ave.
Audubon, IA 50025
(712) 563-3044
vcmadsen@iowatelecom.net

Mark Quee

1951 Delta Ave.
West Branch, IA 52358
(319) 530-3782
farm@scattergood.org

David Rosmann

1038 St. 35th Ave.
Omaha, NE 68105
(612) 219-7396
davidrosmann@hotmail.com

Kurt Van Hulzen

2397 Wadsley Ave.
Sac City, IA 50583
kurtvh@netllc.wb.net

AT-LARGE FRIENDS OF FARMER

Gail Hickenbottom – Treasurer
810 Browns Woods Dr.
West Des Moines, IA 50265
(515) 256-7876
gchickenbottom@gmail.com

CO-FOUNDERS

Larry Kallem **Sharon Thompson**
12303 NW 158th Ave. Boone, IA
Madrid, IA 50156
(515) 795-2303

PFI STAFF

For general information and staff connections, call (515) 232-5661. Staff extensions are listed in parentheses.

All email addresses are
@practicalfarmers.org

Erica Andorf (303)

Office Manager
erica@

Sarah Carlson (305)

Midwest Cover Crop Research Coordinator
sarah@

Steve Carlson (308)

Beginning Farmer and Program Associate
steve@

Meghan Filbert (309)

Livestock Coordinator
meghan@

Stefan Gailans (314)

Research and Field Crops
Director
stefan@

Suzi Howk (301)

Finance and Benefits Manager
suzi@

Tamsyn Jones (311)

Communications Specialist
tamsyn@

Liz Kolbe (313)

Horticulture Coordinator
liz@

Nick Ohde (306)

Research and Media Coordinator
nick@

Teresa Opheim
Farm Transfer Director
teresa@

Julie Wheelock (304)
Beginning Farmer Director
julie@

Sally Worley (310)
Executive Director
sally@

Lauren Zastrow (312)
Membership and Event Assistant
lauren@

the Practical Farmer

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership, and helps keep farmers and friends of farmers in touch with one another through informative articles on relevant farming topics, current on-farm research, upcoming events and other news of interest.

Newsletter Editor: Tamsyn Jones

(Back issues are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, articles may be reprinted or adapted if credit is given. Clippings and notice are appreciated).





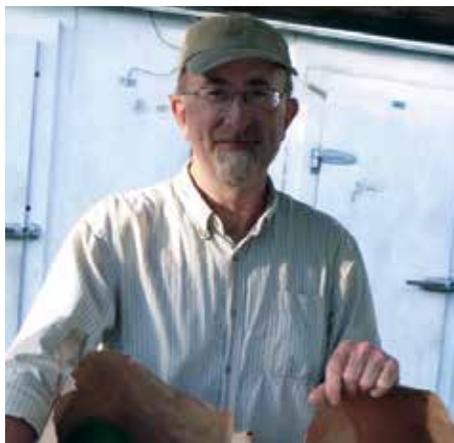
Let the Next Chapter Begin

Here in Iowa, the sun is on its way back to us. We feel it in the lengthening days, and in the activities underway on farms. Farmers are making their planting and nutrient plans, placing seed orders, recruiting CSA members and deciding their livestock birthing plans. Change is also in the air at the Practical Farmers office.

At our 2016 annual conference, Practical Farmers of Iowa celebrated its 30th anniversary. Thirty years of farmer-to-farmer networking, education, research and environmental stewardship. Thirty years of change on farms in the Midwest and 30 years of change within Practical Farmers as it has adapted to meet the needs of members. For the last 10 of those 30 years, PFI was very fortunate to have Teresa Opheim serve as executive director. Teresa has helped guide the organization toward a very stable, sustainable future. Practical Farmers of Iowa thanks Teresa for the many hours of hard work, sweat, tears and laughter it has taken to fulfill her role as executive director.

Early in 2015, Teresa notified the Practical Farmers board of directors that it was time for a change: It was time for PFI to find a new leader to carry it onward into its next phase of life as an organization. Practical Farmers' Transition Committee has been working the past several months to search for the next executive director. We were looking for someone who embraced the concept of a farmer-led, farmer-focused organization that envisions an agriculture of diverse farms, healthy food and vibrant communities.

I am very pleased to announce that the board of directors has unanimously selected Sally Worley to serve as the next executive director of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Sally has worked at Practical Farmers for more than eight years, where she has earned a reputation for being farmer-focused, successful in fundraising and passionate about working to fulfill Practical Farmers' mission to strengthen farms and communities through farmer-



led investigation and information-sharing. Since joining the Practical Farmers staff, Sally has steadily advanced in the organization, most recently serving as operations director. Many of you have met or worked with Sally already.

Sally brings, and instills in others, deep passion for an agriculture based on diverse farms – diverse sizes of operations, scopes of farm enterprises and ecological habitats. She brings a clear understanding of PFI's role to serve its members by listening to

them and using their guidance to shape research priorities and areas of focus. She also practices an ethic of care for staff, accountability to supporters and leadership in setting a path forward.

Teresa will remain on the PFI staff, as the Farm Transfer Program director, but she will be based in Minneapolis. We are excited to begin the next phase of our work at Practical Farmers, and to have Sally as the new executive director. We look forward to the challenges and rewards that will be the next chapter of Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Thank you for your continued support of Practical Farmers of Iowa!

Sincerely,

– **Tim Landgraf**
Chair, Practical Farmers of Iowa Executive Director Transition Committee

About Your New Executive Director

- Sally has worked at Practical Farmers of Iowa for eight-plus years, and was a member for four years prior to employment
- She has served previously as communications director, next generation and horticulture director, deputy director and operations director
- Sally is a lifetime member of Practical Farmers of Iowa
- She was chosen by unanimous decision by PFI Board of Directors after an open search
- Sally lives in Grimes with her husband, Chris, and three children, Maya (11), Mesa (9) and Wyatt (6)
- She is an avid fiction reader, enjoys live music, cooking for houseguests, traveling and spending time outdoors.



“I am honored and excited to serve as Practical Farmers’ next director, and I am thankful for such fulfilling work, with the best group of members and staff in existence!”

Meet the Savings Incentive Program *Class of 2017*



Dani Bice
Cherokee



Daniel Heldt
Granger



Ta Kaw Htoo
West Des Moines



Peter Kerns and Natasha Hegmann
Elkport



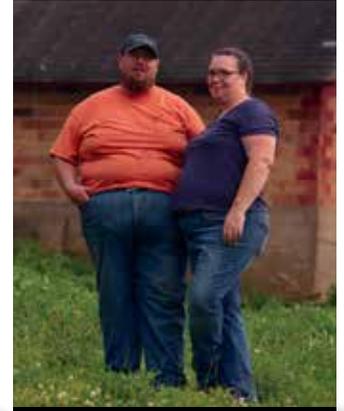
Nick Koster and Jennifer Vasquez-Koster
Tama



Jennifer Miller
Waukee



Amber Mohr and Jeremy Hall
Avoca



Jim and Caite Palmer
Castalia



Caleb and Jacqueline Shinn
Osceola



Jacob Spece
Independence



Scott Yahnke and Ali Clark
Crescent



Susan Young
Iowa City

Learn More

View profiles of Savings Incentive Program Class of 2017 members at:
practicalfarmers.org/member-priorities/beginning-farmers/savings-incentive-program

Everything but the Land

Overcoming the biggest beginning farmer obstacle

by Sally Worley

Eric Bryden has known for years that he wants to farm. His dream is to continue the more than century-old Bryden family tradition of dairying by operating a grazing dairy, and he plans to develop additional enterprises that complement a grass-based dairy, such as pastured pigs or orcharding.

Eric has been an active aspiring farmer since 2010, seeking out opportunities to learn the trade, as well as fleshing out his business vision. He is currently participating in the apprenticeship program offered by Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship, a Wisconsin-based organization that connects aspiring dairy graziers with master graziers. He has participated in Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers, as well as many online and in-person farm-related classes. He has interned and worked on multiple farms, developed a business plan and is building savings to put toward his farm. While he has secured the training and education he needs to succeed, he's missing one important detail – farmland.

Eric's barrier, land access, is one of the most common obstacles for beginning farmers.

Eric and his family recently moved to Cedar Falls. His wife is a midwife at a Waterloo hospital; she loves her job, and the family just purchased a house. Eric's land goal is two-fold: Find land as soon as possible to start farming, and secure a long-term lease or purchase land within 30 miles of Waterloo within two years.

"My hope is for the near future, to find some acres to rent or lease within 10 or 15 miles of Cedar Falls," Eric says. "Ideally, I would like 80 acres with facilities so I can start building my dairying herd."



Eric Bryden milking goats

Eric realizes this vision – 80 acres with facilities that close to Cedar Falls – might be unrealistic. "I ultimately want to farm, and am adaptable to change to make that happen. If I can access only 5 or 6 acres, I would bite on that to be able to start raising some heifers and other meat animals."

Eric's long-term vision is "to have a grazing dairy with a relatively small herd, big enough to support itself but not so big I can't handle it myself." He also says he wants hired labor to be a "nicety, not a necessity," and foresees milking between 30 and 60 cows, though he adds that "some have told me I will need to milk 70 to 80 to be able to sell milk into certain markets." To be able to graze his dairy herd and have some side ventures, Eric would love to secure 100 to 200 acres. "The great thing about grazing is the land doesn't have to be pancake flat. I am not worried about corn suitability," Eric says. "My primary goal is to find land that is good for grazing. Other goals are land that is good for my boys to explore, as well as some workable ground to produce hay and small grains."

Eric prefers to own land in the long-run, so he can have full control over decision-making, build equity – and so he can one day pass it on to his children, if they are interested. If he cannot find land to purchase, he is open to a long-term lease.

Eric has started actively searching for land. He is registered on FindAFarmer, Practical Farmers' website that helps connect landowners with beginning farmers seeking a place to farm. He has driven around the rural fringes of Cedar Falls: "I have stopped and asked people with pasture and fenced land on several occasions about potential land to rent in the area. The people I've talked with are running animals right now, and didn't know many other farmers or landowners in the area." Eric is also posting interest on Craigslist and at the local feed store.

If you have tips or suggestions for Eric, please let him know! He can be reached at ejbryden@gmail.com. ■

The Art and Science of Cover Crops

Boyers use on-farm research to refine their knowledge

by Nick Ohde

Jack and Marion Boyer farm corn and soybeans near Reinbeck, and work hard to take good care of the land that's been passed down to them. "Part of our farm is a Century Farm with some of the finest soils in the world, and I want to preserve that quality," Jack says. "My father-in-law said many times that he received this farm in good condition and wanted to pass it on in as good or better condition. We agree and believe we have the same responsibility."

Over the past few years, cover cropping has become an important tool in helping them carry out that work. Beyond helping the Boyers with their long-term goal of protecting the soil from erosion, they are discovering how they can use cover crops to become more profitable and protect water quality.

The Boyers first started planting cover crops a few years ago, after attending a conference on the subject.

Since then, they have become lifetime members of Practical Farmers of Iowa and embraced its mission to strengthen farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing. Jack views on-farm research as a supplement to research conducted at universities. "A properly conducted on-farm trial can provide valuable information in a situation that more nearly represents the producer's world."

He says if proper setup and protocols are followed, on-farm research fills an important niche: "It can be conducted over a wider range of conditions, and you can have plots that cover larger acreages, soil variation and environments than the university can afford to undertake."

On-farm research can provide data on both profitability and environmental performance. In studies conducted with PFI last year, Jack gained valuable knowledge about managing cover crops to contribute more organic material to the soil and reduce nitrate loss. He also gained insights into areas he hadn't planned on studying. While examining seeding and termination date, he began noticing cereal rye's ability to control problematic weeds – particularly waterhemp and marestail. Reflecting on this observation, Jack says, "By conducting on-farm trials, you may be able to observe outcomes that were not observed or reported in university or industry trials,

because that was not the subject of their investigation."

Researching Cover Crops in Seed Corn at the Boyer Farm

Quality of research is important, however. Jack says that before deciding on a cover crop or thinking about a research trial, you need to determine your goals: "My main goals for planting cover crops are building organic matter; reducing erosion and capturing residual nutrients after the cash crop to have available for the following crop; and reducing nutrients leaving the field by leaching or surface runoff." For him, winter cereal rye works best to accomplish these goals, so much of his on-farm research focuses on better understanding how management of cereal

rye affects soil organic matter, and soil and nutrient loss.

Study #1: "Effect of Seeding Date on Cover Crop Performance"

Jack raises seed corn for DuPont Pioneer, and is concerned about the impact seed corn production could have on his soils if not properly managed. "In seed corn production, there is very little residue returned to the soil," he says. "It can be degrading to the soil, particularly to the organic matter." However, planting cover crops in that system could turn the potential liability into a benefit. To raise seed corn, farmers must detassel female corn rows and then remove the male rows. This allows more sunlight to reach the soil surface, potentially allowing seed corn farmers to successfully aerial-seed and establish a cover crop earlier in the year than those raising corn or soybeans for grain.

"I had read some of the studies showing the benefits of establishing the cover crop earlier – such as that it had more growth before frost and therefore would be in a better position to produce more biomass in the spring, and to provide more cover for the spring rains and nutrient capture," Jack says. DuPont Pioneer agreed to cooperate, so Jack worked with Practical Farmers staff to design a study examining

▼ **Strips of cereal rye versus no cover at the Boyer farm in early May 2015.**



the effect of seeding date on cover crop performance.

For this study, conducted in fall 2014 and spring 2015, Jack investigated three cereal rye seeding dates in his seed corn field: Aug. 19 (early aerial), Aug. 29 (late aerial) and Sept. 25 (drill). The study also included a control treatment with no cover crop. To determine how the cover crop performed, Jack and PFI assessed soil characteristics and the cover crop's above-ground biomass in late fall 2014 and spring 2015.

Notable results include:

- The two aerial seedings in August 2014 resulted in more cover crop growth in fall 2014 and spring 2015 compared to the drill seeding in September.
- In fall 2014, soil nitrate concentrations were lower in the two aerial seeding treatments compared to the drill seeding date and no-cover treatment.
- In spring 2015, all cover crop treatments reduced soil nitrate concentration compared to the no-cover treatment.

Jack's findings are consistent with results of numerous university studies showing that cover crops reduce nitrate loss. Nitrates are produced naturally by soil microbes in the spring and fall when conditions are warm and wet. But corn and soybean cropping systems are out of sync with this microbial process. Plants aren't actively growing at those times of year, so there's no nitrate demand and available nitrogen is susceptible to being leached out and lost to waterways. Michael Castellano, with the Agronomy Department at Iowa State University, says cover crops work because they fill that void: They add an actively growing plant that can take up the nitrate, thus reducing the risk for loss.

In addition, grabbing that leftover nitrogen saves money. "From a selfish standpoint, I paid for the nitrogen and I don't want it to leave the field," Jack says, adding that a broader interest is the effect on leaching and water quality. "By capturing the nutrients and having them available for future cash crops, it's a win-win – better for water quality, and it potentially reduces my input costs."

"I believe that a properly conducted on-farm trial can provide valuable information in an environment that more nearly represents the producer's world."

– JACK BOYER



Jack explains that, while less nitrate was present in the soil, much of that nitrogen was captured by the cover crop. Based on local fertilizer prices, he figures that the nitrogen in the cover crop was worth \$29 to \$37 per acre. "This will pay for this cover crop. For me, as a farmer, this was one of the most important observations."

Study #2: "Cereal Rye Cover Crop Termination Date Ahead of Soybeans"

In addition to studying cereal rye seeding dates, Jack conducted a second trial looking at cereal rye termination dates ahead of soybeans. For this study, Jack was one of three PFI farmers involved (the other two were Bob Lynch of Gilmore City and Jeremy Gustafson of Boone).

Participants wanted to give the rye more time to grow and produce more biomass in the spring by delaying cover crop termination until soybean planting. They hoped this increased biomass production would improve its ability to scavenge nitrates and contribute organic material to the soil upon termination. To examine this, Bob, Jeremy and Jack compared early termination dates that are currently more common for cover crop farmers (nine to 14 days prior to planting) to late termination dates (one day prior to one day after planting) for cereal rye ahead of soybeans.

Notable results include:

- Jeremy and Jack saw no difference in soybean yields between early and late termination dates. Bob saw a small reduction with late termination.

- Bob and Jack noted that cereal rye residue in the late termination treatment persisted through the soybean growing season, holding soil in place and reducing weed pressure.

In addition, Jack and Jeremy noticed a big difference in cereal rye biomass between termination dates: Jeremy measured 2,500 pounds per acre more biomass in the late termination date than the early date. Jack estimates he saw about twice as much biomass with the late date. Because of that increased biomass's ability to suppress weeds, Jack was able to eliminate a sprayer pass, which he estimates saved him about \$40 per acre.

The full text of both on-farm research reports – "Effect of Seeding Date on Cover Crop Performance" and "Cereal Rye Cover Crop Termination Date Ahead of Soybeans" – is available at practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/research-reports.

In the future, Jack says he plans to expand his cover crop research to look at establishment and termination dates, as well as new species and mixes. ■

Do you want to participate in on-farm research with Practical Farmers? Contact Stefan Gailans, research and field crops director, at stefan@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

Behind the Research: What Drives a Cooperator's Project?

by Liz Kolbe

In 1987, 10 farmers completed research projects through Practical Farmers' budding Cooperators' Program. By 2015, 246 different farmers had completed research projects, with topics in 2015 ranging from apple cider vinegar in hog diets to methods for starting pepper seedlings. How do these projects come to be? And why do farmers choose to share their data?

To elucidate some answers, I followed up with three fruit and vegetable farmers who participated in a 2015 on-farm research project on cucumber enterprise budgets: Ann Franzenburg of Pheasant Run Farm, Emma Johnson of Buffalo Ridge Orchard and Jan Libbey of One Step at a Time Gardens.

An enterprise budget examines the profitability of a single crop or market. For this project, the farmers disclosed their annual expenses, revenue, yield, sale prices, growing practices and a detailed labor breakdown for their cucumber crop. This data, provided in an Excel workbook, was then analyzed by PFI staff and published in a Practical Farmers research report (the six-page report is available on the Practical Farmers' website http://bit.ly/pfi_horticulture).

Where did this project come from? All the research questions tackled by PFI's farmer-cooperators are developed by the farmers themselves. At the 2014 Cooperators' Meeting, Ann and Emma were drawn into a conversation about farm profitability, which they soon abandoned in favor of a spirited and good-humored discussion about their greenhouse and high tunnel crops – particularly the labor required for tomatoes and cucumbers. Whose system was more efficient? Whose was more profitable?

Studying those questions would be a challenge, because the three farmers (Jan



► Emma Johnson (center), of Buffalo Ridge Farm, staffs her farmers market table.

was on board) grow different varieties – one grows Marketmore, another Tyria, a third Tasty Jade and Taurus – and favor different production structures and methods. For instance, Ann uses a heated greenhouse while Emma uses an unheated high tunnel, and Jan grows these crops outside. Different trellis systems are used – string versus mesh versus no trellis – and each farmer sells with different marketing strategies.

Instead of each experimenting with the other's production method, Ann, Emma and Jan decided to share an enterprise budget for cucumbers. This would give them good baseline data about their own cucumber enterprise profitability and labor

efficiency, and would supply a common platform for comparison. It would also give other producers a glimpse into how cucumber production profitably fits into the production systems of three different farms.

Ann, Emma and Jan recognized the value of the enterprise budget data to their own farms. Thus, their first research priority was gaining a better understanding of their own cucumber production and marketing expenses and finding places where efficiency in costs and labor could be improved.

Collaboration and Conversation

Since each could have completed an enterprise budget on her own, this begs the question: Why do it together? Collaboration helps, they all said. "Having multiple producers tracking similar data helps open up a conversation," Jan says. "Why did you get that number? What does it say about your system? Why do you manage your system the way you do?" Ann and Emma echoed her sentiment, mentioning the opportunity to compare production methods and efficiencies. A

This co-learning continues to foster the culture of cooperation so inherent to Practical Farmers of Iowa.

– JAN LIBBEY

third reason? Accountability, they said. Knowing others are involved in the project makes you more accountable for following through on data collection.

"And," Ann adds, "a great benefit of doing research with PFI – someone else crunches the numbers."

Deeper Insights

Curious how much time Emma spent trellising cucumbers for every pound she sold? About 15 seconds. How much of Jan's labor went toward pest management? Twelve percent. Who netted the highest earnings per square foot? Ann did.

Details like these can easily be found in the research report. Key findings revealed that labor was the biggest expense for all farms (to none of the farmers' surprise). However, the percent of total production costs that labor consumed varied widely by farm: 56 percent for Ann, 78 percent for Emma and 93 percent for Jan. Trellising and pruning were the biggest labor tasks for Ann, while harvesting and packing comprised the largest portion of labor for Emma and Jan.

So who is doing it right? Whose farm is the best? The answer isn't so simple. Things that look problematic to one farmer are sometimes necessary. For example, Ann places an "organic" sticker on each cucumber harvested. The stickers cost 10 cents each, and it takes time to do. An outsider might say "cut the sticker." But for the grocery store where Ann is selling cucumbers, that sticker is what separates her cucumbers from the others – it has to be there. For Jan's cucumber budget, stickers aren't even a factor: She moves most of her cucumbers through CSA boxes, or sells by the pound. Emma does a lot of wholesale marketing, so her biggest change for next year will be adjusting her production to better fit her existing markets.

"I thought it was interesting to see that we were all good at different things, and the things we were good at fit our method of production," Ann says. "For example, at Pheasant Run Farm, we were best at getting the most profit out of our square footage, which is important for growing in the greenhouse. Jan was good at price per pound – which is how she sold cucumbers."

Collaborating on the project helped yield these unique insights. The trio also enjoyed working together, and unanimously agreed they want to record a second year of data, so they can work together fine-tuning their data-collecting and accounting methods, and implementing a few new ideas on their own farms for labor efficiency.



► Jan Libbey (left) and Ann Franzenburg at the 2015 Cooperators' Meeting

Improving Self, Helping Others

It might make sense that Ann, Emma and Jan would prefer collaboration over an individual initiative. But what might seem less obvious at first is why they – and other participants in Practical Farmers' Cooperators' Program – would want to share their data, farm details, and the particulars of their farming practices and strategies with others.

"It was interesting to see that we were all good at different things, and the things we were good at fit our method of production."

– ANN FRANZENBURG

Ann, Emma, Jan and other cooperators say that one of the quickest ways to get feedback and improve their farming practices is to show areas where they need help, with specific examples of what they've tried in the past. PFI farmers want to improve their own practices, and they also want to help others succeed. Cooperator projects expedite the process of sharing both successes and areas in need of improvement.

For example, during the breaks at the Cooperators' Meeting, farmers are glued into conversations discussing alternative practices and modifications based on what they've seen in the presentations and reports. Specifically for the cucumber

enterprise budget, Ann says she got a helpful time-saving tip about string-trellising from Jill Beebout. Without open sharing of detailed labor accounting, neither would have known that a three-minute conversation could save Ann hours of trellising labor in the spring. By putting their methods and numbers on the table, they got helpful feedback from their peers.

Outside of the Cooperators' Program, the farmers also feel sharing data in this way helps other farmers, and helps to strengthen the Practical Farmers community. Emma hopes other farmers reading the report will learn that cucumbers can be profitable in different systems, and that the enterprise budget can be an important decision-making tool. Ann stresses that there is no "cookie cutter" that can be applied to a farm enterprise. "Producers need to make decisions based on how things fit into their production practices and the flow of their farm," she says. "This information could help them see where and when they need to allocate their time."

For Jan, the benefits of this sharing are even broader: "I hope other farmers will learn to develop their own enterprise budgets, and through the process find all the angles of their operation that can be analyzed. But I also hope it leads to more open sharing of practices. This co-learning continues to foster the culture of cooperation so inherent to Practical Farmers of Iowa." ■

Farm Legacy Letter

by Lisa French

FARM LEGACY LETTER

A Project of Practical Farmers of Iowa

I grew up five miles from where I live now. After I married Jim, we went to college and were out of state for a few years. Jim's dad had some health issues, so we came back to the farm in 1979, even though his parents didn't really encourage it. I worked in town for a while. When we had a family, I decided to stay home for a number of years.

Our two children are both attorneys in Kansas City, and we have one grandchild. I don't think either of our children will farm, but they both have affection for the farm.

When we came back, Jim's family had cattle in a conventional grazing pattern: Take them to the pasture in the spring and pick them up in the fall. They also had wheat, milo and alfalfa. We still have a cow-calf operation, but we've moved to a smaller number of animals grazed throughout the year. We try to incorporate the cattle into all the aspects of the farm, including grazing native grass and other kinds of forage. We market some for grass-fed beef, some commercially and some as replacements. We still have wheat and sorghum that is sold off the farm. We do have hay production, but we think that's about to end. Over the years, we have converted about 100 acres from field crops to grazing.

When I am out on the farm, I see things I don't see when driving down the road: the different animals, the birds, the way the weather rolls through, the changing of the seasons. I especially notice things if I am outside by myself for a long time during the day. The connections we make with the natural world are very strong. All who work on the farm know this.

I remember teaching our kids to drive before they were technically old enough to drive. We would take them to the middle of the field so there was not much they could do wrong! I remember building fence with them and some 4H projects with chickens that they did. Jim has been really good to work with kids raising 4H calves. He still does that, calling them up to see how they're doing.

I have strong memories of walking through the rangeland, trying to identify particular plants. And the weather extremes – incredibly hot days in the summer, on the opposite day extreme cold when you still have to keep equipment going and check on animals. Years of drought, years of flooding.

I remember the smell when we're working the ground, and the smell of hay and the manure in moist air. Cattle have their own particular pleasant scent. All the crops have their own smells. Wild plants, like poison hemlock, have such a strong scent. There is a definite smell in butchering chickens!

We have had lots of wonderful parties on the farm. We were part of a group of farmers who did cooperative chicken butchering and other projects. We all had kids in grade school at the time. I'd like to connect back with that again.

My negative memories are when things fell apart. Machinery breakdowns would happen when we just weren't paying enough attention. One time we were trying to unhitch something, and it flipped



Lisa and Jim French

in the air and flipped Jim as well. He came out okay, but that memory sticks with me. There is such danger in farming! We don't often hear the difficult things about farming when we hear this "praise the farmer" talk.

1993 was an extremely wet year. We were still trying to calve-in a lot. Jim should have been in the hospital, he was so sick. My sister and I were trying to doctor calves, and neither of us is good with needles. We were up to our knees in mud, and walking right out of our boots.

The most positive thing we've done here is improve the soil. We have used holistic management to build conservation on this farm. Our system of moving cattle around is so intricate. We do things differently than most of the neighbors, so we are always searching for the right person to hire for the farm. We'd like someone to take over who recognizes the value of this management system. It would be a shame to lose the improvements in soil and habitat!

We are at an interesting point where we are not ready to leave our other jobs, but we are thinking about how that would work. It produces a lot of thoughts about finances, our land, what farming we're going to do in the future. We are working on non-land investments because a lot of our wealth is tied up in land.

Here is a conversation we need to have with our children: Should we sell part of our land? Will we have to? There may be some need to do so for their stability and for ours. We have just gone through the process of creating a trust. Every dime and piece of property we have could be needed to take care of us until we die. You wonder how all that is going to work out. That hangs over you a bit.

How can we preserve some of what we have done to make a healthy system, while still recognizing we may have financial needs? Maybe the financial stability for us will come when our children, other relatives or another family purchases some of our land. I don't want to see it go to auction where we have no control over to whom it's going to go!

One of the neighbors referred to Jim as "Mr. Hodge Podge." We have a diverse system. We make do with the machinery we have. Maybe that's a good term for us. We want people to remember that we were involved with our community. We partnered with other farmers, both near and far. Integrating the arts – music and literature – with farming has been important to us.

We're probably looked at as outside of the mainstream. People think that we aren't doing things the most efficiently and maximizing profit. We will probably be known more for participation in the wider community rather than just the local farming community.

I am really heartened by the emphasis these days on soil health and cover crops. We've worked a long time on this, but now it's becoming more mainstream. No-till and organic farmers are starting to talk the same things – fewer chemicals. But they are coming at it from different directions. It's really encouraging. Farmers have a sense of stewardship, but for many that can mean a tidy field, lots of tillage and continuous wheat. That is a much different view of stewardship than when you have diverse cropping and bring livestock into the system.

My number-one goal for my farmland is to conserve and improve the soil, increase biodiversity, improve water quality and other conservation. These are the most important things that we can do regardless of who is farming the land.

My goals are also to provide my heirs with financial stability and to provide a farm for a family to farm. This land is probably the primary "thing" that we will leave. I would like to see our heirs or another family tending and conserving it and earning a living. ■

– Lisa French

Sheep Dairying: Pioneering a New Niche in Iowa

Two farms seize on growing interest in sheep's milk products

by Meghan Filbert

Sheep dairying has been practiced throughout the world for centuries. Sheep milk cheese became popular in regions where raising cattle was less practical – in mountains and on islands. Some of the most famous cheeses in the world are made from sheep's milk: Roquefort in France, Manchego in Spain, Pecorino Romano in Italy and Feta in Greece. The first sheep dairy in the U.S. was established in the mid 1980s. Thirty years later, there are about 80 sheep dairies in the U.S. – with Wisconsin, New York and California producing the most milk.

Market Demands

The U.S. imports 73 million pounds of sheep cheese annually, which is over 60 percent of the world's exports; yet we're only making 2 million pounds of cheese domestically. This presents an expansion opportunity for domestic production – and two PFI farm families have taken on the challenge.

The specialty cheese market for American-made cheeses is growing each year, mostly driven by Millennials, who want to know where their food comes from. Jeanne Carpenter, specialty cheese buyer for Metcalfe's Markets in Wisconsin, says more and more consumers are seeking out sheep's milk cheeses, which appeal to the American palate for their sweet flavor, salty finish and rich texture. In a recent talk she gave during the 2015 Dairy Sheep Association of North America Symposium, she said that sheep's milk cheeses have been dubbed the "potato chip of cheeses" – and we all know how Americans love potato chips!

What's Different about Sheep's Milk?

Dairy sheep differ from cows and goats in that they produce a lot less milk – but it's richer in fat and solids, making it ideal for making cheese. Milk from ewes is 7 percent fat and 6 percent protein, compared to 4 percent fat and 3 percent protein in milk from cows and goats. Sheep produce one-half to 1 gallon of milk per day, compared to a cow's 7 or 8 gallons. Because of the high components in sheep milk, it sells for 70 cents to \$1.35 per pound, whereas cow's milk sells for 12 to 35 cents per pound.

Sheep and goat milk both contain smaller fat globules than cow's milk, making

them easier to digest. This is why people with milk sensitivities often find they can consume milk from small ruminants without issues.

The appealing flavor and higher solid composition of sheep's milk is attractive to cheesemakers. Two PFI farm families in Iowa have added dairy sheep to their existing operations in order to produce specialty cheeses for local markets. Janna and Tom Feldman, owners of Doe's and Diva's Dairy, and Lauren and Jacob Petersen, owners of Ewenique Farms, share their stories of how they became the pioneers of sheep dairying in Iowa.

Doe's and Diva's Dairy, Inc. – Honey Creek

"I started milking goats years ago, and recently introduced sheep to diversify my product," says Janna Feldman, farmer and cheesemaker. Janna, her husband Tom, and son Matthew, operate a goat and sheep

dairy in the Loess Hills of southwest Iowa. The dual-species dairy is reflected in the farm name: Doe's and Diva's (she calls sheep divas because they are more difficult to milk than goats).

"The more we milk sheep, the more I want to increase our dairy sheep numbers. Sheep milk has a mild flavor, very different from goat milk," explains Janna, who makes four types of mixed goat and sheep milk cheeses and goat milk body products. "Goat milk has a goaty flavor, and adding sheep milk mitigates that flavor. Sheep milk makes our cheese milder, sweeter and creamier."

Janna's four signature styles of cheese – fresh chevre, a manchego-style, a bloomy rind and traditional feta – can be found at farmers markets and a few natural groceries in and around Omaha. During the winter, when the animals are not milking, she shifts her focus to marketing goat milk soaps and body lotions.

Consumer Education

"At the farmers market, almost every person who commits to tasting a sample of our cheese will purchase some," Janna says. "But people are still apprehensive about trying them." Doe's and Diva's has been approached by several national grocery chains and cheese shops, but Janna feels demand in the Midwest has lagged. "The largest obstacle we face is consumer education," she says. "Once people are

"The more people taste, see, smell and learn about our products, the more willing they'll be to consume sheep and goat cheese."

– JANNA FELDMAN



▲ Left: Janna Feldman adds Urfa pepper to wheels of mixed milk goat and sheep cheese. (Photo by Chad Lebo, Cure Cooking LLC.) Right: Tom Feldman holds goat kids.



▲ Jacob and Lauren Petersen



▲ Jacob Petersen milking a ewe. Lauren and Jacob will milk 20 ewes during the 2016 season.



▲ The Petersens' herd of dairy sheep

educated, the demand will increase." Janna hopes local consumer trends will soon follow those on either coast, where the majority of sheep milk cheeses are sold.

This year, the Feldmans will focus on additional retail opportunities at grocery stores in Omaha, Lincoln, Neb., and Des Moines that are dedicated to selling artisanal products. She will also continue practicing affinage (the aging of cheese) with her manchego-style cheese – which she ages in Templeton Rye whiskey barrels – and with wheels of bloomy rind cheese.

To help educate consumers, Janna plans to participate in collaborative, family-style dinners that showcase local food products from fellow artisans around Omaha. "This may be a slow way to educate," she says. "But the more people taste, see, smell and learn about our products, the more willing they'll be to consume sheep and goat cheese." Doe's and Diva's Dairy is also a stop on the Harvest Spoon Tour, which is a culinary farm cruise in the Loess Hills. "I've started attending Iowa Cheese Guild meetings, am looking into the American Cheese Society conference in Des Moines and will enter our cheese into the state fair."

Ewenique Farms – Knoxville

Lauren and Jacob Petersen's family operates a commercial sheep farm with 1,000 ewes in south-central Iowa. After Jacob graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in dairy science, someone from the Knoxville area jokingly asked if he was going to start milking his meat sheep. This prompted Jacob to research sheep dairy production. Soon after, Lauren says "he got involved in the Savings

Incentive Program, wrote a business plan and contacted Lois Reichert, who lives 3 miles down the road – to ask if she wanted to buy sheep milk from us." Lois is a PFI member who operates Reichert's Dairy Air, a goat dairy and creamery. Lois agreed to purchase the Petersens' fluid milk for \$1 per pound and started incorporating it into her cheese recipes.

Milk Production

Last season, Jacob and Lauren milked 18 East Friesian ewes, two at a time, using a bucket milker and vacuum pump. Ewes were milked twice a day for four months, then once a day during the last six weeks of lactation. Jacob and Lauren found that backing down to once a day milking cut labor in half, while still yielding 80 percent of what they got when milking twice a day.

This coming season, the couple will be milking 20 ewes with the goal of increasing herd size every year. Lauren believes they will see higher milk yields this year as a result of feeding system changes, which stemmed from Lauren conducting her master's degree research on the milking herd: "My research informed us that access to pasture, along with free-choice hay in the barn and grain offered during milking,

results in the highest milk yield and milk components, versus grazing with no hay and grain offered."

With this projected increase in milk production, Lauren and Jacob will produce more milk than Lois can handle in her small creamery. Lois purchases 80 to 90 percent of the Petersens' milk to make cheese, and they want to start making ice cream and yogurt with the rest. "There are no sheep milk ice cream makers in the Midwest, so I see this as a great opportunity to take advantage of a niche market," Lauren says. In the coming years, she and Jacob plan to build a certified facility to process the extra milk and sell at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market, ice cream shops and restaurants around central Iowa.

As the herd grows, Lauren and Jacob will focus on genetic improvement and increasing milk quality. They will also continue to foster their relationship with Lois, who has provided guidance to the couple and to Janna (Lois is Janna's SIP mentor). "Lois' cheeses had great reviews last year, and she does a great job of educating consumers about new cheeses," Lauren says. Hopefully, the combined efforts of these farmers will help the sheep dairy industry in Iowa continue to grow. ■

"There are no sheep milk ice cream makers in the Midwest, so I see this as a great opportunity to take advantage of a niche market."

– LAUREN PETERSEN

If you want to learn more about sheep dairy production, or where you can find the products mentioned in the article, contact Meghan at (515) 232-5661 or meghan@practicalfarmers.org.



Learning...

1). Richard Wiswall's session, "Farming Smarter, Not Harder: Financial Literacy and Business Management," attracted a big crowd.

2). Kerri McKlimen, with Pew Charitable Trusts, has a chance to visit one-on-one with another conference-goer.

3). Mike Nordberg, of North Mountain Farm, gets advice on his orchard plan from Kathy Dice of Red Fern Farm. Kathy helped teach the "Successful Establishment and Management of Orchard Trees" short course.

4). Brian Geerlings of Great Lakes Organic Feed Mill chats with a visitor to his booth.

5). Sarah Gilbert takes notes during a conference session.

6). Conference-goers who attended Wes Jarrell's and Leslie Cooperband's session, "Establishing and Managing a Goat Dairy, Creamery and Farm Restaurant," enjoy samples of goat milk value-added products during the workshop.





...and Networking



1). Cheryl Ness (left), of Thousand Generations Farm, chats with Mary Cory, of Cory Family Farm.

2). Hannah Dankbar (left) chats with Sabina Peters during the regional breakfast meetings.

3). Breaks between sessions provided ample time to network with sponsors and fellow attendees.

4). A conference participant has a chance to speak with presenter Kelly Griffith after the "Living Plants as Solar Collectors" in-depth workshop.

5). Eve Iverson (left) exchanges information with another conference attendee.

6). With more than 960 attendees, PFI's 2016 annual conference broke another attendance record. Creating opportunities and spaces to network is a major feature – and attraction – of PFI conferences.

7). Russ Wischover gets one-on-one time with speaker Janet McNally.

8). Linda Naeve (left) speaks with a visitor to the Iowa SARE booth.



Food and Fellowship... ①

1). Members who attended the PFI Potluck enjoy sampling some of the many food items shared by fellow PFI members.

2). John Bruhler chats with Peter Kerns at the potluck.

3). The Saturday lunch is a prime opportunity to network, converse and build fellowship.



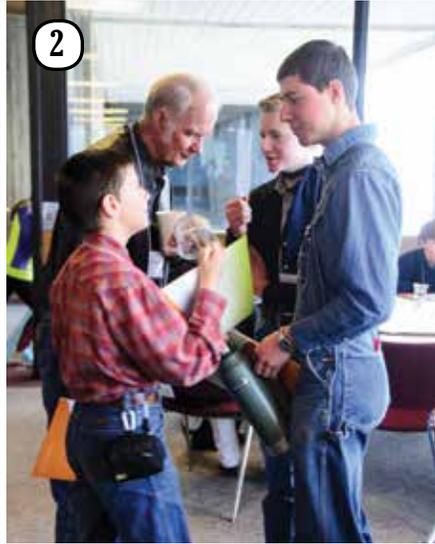
4). Mary Damm (center) speaks with Kayla Koether and Landon Corlett in between sessions.

5). Vance Nimrod (left), one of the 2015 Farmland Owner Award winners, chats with Mark Peterson (right) and another conference attendee.

6). Craig Fleishman and Rick Hartmann chat with a fellow attendee over snacks and beverages during a break.



Family and Friends...



1). Tyler Magnuson keeps up with his children, Mira and Catalpa, at the potluck.

2). Gavin, James and Luke Cory talk with their grandpa, Jim Mathis.

3). Chris Patton (left) visits with a friend.

4). Tom Frantzen (left) and PFI co-founder Larry Kallem enjoy time to catch up with one another during a break in between sessions.

5). Angela Tedesco and George Schaefer enjoy a chance to converse after bumping into one another after the first round of sessions on Saturday morning.

6). Laura Krouse and Francis Thicke catch up, while Christina Klinge and Sarah Carney smile for the camera.

More Than 450 Members Serve as Leaders in 2015

This impressive number is a reflection of the degree to which Practical Farmers members are truly the heart and soul of PFI. Whether sharing their knowledge with fellow farmers and the public, hosting field days, conducting on-farm research, speaking with the media, serving on committees, volunteering at events, serving as mentors or outreach speakers – and more – Practical Farmers of Iowa members demonstrate their dedication to PFI's mission and vision on a daily basis.

THANK YOU to everyone who served as a leader in 2015! While there are more of you than we can fit onto two pages, we'll have the complete list in our 2015 annual report. For now, take a look at these stats!

Leaders at a Glance

111 MEMBERS served on **16 COMMITTEES**



Dennis McLaughlin serves on the Field Crops Steering and Welcoming committees.

- Cooperators' Program Committee → 7
- Energy Committee → 4
- Executive Director Transition Committee → 6
- Farm Transitions Committee → 9
- Farmland Investment Committee → 3
- Field Crops Steering Committee → 11
- Finance Committee → 3
- Horticulture Steering Committee → 10
- Investment Committee → 3
- Livestock Steering Committee → 14
- Nominating Committee → 4
- Policy Committee → 1
- Savings Incentive Program Committee → 7
- State Soil Conservation Committee → 1
- Welcoming Committee → 21

45 MEMBERS served as

Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioners



Jack Knight serves as a SWCD commissioner for Allamakee County. He also spoke at PFI's 2015 annual conference and was featured in the news.

Jean Eells serves as a SWCD commissioner for Hamilton County. She also served as a speaker at PFI's 2015 annual conference.

220 MEMBERS were featured as

Members in the Media

including on **RADIO** and **T.V.**, in **NEWSPAPERS**, **MAGAZINES** and **BOOKS ... and MORE!**

77 MEMBERS served as

3

types of **HOSTS**

- Field Day Host → 67
- Next Generation Potluck Host → 3
- Social Host → 7



Ortrude Dial hosted the "Lamb Production for Wholesale Marketing" field day.



Nate Kemperman hosted the "Establishing On-Farm Pollinator Habitat" field day.



Sophie Ryan served as a social host.



102 MEMBERS served as **4 types of SPEAKERS**

- Annual Conference Speakers → 44
- Cover Crop Speakers → 27
- Farminar Speakers → 28
- Next Generation Retreat Speakers → 3



Steve McGrew served as a cover crop speaker, and was also featured in the media.



Bobbie Gustafson served as a farminar speaker and as a speaker at PFI's 2015 annual conference.

31 MEMBERS served as **Mentors and Trainers**

- Labor4Learning Trainer → 4
- Savings Incentive Program Mentor → 27



Ryan Herman served as both a Labor4Learning trainer and a Savings Incentive Program mentor.

75 MEMBERS served as **On-Farm Research Cooperators** conducting research on **FIELD CROPS, ENERGY LIVESTOCK and HORTICULTURE**



Kirk Den Herder (left) served as an on-farm research cooperator, and also hosted a field day.



Emma Johnson is an on-farm research cooperator, SIP Class of 2015 participant and also served as a farminar speaker.



Denny Vande Brake served as an on-farm research cooperator.

54 MEMBERS served in **2 SAVINGS INCENTIVE PROGRAM CLASSES**



Angelique Hakuzimana is part of the SIP Class of 2016.

- SIP Class of 2015 → 25
- SIP Class of 2016 → 29



Benjamin Barron is part of the SIP Class of 2016.

12 served as **Volunteers**

30 served in **5 types of Support Roles**

- Board of Directors → 12
- Consultants → 2
- Founders → 2
- Leopold Center Rep. → 1
- Staff → 14



Kathy Eastman consults as our conference planner.

Non-Farmers Play Key Role in Creating Stronger Farms, Communities

Farmers weigh in on how non-farmers can be active supporters

by Tamsyn Jones

Practical Farmers of Iowa strives to help farmers learn from each other, become resilient and profitable, and forge strong ties with their wider communities. While serving farmers is the main focus of our work, our mission – strengthening farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing – includes work to help non-farmers connect with and support their local farmers.

But what does that support look like? How can non-farmers in PFI's network better support farmers?

Delora Hade, a friend-of-farmer member, asked those questions in the most recent member survey. To help her find some answers – and start a dialog between farmers and non-farmers – we posed them to members on our email discussion list.

Delora, of Ames, has been a member of PFI since 2003 and believes in supporting local farmers and their efforts to produce healthy food with sustainable practices. In the past, she has tried to support local farmers by enrolling in two different CSAs – but one farm went out of business, and another stopped delivering to Ames. She also organized a farm-to-childcare program at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny, where she works, and tried for two summers to make it work out. But the program was discontinued due to difficulties getting the quantities of items needed.



While she still purchases through Farm to Folk, these experiences have left her unsure how to best support farmers. "I have tried to do what I can in my little world to support sustainable agriculture and local farmers, but it can be a challenge," Delora says.

Delora also has a lot of questions – about farming practices and concepts; different ways farmers market their products; how external forces affect farmers. However, she worries about bothering farmers with all her questions, or taking up time they could be using to network with other farmers or accomplish farm work.

This tension between wanting to understand and support farmers, and uncertainty about where the friend-of-farmer fits in, is what prompted her to ask for help and ideas.

"I've always been interested in farming," Delora says. "I'm a lifelong Iowan. One of my grandfathers was a farmer, and my dad was a big gardener. I think I joined PFI so I could be a better consumer and advocate for farmers. But I feel hesitant asking questions of farmers. What kinds of questions are okay?"

Start a Conversation – And Keep It Going

According to the farmers who responded on the discussion list, any and all questions are okay – vital, in fact, to building the kinds of relationships necessary for a community-based farming system. "We love when people ask us questions," says Tammy Faux, of Genuine Faux Farm near Tripoli. "It strengthens our CSA and gives us courage on bad days, because it lets us know people care."

She adds that forming a fulfilling and successful relationship requires dialog so both sides can understand the others' needs. A non-farmer might be well-intentioned, Tammy says, but if his or her



▲ Tammy and Rob Faux

needs don't quite match with a farmer's production process or schedule, the relationship is unlikely to succeed. On the other side, Tammy says it's easy for farmers to forget that a technique they've been using for a long time – such as integrated pest management – might be a foreign concept to a potential customer.

"It's on both sides to have those conversations. There's no question that's too dumb," she says.

Greg Lipes, of Lipes Family Farm near West Branch, agrees. He believes strong communication between farmers and non-farmers is the bedrock of a longer-term relationship, and a prerequisite before non-farmers can take what he considers the next key support action: investing their food dollars.

"When I say the food-dollar concept is important, I'm presupposing a strong line of communication between the farmer and the non-farmer," Greg says. "How else would the non-farmer know if this was a farm worth supporting?"

On the flip side, while Greg says transparency on the farmer's end is crucial, he adds non-farmers need to realize they have a responsibility to seek the answers they need to make informed choices. "It's part of their job as consumers." Greg and Tammy both advise non-farmers to be brave if they're feeling unsure about a question. In fact, they argue that how a farmer responds can be a good gauge of the relationship's potential.

"If someone is selling you something, they've given you permission to ask them questions," Greg says. "If you get a 'quit wasting my time' vibe, you need to decide if it's worth it to struggle in your relationship with that farmer, or if you need to find another farmer who will openly discuss farm practices with you."

Exert the Power of Your Food Dollar

While Tammy and Greg both agree that starting (and sustaining) a dialog is the foundation for longer-term support, they

diverge on what form of concrete support is best for farmers. For Greg, the power of a consumers' food dollar is so paramount, it's impossible to overstate its importance.

"Spending your money – your food dollars – on farmers you want to support is both the first and last word in how non-farmers can support farmers," Greg says. "There are plenty of other things non-farmers can do, but this is the most powerful. Where you spend your money indicates what you value. It also helps determine what purchasing options will be available to you in the future.

"If you don't buy food from farmers who are using practices you agree with, how will they stay in business? This is why it has been popular to talk about 'voting with your dollars,' because that's exactly what you're doing: You're voting for the business models you want to see succeed into the future."

Rob Faux, also of Genuine Faux Farm, shared a similar sentiment. In a post on his farm blog, he writes that non-farmers can show their support to farmers by paying the asking price for local food products: "Prices are not a random act. A typical farm of our size will ask for prices they feel they need in order to cover appropriate expenses – and hopefully make some profit so we can pay bills, invest in the farm and maybe have a little left over."

He says non-farmers "need to respect that the price was come by honestly," and be willing to pay it. If they and other consumers choose not to pay that price, the farm will stop producing the item in question. "It's a fairly simple situation with simple consequences."

Support Farmers by Speaking Up

Tammy doesn't dispute the power of the food dollar, but thinks non-farmers may be unaware of how much support they can offer simply by speaking up on issues that affect farmers and their ability to make a living – such as on the issue of pesticide drift. "If all residents – especially those who live and drive in rural areas – knew about the rules of chemical application and how to speak up if they have a concern, that would be a support to those of us who farm," she says.

Tammy argues that if non-farmers lent their voices to the debate about drift, it would send a strong signal that pesticide drift is a community-wide issue, rather than the petty gripe of some organic or vegetable farmers.

"As our state is shifting more and more away from agriculture, it becomes easy to say that it's only a handful of farmers who are worried about pesticide drift. But it's not a small issue," Tammy explains. "I hear friends saying 'I'm not going to let my kids go out to play,' or 'They were spraying near the park. Is it safe to go there?' If we make drift a community issue, that increases the number of stakeholders – and then the issue isn't just about how I choose to farm, but how we as a community choose to live."

Lead by Example to Other Non-Farmers

For Wendy Johnson, who operates a diversified crop and livestock farm near Charles City, the force of the food dollar is on par with a non-farmer's potential to set an example and influence others.

"Non-farmers can be very supportive with their dollars – and with their influence and opinions. They are the people asking questions and setting the example that, even though they don't farm, they support farmers," Wendy says. "Others hear those conversations and comments and start to form an opinion of their own, and the domino effect begins. People and marketing are so very influential in changing buying patterns."

Greg agrees, adding that non-farmers can extend the power of their food dollar by using it to help educate others. Imagine the impact, he says, when a customer buys extra meat to share with guests, or a farm gift certificate to give someone. "They are taking their time and money and using it to help me grow my farm business."

Support Your Farmer Over the Long-Term

In addition to the methods of support mentioned, the farmers all emphasized another key way non-farmers can show support: Stick with your chosen farmer (or farmers) over the long-term.

Rob writes that since farmers operating small, diversified farms don't have the security of a regular paycheck, knowing there are customers who regularly and consistently purchase from them – be it a recurring CSA membership, or a few chickens each time a batch is processed – gives him peace of mind. "We thrive when we have some security in knowing there will be consistent purchases," he writes. "Farms



Greg Lipas

"Spending your food dollars on farmers you want to support is both the first and last word in how non-farmers can support farmers."

like ours depend greatly on the investment of a community of buyers, just like any other business."

Greg comments that this kind of loyalty – where a customer sticks with a farmer even through tough times – can elevate the economic power non-farmers hold, while embodying the kind of moral support that makes a local farm a community endeavor, rather than an occasional novelty.

Using the example of a farm that experienced pesticide drift, he asks non-farmers to consider the impact of saying to that farmer "wow, I never realized how tough it is for you out here" – and then showing their support by continuing to buy vegetables there.

For Tammy, achieving this kind of enduring support underscores the central role of forging strong ties between farmers and non-farmers. "Relationships need to be front and center," she says. "Getting back to strengthening communities, that only happens when you have conversations." ■

Non-farmers, what are your thoughts on how friends-of-farmers can help support farmers? What actions do you take? We'd like to hear your views and keep this conversation going! Share your comments with Tamsyn at (515) 232-5661 or tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org

Read more of Rob's thoughts on how non-farmers can support farmers on his blog at bit.ly/Genuinely_Faux_Blog_Tips_for_Non-Farmers

Details Matter When Growing Small Grains

Short course attendees learn they can't skimp on management

by Nick Ohde

On Jan. 21-22, farmers from across the state gathered in Ames to learn about growing small grains crops from industry professionals, researchers and fellow farmers at the "Growing Good Small Grains" short course, just prior to Practical Farmers' 2016 annual conference. The speakers addressed key factors that can affect the success of a small grains crop, such as plant populations, plant protection products and fertilizer needs. Short course attendees learned that, just as with corn and soybeans, paying attention to management details like these can be crucial to achieving good yields and better profits in small grains.

David Weisberger, who studies oat production at Iowa State University, shared survey results from Iowa small grains producers who identified areas where production knowledge was lacking. "The most important infrastructure we're losing over time is knowledge infrastructure – practical things like how to clean small grains and what sieves to use." Earl Canfield, a short course participant from Dunkerton agreed: "I believe it is a lost art in Iowa that needs to be revived for a number of reasons."

Balancing Quantity with Quality

Bruce Roskens of Grain Millers said his company is sourcing more and more oats from Iowa. "We've bought more oats from Iowa in the last year than we did in the previous five years," he told course attendees. But he added that getting grain quality right is important. "When you truly understand your crop's role as a food ingredient, and the process to convert that grain into food, you begin to fully appreciate the specifications and the steps necessary to make quality."

Darren Fehr farms near Mallard and grows organic oats to sell to Grain Millers. He helped teach the short course and said



From left to right: Matt Liebman, Bruce Roskens, David Weisberger, Darren Fehr, Mac Ehrhardt, Al Frederick and Bill Frederick.

harvest method has a big impact on yield and test weight for oats. On his farm, he has switched from swathing oats to direct-combining them, and said he picks up some yield at the cost of losing a little test weight. "I'm out there collecting samples from the first oats I harvest, weighing and adjusting my fan speed accordingly." Turning up fan speed can increase test weight by blowing out light oats, he explained, and can increase grain quality by eliminating insects.

Pest and Disease Management

Mac Ehrhardt of Albert Lea Seedhouse explained that small grains, especially barley, can be a good source of farm-grown feed – if precautions are taken. "Small grains can have levels of vomitoxins high enough to sicken or kill animals," he said, "so the feed always needs to be tested."

Fred Kolb, from the University of Illinois, discussed wheat varieties, as well as fusarium head blight (FHB), known as scab. This disease causes DON (vomitoxin) in grain. Because of this, resistance to FHB should be the main consideration when deciding which wheat variety to plant. Joel Ransom, extension agronomist at North Dakota State University, studies small grains and said that here, too, management details can make a difference. "Planting wheat or barley after soybeans instead of corn in your rotation reduces the likelihood of fusarium head blight," he said, explaining that corn harbors the spores that cause the disease.

A Systems Approach to Small Grains

Small grains are a crucial part of Jefferson farmer Al Frederick's operation. "As long as you can use the whole crop, they're a good crop," said Al, a panelist at the course. "They provide cattle bedding, and we can use the grain however we want." He cautioned that small grains can be "fickle crops in this part of the world," and can take an extra set of skills and patience, but that growing them was worthwhile. "They do us a lot of good," he said.

Matt Liebman of Iowa State University presented the results of his group's Marsden Farm research on the economic and environmental effects of crop rotation. The research shows that three- and four-year rotations improve soil health, water quality and corn yields, all while reducing input costs. "Managing your production costs can be an effective way to improve profitability," he said.

Matt pointed out that extended rotations aren't new, and he explained his research was inspired by the farm system of PFI co-founder Dick Thompson. "The basic agronomy [of extended rotations] is something farmers have been well acquainted with for a long time." ■

Learn more about small grains production – and this short course – at practicalfarmers.org/small-grains

Solar Panels Fit Beard Family's "Triple Bottom Line"

by Nick Ohde

Last autumn, Tom and Maren Beard co-hosted a field day with Tom's parents, Dan and Bonnie, at their family farm – Canoe Creek Dairy – near Decorah, where Tom and Maren recently installed a new solar panel array. The Beard family operates an organic dairy, beef and sheep operation, and completed a whole-farm energy audit early in 2015.

Last year, on New Year's Day, Tom and Maren sat down to set goals for the coming year. One of those goals was looking at the feasibility of installing solar panels on their farm. By mid-May, the panels were installed and producing power. "It was a much quicker turnaround than we had anticipated," Maren says, "but the numbers penciled out and it seemed like a worthwhile investment for us, so we decided to move forward with the project. One of the reasons we moved as quickly as we did is because of the extremely attractive tax credits available that might not have been available in the future."

At the time Maren and Tom were deciding on their solar energy system, the tax credits were set to gradually phase out, starting in 2016. However, Congress recently passed a spending bill that extends the credits through 2019. Farmers can also apply for a Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant to help offset costs. While the Beards' system wasn't big enough to justify applying for this, the REAP grant would pay for 25 percent of a new installation.

The Beards installed solar panels on their farm because it fits well with the family's "triple bottom line," as Maren describes. "We know renewable energy is better for the environment, better for communities and will be better for us financially over time," she says. "We would definitely recommend solar PV (photovoltaic) to other PFI members." Because solar technology is gaining momentum in Iowa and nationally, Maren says it's hard to



"It is pretty fun to turn on the lights in our house, the garden fence, the fan on the grain bin, the washing machine, and to know the electricity is coming from the sun."

– MAREN BEARD

predict what will happen with the federal and state solar tax incentives. "We would encourage anyone thinking about solar PV to take a harder look."

While solar panels have gained in popularity everywhere, interest has particularly increased in the Decorah area – and that means potential customers have many contractors to choose from. The Beards got bids from three, comparing the cost per watt price to determine the lowest bidder. Maren says being able to compare bids – for both cost and configuration – was helpful. "We really enjoyed working with all three contractors to hear their ideas and perspectives and see their quotes," she says. "We would encourage anybody looking to install solar to seek multiple bids whenever possible."

Solar panel installers need at least two years of electricity bills to be able to accurately size a solar PV system, and most electric companies can provide you with usage estimates pretty easily. After consulting with their contractor, Maren and Tom decided on a 4.8 kilowatt system. This size was big enough to cover all their farm and home usage, which they estimate will take about seven years to pay back. After that, the panels will save them \$900 to \$1,200 per year, Maren estimates. Because the panels are rated to last 25 to 30 years, the Beards see it as a sound financial choice.

One thing that makes Tom and Maren's system financially viable is the ability to do net metering, a practice that allows those who produce their own energy to receive full retail credit for the excess energy they produce. Maren explains that in Iowa, solar energy is much more abundant during the summer months than during winter. "This means it's important that we have the ability to roll over our kilowatt credits from month to month and year to year." Beyond the financial benefits, Maren says she and Tom enjoy the fact that their power is now coming from a renewable source: "It is pretty fun to turn on the lights in our house, the garden fence, the fan on the grain bin, the washing machine, and to know the electricity is coming from the sun." ■

Read More

Learn more about solar tax credits and the advantages of installing solar now at these two blog posts:

☉ "Federal Solar Tax Credits Extended Through 2019" – by Nick Ohde

practicalfarmers.org/blog/2015/12/31/federal-solar-tax-credits-extended-through-2019

☉ "Why PFI Farmers Should Go Solar, NOW!" – by PFI member Kayla Koether

practicalfarmers.org/blog/2015/09/23/guest-blog-why-pfi-farmers-should-go-solar-now

PFI Members Weigh in on “Renewable Fuel” During Election Time

by Steve Carlson

A lively and in-depth discussion took place on Practical Farmers' policy discussion list in November, following an opinion article in the "Des Moines Register: written by PFI member Kamyar Enshayan, who also works as director of the Center for Energy & Environmental Education at University of Northern Iowa, in Cedar Falls. In the article – “Renewable Fuel,’ a Term Thrown around Loosely” – Kamyar questioned the accuracy of considering Iowa-grown corn that is converted into ethanol to be a renewable source of fuel.

Kamyar wrote: “Iowans, elected officials and those aspiring for high federal office need to know that there is very little renewable about corn-based ethanol. . . .The everyday processing of ethanol requires vast amounts of coal and natural gas . . . [and] the current process of growing corn causes severe soil erosion and damages water resources of our state.”

On the policy discussion list, Patti Edwardson, of Churdan, emphasized the timeliness of Kamyar's point, saying: “It is a concern in this presidential election year that the candidates understand what renewable fuels mean to the future of soil in Iowa.”

Elaborating on the points he had raised in his article, Kamyar replied: “With few exceptions, soil scientists are pretty much silent, ecologists are not saying much. PFI farmers are not as vocal in local papers as they could be . . . to keep reminding everyone that better ways of treating the land are totally within reach.” Kamyar argued that only by speaking up and presenting “the best of what we know” would it be possible to “change the conversation, change the story of agriculture as commonly understood by the everyday citizens.”

In a response to Kamyar's piece in the Register, the Iowa Renewable Fuels

Association published an opinion piece citing a 2008 U.S. Department of Agriculture report (“2008 Energy Balance for the Corn-Ethanol Industry”) that concluded ethanol energy returns more than twice the fossil energy used to produce it. PFI member Ai Wen, an ecologist at University of Northern Iowa, critiqued the report, saying “in a perfect world where all hypotheses in the report can come true, using corn to produce ethanol might be beneficial. But in reality, what Kamyar talked about in his article are the ugly facts that we have to deal with.”

Francis Thicke, of Fairfield, further questioned the report's assumptions and the extent to which its authors had considered the impacts on soil, water quality and other externalities tied to producing ethanol. “The energy balance calculations of ethanol production depend a lot on how you set the boundary conditions,” Francis explained. “For example, do you consider the energy required to take nitrate out of the drinking water that got into the river from corn ethanol production? What would be the energy requirement to replace the 5.7 tons per acre of soil (average erosion rate for corn in Iowa) for every acre of corn grown to produce ethanol? Then there are other environmental costs, such as eutrophication of Iowa's lakes, and the Dead Zone in the Gulf.”

Dennis Keeney, of Ames, joined the conversation to clarify the difference between Kamyar's argument and that of the Renewable Fuels Association, saying the proponents of ethanol as a renewable fuel are “not willing to ever look at external costs such as groundwater pollution and unsustainable erosion. They are not wired to worry about such things, just to make money.”

Jordan Scheibel, of Grinnell, shared a personal anecdote illustrating another unintended consequence of corn-based ethanol production: its effect on land prices. “Ethanol was at least in part responsible for the boom in corn prices several years ago that drove up land prices and rents, thereby excluding or making it more difficult for young and beginning farmers to



Kamyar Enshayan

access land.” Jordan also pointed out how this boom led many farmers to put their marginal and highly erodible land back into corn production.

As we enter another election cycle, this discussion highlights the important contribution Practical Farmers members can have in shaping the political discourse and influencing political candidates to have conversations about issues that affect Iowa farmers. Through discussions such as this one on PFI's policy list, it's clear our members realize the far-reaching consequences of Iowa's farming practices and are able to articulate the connections between economic, environmental and social issues that often aren't discussed in mainstream channels. Kamyar's article – and the conversation it ignited – illustrates the power members can have in shaping the regional – or even national – dialog when they share their knowledge and stories with the public, and with elected officials. As Kamyar said, “Thanks to PFI members and others, we know what good land stewardship looks like, so that we all can work towards it.” ■

Do you want to participate in discussions like this? Join the PFI policy discussion list by contacting Erica Andorf: erica@practicalfarmers.org or (515)232-5661.

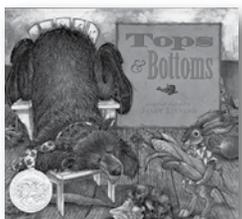
If you'd like help speaking up on an agricultural issue you're passionate about, contact Steve Carlson at steve@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

“Tops & Bottoms”: A Tale of Farming, Consequences and Learning from Mistakes

For this issue, we decided to do something a little different with the book review section. One thing that makes Practical Farmers unique is the number of children in our ranks. If these young people are anything like their parents, they will grow up to be the next generation of leaders and decision-makers (see pages 17-18 for a glimpse at just how many member-leaders we have!). We decided to enlist some of these younger members to review the children's book "Tops & Bottoms," by author and illustrator Janet Stevens.

The book was published in 1995 and received a Caldecott Honor award. In addition to its farming theme, the book touches on weightier topics such as the consequences of risk-taking and laziness, wealth inequality, neighborliness (or lack thereof), coping with hardship and learning from one's mistakes. For all these reasons, we thought it a perfect book for youngsters to read and comment on. Book review volunteers included Cora and Margaret Lipes, of Lipes Family Farm in West Branch; Sadie Jimenez, daughter of PFI staffer Sarah Carlson, of Pleasant Hill; and Logan Erwin, son of Jennie Erwin, who operates Daystar Harvest near Windsor Heights.

Plot Summary



"Tops & Bottoms" tells the story of Bear, a wealthy – but lazy – landowner who inherited his wealth from hardworking parents; and Hare, a father rabbit who

lost a risky bet with a tortoise (ring any fairytale bells?) and has to sell his family's land to Bear, his neighbor, in order to pay the debt. Lacking land and food to feed his family, Hare and his wife decide to trick Bear into sharing his land by proposing he enter a "business partnership." All Bear has to do is provide land to farm while

Hare and his family do the hard work of planting, weeding and harvesting. Bear gets to sleep, and they'll split the harvest equally.

Bear gets to choose "tops or bottoms," and without a second thought, chooses tops the first season. Hare's family plants carrots beets and radishes, which ensures his family gets the tastier bottoms while Bear is left with a pile of rotting greens. The story is similar the second season, only Bear assumes Hare will plant the same crops, so demands to get "bottoms" as his payout. This time, however, Hare's family plants lettuce, broccoli and celery, leaving Bear with the roots. The third season, expecting to be tricked again, Bear demands both tops and bottoms – only Hare outwits him again by planting corn, leaving the tassels and roots for Bear, while he takes the tasty ears from the middle. The story has a happy ending, however: Bear learns the importance of being an active participant; Hare is able to buy back his land with profits from the crops; and Hare and Bear become friendly neighbors.

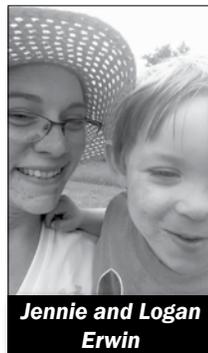
Book Review Questions and Answers

To help the children reviewing the book better structure their responses, we asked each to consider the following questions:

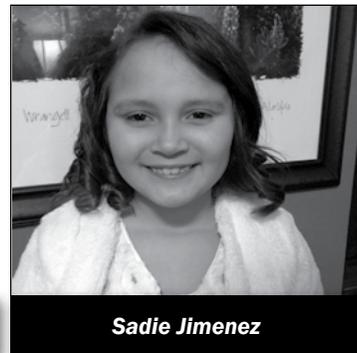
- 1). What did you like best about the book?
- 2). Is there anything you didn't like about the book?
- 3). Were there any lessons you learned from this book?

Cora and Margaret Lipes

Cora, 5, and Margaret, 3, both liked the story, reports their father, Greg. "It was funny and kind of silly. The artwork was perfect," they replied. Cora especially loved "the bear's bee scarf and all of the brightly colored vegetables, like the beets and the orange carrots and the yellow corn." Greg says they thought it was neat that the book opened up and down instead of side to side. They didn't like that "the rabbit was



Jennie and Logan Erwin



Sadie Jimenez

mean to the bear and was tricking him." Margaret also thought the bear looked a little scary.

The lesson was that "it's not nice to cook up mean stuff and take advantage of the bear. The bear learned that he needed to do his part and do hard work".

Logan Erwin

For 3-year-old Logan Erwin, his mother, Jennie, reports that "he really liked the rabbit's hat – and the carrots!" While he didn't dislike anything about the book, a lesson he took away was that "you have to weed if you want carrots."

Sadie Jimenez

Eight-year-old Sadie says she "wanted to do this [book review] because I like the book a lot." In response to the questions, she says: "I liked when rabbit made a deal that bear would get the tops, and so I like the part when rabbit tricked bear. I did not like when bear got mad because he was upset, and I do not like people being angry." For Sadie, the take-home message was that "if you don't grow your own food, that person [who does grow it] will trick you and . . . clip off the good stuff for that person not you."

Thank you to all the book reviewers and their families! ■

Do you have other youth book review suggestions? We'd like to feature more PFI youth perspectives in future issues. Share your ideas with Tamsyn, at tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

Practical Farmers Cooperators: Leading Investigation, Sharing Results

by Jon Bakehouse

The Cooperators' Program is the epitome of what PFI is all about: Farmer-led investigation and information sharing. In 2015, 75 farmers took part in 35 research projects on farms across the state spanning the field crops, livestock, horticulture and on-farm energy program areas. On Dec. 10-11, over 50 farmers gathered in Ames to discuss completed on-farm research projects and design new experiments for the coming year. Jon Bakehouse, who farms near Hastings in Mills County, delivered the meeting's concluding remarks. Here is what he said.



Jon Bakehouse

As members, I hope we all know PFI's mission statement by heart: strengthening farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing. Over the last 24 hours, we have talked at length about our own research, sharing our results and how it strengthens our operations. But what about the community part? How are we strengthening communities? Maybe a better question would be *are we* strengthening communities?

I have thought a lot about this portion of PFI's mission statement lately, and for inspiration, I returned to Practical Farmers' bible, Dick and Sharon Thompson's "Thompson's Agriculture Alternatives." The last chapter in this extraordinarily forward-looking document is entitled, "Farming for Better Communities." This title in itself should give us all pause. It is a powerful phrase on its own, let alone as part of a mission statement. It gives us enough brain fodder for hours of conversation, but within this chapter I found two sentences that changed my way of thinking almost immediately.

Before I relay what those sentences are, I should tell you that I am a pretty

traditional corn and soybean farmer. I use the industrial model of farming, which is what Dick and Sharon Thompson discuss in "Farming for Better Communities." In a nutshell, they describe how the industrial model tends to lead to overproduction, which in turn leads to lower prices, which leads to poor farm economics, which finally leads to a weakened community and rural decline. Government programs figure heavily into the industrial model, and the Thompsons are quick to point out that these payments are not sustainable.

As I read about the cons of the industrial model of farming and, admittedly, felt my hackles rise, I wondered if they would offer any of the alternatives promised in their title. Of course they did. They compared the industrial model to an integrated systems model, talked about how demand for food is inelastic and how farmers can't agree on supply control. What really caught my attention, however, were these two sentences: "Stop trying to feed the world. Stop trying to beat your neighbor by one bushel per acre."

We would do well to stop on a regular basis to make sure what we're doing makes sense. Very often, the farmer's charge to feed the world tricks us into thinking we have carte blanche to do so by any means necessary. We should stop for a minute and think about this.

Even if we could feed the world, should we? What are the less tangible costs of high production, narrow margins, and specialization?

And what about our insane desire to beat our neighbors by one bushel? Is this really what's driving our day-to-day management decisions?

So as you are driving home this afternoon, take a minute to, first of all, stop. Not literally, but mentally. Stop and think about everything you've learned over the last 24 hours: the farmer-led research, the information sharing, how both of those strengthen your farms and then think about the context within which all of those things function: your community. Dick and Sharon Thompson knew that for each of us to succeed, we need a community working together. ■

Read Dick and Sharon's "Thompson Agriculture Alternatives" online at practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/research-reports/thompson-agriculture-alternatives/

Planning Priorities

In each of the three program areas, we heard presentations from farmer-cooperators who completed trials in 2015. The reports for those projects can be found at practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/research-reports. After cooperators presented their completed projects, they worked to identify knowledge gaps, pose new questions and design projects to explore in the coming year.

2016 Project Ideas

Field Crops:

- Cereal rye cover crop termination date ahead of corn planting (10-14 days before planting vs. day-of planting)
- Cereal rye cover crop termination a few days after soybean planting to reap potential weed control of resulting mulch
- Interseeding cover crops at V4 corn stage (evaluating a rapeseed-clover-annual ryegrass mix to see which species, if any, can survive)
- Fungicide trial with cereal rye seed production to increase yield, test weight and resulting seed germination
- Green manure cover crops after small grain to replace purchased N for corn

Livestock:

- Alternative free choice minerals for goats
- Reducing woody invasive species in timber pastures: comparing chemical and mechanical methods to goats
- Finishing hogs on 100 percent small grains ration
- Corn-free and soy-free rations for niche pork
- Apple cider vinegar supplementation for feeder pigs (*continuing project*)

Horticulture:

- Evaluate annual plant species for pollinator habitat
- Living mulch in cucumbers & peppers
- Summer broccoli variety trial
- Determinate tomato variety trial in high tunnel
- Double-dug beds with clover cover
- Cornstalk mulch with foliar feed in butternut squash & tomatoes



David Rosmann (left) chats with Dale Raasch.



From left to right: Sarah Hargreaves (holding Sylvie Schmidt), Meg Schmidt, Ali English, Bruce Carney, Jeff Olson and Cheryl Hopkins discuss livestock.



Tim Landgraf, Jan Libbey and Siobhan Danreis chat during lunch.



Darwin Pierce (left) chats with Ray Hansen and Penny Perkins.

► See more photos from the 2015 Cooperators' Meeting on pg. 29

Nimrod Family Receives 2015 Farmland Owner Award

Dale Nimrod and his siblings Faith Sherman and Vance Nimrod – the winners of PFI's 2015 Farmland Owner Award – received their awards during PFI's 2016 annual conference. Dale of Decorah, Faith of Des Moines and Vance of Mississippi received the award for selling their farmland to a local farm family at a below-market-value price.

The Farmland Owner Award is given to non-operator landlords who use their land to advance stewardship and help get the next generation started on the land. With this award, the organization is calling attention to the huge role non-operator farmland owners are playing in the future success of sustainable agriculture.

The Nimrods' parents purchased a farm in southwestern Iowa in 1944, but their father died before he had an opportunity to work the place. Their mother was determined to raise her family on the farm, a feat Dale thinks would have been very difficult without the support of the small town of Stanton and the local church. None of the three Nimrod children grew up to be farmers. In 2005, they decided the best



Dale Nimrod at the podium with siblings Faith Sherman and Vance Nimrod after being presented the 2015 Farmland Owner Award during PFI's 2016 annual conference.

way to pay back that community was to sell their 240 acres to a local family.

The family selected for the sale was that of Mark and Melanie Peterson, who were unknown to them before they began searching for the right family. The Nimrods' sale price and terms were generous and based on the production value, rather than market rate for the land.

"We were no different from many aging landowners facing this very common situation: We aspired to find a nice, young family who would appreciate the land, the community and the church, and would invest themselves in caring for all three," Dale says. "But far too often I have seen owners who fervently hope for such an outcome put their place up for auction with little more than their fingers crossed regarding their community."

"We're honored to receive this award. We have immense satisfaction in seeing the Petersons on that place."

"What the Nimrods did needs to happen thousands of times over in Iowa," says Teresa Opheim, who leads Practical Farmers' farm transfer work. "As Dale Nimrod says, there are more important goals than getting top dollar at auction for your farmland. Helping beginning farmers is one of those goals."

For more on the Nimrods' story, see practicalfarmers.org/farmtransfer. ■

Dan and Lorna Wilson Receive Sustainable Ag Award

Teresa Opheim presented the 2016 PFI Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award to Dan and Lorna Wilson, of Paullina, at the PFI Potluck, during the annual conference. This award is granted each year by PFI to an individual or couple who has shown dedication to sustainable agriculture, generously shared his or her knowledge with others, and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthful food.

Dan and Lorna own and operate Seven W Farms, where they farm with two of their sons and one of their daughters. The Wilson farm has been in the family for three generations. Dan began farming there with his father in 1972, and the Wilsons' children are the fourth generation to farm the land. Together, the family raises organic row crops, pastured pork and chickens, grass-fed lamb and beef, and free-range eggs.

Dan and Lorna have been long-time leaders in farming by conducting on-farm research,



hosting many field days over the years and serving as mentors to beginning farmers. Dan also recently ended a nine-year term on Practical Farmers' board of directors, a portion of which he served as president, where he was a strong advocate of Practical Farmers' farm transfer work.

One of the central tenets of Dan and Lorna's farming philosophy has been to ensure that the next generation comes back to the farm. "We have to be really serious about bringing the next generation back," Lorna

says. "As we older farmers get ready to quit, we need someone to pick up where we left off. The older generation needs to have that passion to allow the next generation to explore new ideas. If they don't give up control, then it's not going to work."

One of the biggest challenges to sustainable agriculture, Dan says, is the loss of people from rural areas. He believes that finding a way to stop and reverse this trend is critical, and says the local foods movement offers promise for building community. "Iowa should be growing and processing food for Iowa. We shouldn't be sending these jobs out of state."

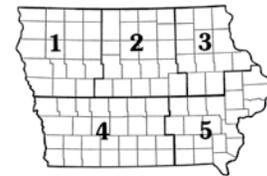
Dan and Lorna were surprised to learn they were selected for the award. "We're just ordinary people trying to do the right thing," Lorna says. "We feel strongly that we need to honor the land, honor our families and honor the animals, because we all come from the same creator." ■



1. Torray Wilson chats with Wendy Johnson.
2. From left to right: Franklin Egan, of Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA); Jill Beebout; Rick Hartmann; Alice McGary; Tim Landgraf; Dale Raasch; Tony Thompson; Mark Quee; and Carmen Black discuss horticulture research.
3. Alice McGary presents her plot layout during a horticulture session.
4. Ron Rosmann (left) and Dave Schmidt discuss research findings.
5. Cheryl Hopkins presents to the livestock group about free-choice minerals for goats.
6. Margaret Smith, Craig Griffieon, Mark Peterson and Kelly Tobin listen during a field crops presentation.



Welcome, New Members!



District 1—Northwest

- Katherine and Adam Dirksen, Danbury
- Anastasia Hodges, Sioux City
- Dennis Kasparbauer, Manning
- Phil and Jeanne Kleinhesselink, Alton
- Larry Schuller, Ireton
- Tom Veit, Fonda
- John Wilcox, Anthon

District 2—North Central

- A. Jalynn Almond, St. Anthony
- Nataliya Apanovich, Ames
- Jackie Armstrong and Gary Levinson, Saint Ansgar
- Hannah Dankbar, Ames
- Erica Johnson, Ames
- Nate Long, Maxwell
- Mike and Linda Nepereny, Stratford
- Hanna Poffenbarger, Ames
- Mark Rieks, Hubbard
- Al Schafbuch, Dysart
- Ann Schneckloth, Charles City
- Andy Swanson, Nevada
- Laura and Jesse Tidrick, Clear Lake

- Robert Valek, Ames
- Linda Wattonville, Huxley
- Kalli Weber, Ames
- Greg Weis, Saint Ansgar

District 3—Northeast

- G. Helen Grunewald and Thomas Millward, Blairstown
- Steve and Brenda Hamilton, Cedar Rapids
- Ken and Judith Hart, Coggon
- Melanie Kaine Reiner, Urbana
- Matt Lansing, Dubuque
- Monte Marti, Mount Vernon
- Wyatt and Amanda Miller, Brandon
- Kristine Nemecek, Waterloo
- Mike and Kara Nordberg, Palo
- Anna Marie Olson, Decorah
- Liz Rog, Decorah
- Doug Senne, Van Horne
- Jeff Sindelar, Newhall
- William and Marilyn Thalacker, Waterloo

District 4—Southwest

- Jennifer Abraham-White, Lamoni
- Charles and Kari Bienert, Des Moines

- Kenneth and Phyllis Bruce, Red Oak
- Michael Christl, Des Moines
- Scott Hoffman, Red Oak
- Kate Holt, Knoxville
- Ta Kaw Htoo, Des Moines
- Amy Johnson, Des Moines
- Kurt Krumm, Johnston
- Joseph and Ruth Lakers, Des Moines
- Cindy McCarty, Panora
- Mountain Nelson, Newton
- Laramie and Autumn Ogden, Ankeny
- Nathan and Emily Paulsen, Elk Horn
- Max Pitt, Lamoni
- Jenny Quiner, Des Moines
- Todd Valline, Harlan
- Klare Veath, Elk Horn
- Bart VerEllen, Centerville
- Carrie Woodley, Lorimor
- Rory Worthington, Pleasantville
- Chad Wyman, West Des Moines
- Scott Yahnke, Honey Creek

District 5—Southeast

- Marty and Rachel Breeden, Grinnell

- Joel Grabin, Oxford

District 6—Out of State

- Scott Bagley, Adair, IL
- Grant and Dawn Breittkreutz, Redwood Falls, MN
- Aaron Grebing, Frohna, MO
- Michael Hass, Latonia, KY
- Vance and Bonnie Haugen, Canton, MN
- Linda Head, Papillion, NE
- Rodney Heinen, Dawson, NE
- Johnny's Selected Seeds, Randy Cummings, Waterville, ME
- Brad Law, King City, MO
- Tonya Nelson, Morrison, IL
- Doug Petersen, Ridgeway, MO
- John and Halee Wepking, Lancaster, WI

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL

Various Dates – "Map of My Kingdom" Play Performances

Commissioned by PFI and written by playwright Mary Swander, the play explores stories of how farmers and landowners have approached their land transitions. **UPCOMING DATES:** Feb. 27 (La Crosse, WI); Feb. 29 (Morning Sun, IA). For more, visit: www.maryswander.com

Feb. 27 – Grassfed Field Day and Pasture Walk | Marquette, IA

Northeast Iowa RC&D and Practical Farmers member Greg Koether have teamed up to organize a grass-fed beef event. Learn about grazing, marketing, local food and soil health. This event is sponsored by Practical Farmers of Iowa. For more, visit: practicalfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Field-Day-2_27_16-1.pdf

Feb. 27 – Beginning Beekeeping Class | Cherry Glen Learning Farm | Polk City, IA

Four classes at \$10 each, FREE to VETERANS. Each class include hands-on work. For more, contact Ray Meylor: cherryglenfarmiowa@gmail.com or (515) 450-1207.

March 2 – Slow Poultry Seminar | Sioux Center, IA | Dorðt College

This eight-hour seminar provides an overview of and strategy for developing sustainable poultry production. Learn how to start effectively breeding, growing and marketing poultry products that are both sustainable and profitable. For more, visit: www.spnusa.com/slowpoultry.html

March 5 – Healthy Harvest Winter Workshop: MarketReady, Basic Food Safety | Mason City, IA

The MarketReady Program addresses the risks and relationships farmers and ranchers must manage as they scale up to market their product to restaurants, grocery stores, food service buyers and schools. Learn about communications, relationship-building, packaging, labels, supply and delivery, post-harvest handling for produce, grading, insurance, marketing and regulations. For more, visit: www.northiowafood.org

March 5-8 – National Farmers Union 114th Anniversary Convention | Minneapolis, MN

Members of the National Farmers Union are encouraged to attend the annual convention to hear a range of speakers on the state of agriculture and agricultural policy in the United States. For more, visit www.nfu.org/

March 12 – Planning Your Farm Transition | Plainview, MN

The Land Stewardship Project is offering a workshop that will focus on short- and long-term goals, financial needs in retirement, transition models, and resources and communication tools to help you throughout the farm transition process. For more, visit landstewardshipproject.org/posts/777

March 17-19 – Nelson & Pade, Inc. Master Aquaponics Course | Montello, WI

This comprehensive course covers all aspects of aquaponics and controlled-environment agriculture. It is intended for anyone seriously thinking of starting or already managing an aquaponics operation. The course covers methods and applications, crop recommendations, water quality, daily operation, growing techniques, greenhouses, environmental control, fish biology and dietary needs, plant care and health, system start-up and business considerations. For more, visit: <http://aquaponics.com/learn/classes-and-seminars>

March 31-April 2 – Holistic Management Workshop: Grazing Planning | Hastings, NE | Pre-register by March 23

This Holistic Management workshop includes: mini lectures, examples, demonstrations and supervised practice in using the Holistic Management Model in decision-making, producing more profit and increasing the quality of life. The workshop is led by Paul Swanson and Ralph Tate. For more, contact Bob Shields at (308) 379-1361 or bob.shields01@gmail.com

For more events, visit practicalfarmers.org



Grow your farm with Practical Farmers. Join today!

This annual membership is a:

- New membership
- Renewal

I am joining at the level of:

- Student – \$20
- Individual – \$50
- Farm or Household – \$60
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups – \$110)
- Lifetime Member – \$1,000

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

- Farmer or grower
- Non-farmer – (You will have the opportunity to expand upon this when you receive your membership information form.)

How did you hear about Practical Farmers of Iowa?

..... Each membership includes one subscription to *the Practical Farmer*.

Sustain PFI

For the long-term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

- \$1,000
- \$500
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- \$_____

JOIN OUR GIFT OF THE MONTH CLUB

The Gift of the Month Club is an easy way to support Practical Farmers of Iowa! Send in your pledge with your credit card information, and we will automatically deduct your donation the first of each month.

YES! I would like to give _____ per month to PFI, to be automatically charged to my credit card the first of the month. (\$10 per month minimum)

Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you!

Individual, Farm or Organization Name*: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Street: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Primary Phone (with area code): _____

Alternate Phone (with area code): _____

Email: _____

* For Farm or Household membership, please list names of persons included. For Organization membership, please list one or two contact persons.

Payment:

Total: \$_____ = \$_____ membership + \$_____ donation

- Check or money order enclosed. (Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")

TO PAY WITH A CREDIT CARD, PLEASE GO TO: <http://practicalfarmers.org/join-pfi.html>

Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



Diverse Farms

Farms that are prized for their diversity of crops and livestock their wildlife, healthy soils, innovations, beauty and productivity their connection to a rich past and a fulfilling present where individuals and families are earning a good living



Healthy Food

Food that is celebrated for its connections to local farmers to seasons, to hard work and good stewardship Communities alive with diverse connections between farmers and friends of farmers

Visit Us on Social Media

 www.facebook.com/practicalfarmers

 twitter.com/practicalfarmer

 www.youtube.com/user/pfivideos

 www.linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa



Vibrant Communities

Places where commerce, cooperation, creativity and spirituality are thriving Places where the working landscape, the fresh air and the clean water remind us of all that is good about Iowa.