



# PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA

## Style Guide

*A handbook on best practices in writing, word usage, Practical Farmers style and branding.*



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# Introduction

Practical Farmers of Iowa excels at helping farmers learn, connect and lead the way to an agriculture that is inclusive, sustainable, ecologically sound and community-enhancing. We're also at a new juncture where our public visibility is rapidly growing. For many people who do not know Practical Farmers, their first impressions will be formed in large part through our marketing efforts – including how effectively others can portray and explain what we're about. Even for those who already know about us, our branding efforts can reshape their image in a positive or negative way.

## **Why Does Practical Farmers Need a Style Guide?**

Every touch point with the public projects an image of Practical Farmers as an organization and conveys the PFI brand. From blog posts to research reports, news releases to newsletter articles, email content to the content of a grant report (and everything in between) – good communication matters. Professional and consistent communication reflects a competent organization. As PFI grows and reaches more people, it's important that we strive to create clear, consistent and consciously-crafted messages.

This guide will:

- outline who we are
- explain our visual identity and house writing style
- cover some grammar basics
- introduce our different types of communications
- offer guidance on best practices for writing and use of photos.

The hope is that this guide will serve as a quick reference when you have questions, and to help you to create cohesive outreach materials that effectively portray who we are to all our audiences, from our members and partners, to funders and researchers, to the media and the general public.

## **Who Should Use This Guide?**

This guide is for staff, consultants, designers, PFI members and others who are working with or for us on communication or other outreach efforts.

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## Communication Staff Contacts

For questions on Practical Farmers' style, communication and outreach products, or specific publications, contact the following staff:

### **General PFI Design, Style and Print Communication:**

**Tamsyn Jones** – [tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org)

### **Website and "Practical News" e-newsletter:**

**Erica Andorf** – [erica@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:erica@practicalfarmers.org)

### **Research Reports:**

**Stefan Gailans** – [stefan@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:stefan@practicalfarmers.org)

**Drake Larsen** – [drake@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:drake@practicalfarmers.org)

### **Use of PFI Photos and Logos:**

**Tamsyn Jones** – [tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org)

All staff can be reached by phone at Practical Farmers' main office number: (515) 232-5661.

# 1. Identity

## ■ 1.1 Mission, Vision & Values

### **Mission**

Strengthening farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing.

### **Vision**

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

Food 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

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.

### **Values**

- Welcoming everyone
- Creativity, collaboration and community
- Viable farms now and for future generations
- Widespread ownership of land and resources
- Stewardship and ecology

# :: Defining Practical Farmers

## ■ 1.2 Taglines & Key Messages

### Tagline

Working Together, Always Learning

### Key Messages

Growing More Than Crops, Bringing More than Food to the Table

– Outreach Leaders

"That's the latest word, not the last word."

"Get along, but don't go along."

"We don't just grow crops, we grow people."

– Dick Thompson

## ■ 1.3 Brand Summaries

### Elevator Speech

An elevator speech is a short summary used to quickly and simply define Practical Farmers of Iowa. You may improvise your own, but it should only take 30 seconds to a minute to say, and should highlight these ideas:

- All are welcome: farmers of all sizes and enterprises, and non-farmers
- We emphasize farmers teaching and learning from other farmers
- Our farmers grow a diversity of crops and livestock
- We have a strong focus on farmer-led on-farm research

### Boilerplate

This text appears at the bottom of all Practical Farmers news releases:

"Founded in 1985, Practical Farmers of Iowa is an open, supportive and diverse organization of farmers and friends of farmers that seeks to strengthen farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information sharing. Farmers in our network produce corn, soybeans, beef cattle, hay, fruits and vegetables, and more. For additional information, call (515) 232-5661 or visit [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org)."

# 1. Identity

## 1.4 Ideological Neutrality

With the exception of the limited areas approved by our policy committee (see [practicalfarmers.org/member-priorities/policy](http://practicalfarmers.org/member-priorities/policy)), Practical Farmers does not take a stand on political issues, agricultural controversies or the “rightness” or “wrongness” of different types of farming systems – nor do we endorse political candidates or parties. Doing so would jeopardize our mission and our “big tent” philosophy, which is based on the idea of welcoming anyone who supports our work, mission and vision.

While individual staff and members may have diverse personal beliefs, when speaking, acting or communicating on behalf of Practical Farmers of Iowa, it’s very important to be mindful of this neutrality so we can protect one of the core tenets that makes us unique.

## 1.5 Member Priorities

Our work is guided by the priorities of our members, and our focus areas have been developed around these. Currently, our work is organized around 10 core priorities:

- Beginning Farmers
- Cover Crops
- Energy
- Farm Transitions
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock
- Local Foods
- Policy
- Research and Demonstration

For more detailed descriptions, background or more information, visit <http://practicalfarmers.org>.



# :: Defining Practical Farmers

## ■ 1.6 Referring to Practical Farmers of Iowa

In June 2013, we successfully trademarked the name “Practical Farmers” with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

### Use Full Name or “Practical Farmers”

When referring to Practical Farmers of Iowa in public settings and all external communications, use our full name (generally on first reference, and when needed for variation), and “Practical Farmers.” The acronym “PFI” is not forbidden, but to build public awareness about the “Practical Farmers” brand, the acronym should be used sparingly.

### “Practical Farmers” is Singular

Remember that the phrase “Practical Farmers” is a collective noun – meaning it represents a group but is treated as singular. Because the core phrase is plural, you must always include the final “s”, though the phrase itself is treated as singular.

#### Examples of Correct Usage:

- Practical Farmers [is hosting](#) a field day on cover crops.
- Meet [Practical Farmers’](#) newest Savings Incentive Program class.
- [Practical Farmers works](#) to help connect farmers to each other.
- [Practical Farmers will hold its](#) first farminar of the season next week.

#### Examples of Incorrect Usage:

- Practical Farmers has set the date for [their](#) next annual conference. – (Should be “its”)
- Meet us at the [Practical Farmer](#) booth during the workshop.
- [Practical Farmer farmers](#) are a diverse group. – (Should be “Practical Farmers farmers,” or rephrase the sentence)

## 2. Visual Identity

### 2.1 Primary Color Palette

Our color palette consists of five colors that reflect our close connection to the land, farming, Mother Nature and the seasons.

**Red** reflects the warmth of friendship, autumn's changing hues and the weathered tones of Iowa's treasured barns.



**CMYK**=6, 86, 100, 21

**RGB**=157, 60, 34

**HEX (Web color code)**  
#9d3c22

**Pantone:** 174c

**Green** symbolizes the growth of plants, spring and fields protected by living cover.



**CMYK**=20, 0, 100, 19

**RGB**=176, 192, 54

**HEX (Web color code)**  
#b2bb1e

**Pantone:** 383c

**Blue** evokes clean water and air, winter, when the land is at rest, and the sky under which farmers work.



**CMYK**=90, 57, 0, 0

**RGB**=5, 108, 182

**HEX (Web color code)**  
#036cb6

**Pantone:** 660c

**Orange** speaks of summer, sun's nourishing rays and the energy essential for all life to grow.



**CMYK**=0, 59, 100, 5

**RGB**=232, 125, 30

**HEX (Web color code)**  
#e87d1e

**Pantone:** 1595c

**Brown** signifies healthy soil, livestock on the landscape and Iowa's rich humus, built by glaciers and prairies.



**CMYK**=50, 60, 100, 48





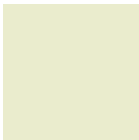




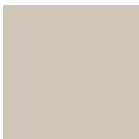
**RGB**=87, 67, 25

**HEX (Web color code)**  
#574319

**Pantone:** 7519c

## 2.2 Color Tints

Color tints can be used to complement the primary color palette and provide added flexibility in design, marketing and color combining. Any percentage tint is acceptable. Here are sample swatches of color tints at 50% and 20%. These swatches provide a close approximation of the printed appearance. CMYK, RGB and Pantone codes remain the same – but note that HEX codes for tints are different.

	<b>Red</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Blue</b>
50%	 HEX=#ce9e91	 HEX=#d5d98d	 HEX=#8ba5d5
20%	 HEX=#ebd8d3	 HEX=#edefcf	 HEX=#ccd5ed
	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Brown</b>	
50%	 HEX=#f6b983	 HEX=#9b896d	
20%	 HEX=#fbe0c7	 HEX=#d1c7b9	

# 2. Visual Identity

## 2.3 Logo Versions

There are three forms of the logo – horizontal, stacked and acronym-only – along with single-color variants of each in the primary palette colors, a black variant and a white variant to be used on dark backgrounds. The horizontal and stacked logos both come in a full-color version that incorporates all the PFI palette colors, and also appear in forms with and without the “working together, always learning” tagline.

### Preferred Logo Use

Whenever possible, always choose the full-color horizontal or stacked logo with tagline (A and B below). These versions are most effective for brand recognition and should be used for all primary purposes. Use the acronym-only version (C below) only when needed due to space issues.

#### A. (Preferred) – Horizontal



This is the main logo, used on our website, letterhead, news releases, membership brochure and other communications. It is the primary logo to use when design or aesthetic considerations are not an issue.

#### B. (Preferred) – Stacked



This form is an alternate main logo that you may use on all communications and outreach when it will work better for design, space or aesthetic reasons.

#### C. Acronym-only



Use this version (or any color variant of it) only when space constraints make it impractical or aesthetically impossible to use either of the two primary logos.

#### File Formats Available

- **.AI** – (Illustrator)
- **.EPS** – (Encapsulated Post-Script)
- **.JPEG**

## 2.4 Logo Variations

Horizontal With Taglines		Stacked With Taglines			
    	  <div><p><i>Note: There's no red box around the white logo; its use here is merely to illustrate the white logo on a colored background.</i></p></div>	    	    		
Horizontal Without Taglines		Stacked Without Taglines		Acronym Variants	
       	     	     	      		





# 2. Visual Identity

## 2.5 Using the Logo

Please use common sense when using or placing the logo. Be conscientious about its size, visibility, proportions and placement. Try to avoid crowding the logo, as this will diminish its effectiveness (and generally isn't good design practice either), and make sure it's big enough to be legible. Also keep in mind that bigger isn't necessarily better. Making the logo too large might look brash, overstated and also work against your design.

### A Few Basic Rules

These are pretty self-explanatory, but just to be clear:

1. Keep the logo intact; don't crop out parts of it, such as in this example:  
2. Try to preserve the logo's proportions (don't scrunch or distort it just to make it fit):  
3. Don't add fills or strokes to the logo, or create unapproved versions:



## 2.6 Practical Landowner Services Logo

Practical Landowner Services is a technical service we offer to help non-operator farmland owners and their farming partners start conversations and work together to add in-field crop production practices that benefit the soil and water quality. This fee-for-services facet of our work is managed by our staff, but is wholly unique relative to the rest of our work. For this reason, we created a separate logo to help distinguish it from the rest of our non-profit services.

**Use this logo – and only this logo** – when working on communications and outreach that relate to Practical Landowner Services. The PFI logos and their variants should never be used on these documents, in order to distinctively brand and differentiate the singular focus of this service.



Examples of documents with specific Practical Landowner Services-only branding.



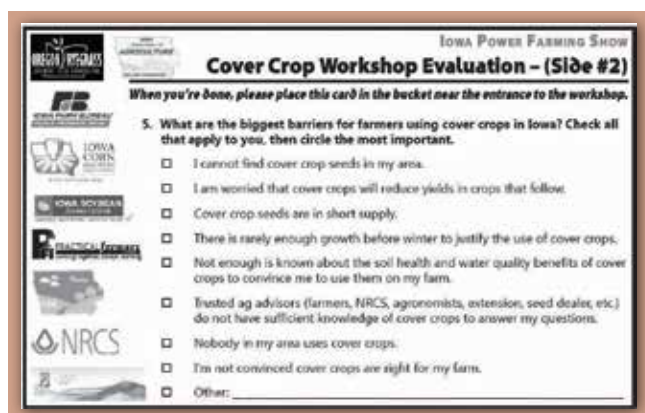
# 2. Visual Identity

## 2.7 Partnerships and Co-Branding

When partnering with other organizations on events or programming where logos are being used as part of publicity efforts, always try to ensure that Practical Farmers’ logo is included. Check with your partner organization contacts to see if logos will be used. If so – and if your contacts don’t ask us for our logo – offer to share it with them.



Example of co-branded news release. Any logo is acceptable, though the main logos are preferred if possible.



Example of co-branding in black-and-white on evaluation materials for an event we helped sponsor.



## ■ 2.8 Typefaces

We have several fonts in our arsenal, including san-serif and serif fonts, as well as some special fonts that are only used in certain circumstances. We don't enforce strict rules about font use because, as with the logo, we want to preserve some design flexibility. But we do have primary fonts and general guidelines on font use. Here's the full list, and then some guidance on our font use practices:

### Full Font List

We currently use the following fonts:

#### Sans Serif Fonts

- Segoe UI family
- Myriad Pro family
- Franklin Gothic family
- Santana family

#### Special Fonts

- Excellentia
- HansHand

#### Serif Fonts

- Cheltenham family
- Chaparral Pro family

### Primary Font

Segoe UI is the primary font family, and will be used for most day-to-day tasks. This is the default body font used in news releases, the quarterly newsletter, research reports and most special projects. It's also used in letters to members and grantors, and in other official communication. While we may at times use other fonts in body text, consider Segoe your "go-to" font for the everyday projects you'll be doing.

*(For a visual reference and some general guidance, flip the page).*

# 2. Visual Identity

## SANS-SERIF FONTS

(cont'd →)

**Note:** Font lists below shown at 9-point text size, 100% width and height.

### Segoe UI

Segoe Light  
Segoe Regular  
*Segoe Italic*  
Segoe Semibold  
**Segoe Bold**  
***Segoe Bold Italic***  
*Segoe Print*  
***Segoe Print Bold***  
*Segoe Script*  
***Segoe Script Bold***  
Segoe Symbols

**\*Note:** Condensed forms can be manually created. This sentence is set at 90 percent.

**USES:** Primary PFI font, and the default font to use for most everyday purposes. Segoe is used in news releases; the body of the quarterly newsletter and research reports; printed member communications; and other standard materials, as well as in special projects.

**ATTRIBUTES:** Clean yet elegant; good expanded family that includes script forms (“Segoe Print” and “Segoe Script”), as well as a symbols set; reads well on-screen and in print; good bold contrast. Also comes in a version developed for Macs.

### Myriad Pro

Myriad Condensed  
*Myriad Condensed Italic*  
**Myriad Bold Condensed**  
***Myriad Bold Condensed Italic***  
Myriad Light  
*Myriad Light Italic*  
Myriad Regular  
*Myriad Italic*  
Myriad Semibold  
***Myriad Semibold Italic***  
**Myriad Bold**  
***Myriad Bold Italic***  
**Myriad Black**  
***Myriad Black Italic***

**USES:** Former primary PFI font. Use Myriad Pro for table text and captions in the quarterly newsletter. You may also find yourself desiring to use this font for certain special projects, such as those needing a smaller footprint on the page, very rich bold contrast or a very diverse font family.

**ATTRIBUTES:** Bears similarity to Segoe, so doesn't detract from brand continuity. Modern yet attractive, with large font family and smaller footprint than Segoe at the same text sizes.

### Franklin Gothic

Franklin Gothic Book  
*Franklin Gothic Book Italic*  
**Franklin Gothic Medium**  
***Franklin Gothic Medium Italic***  
**Franklin Gothic Medium Condensed**  
***Franklin Gothic Demi (Bold)***  
***Franklin Gothic Demi Italic***  
**Franklin Gothic Heavy**  
***Franklin Gothic Heavy Italic***

**USES:** A coordinating font. Use for headlines in the quarterly newsletter, captions (you can choose whether to use Franklin Gothic or Myriad Pro) and some sidebar text. You might also want to use this font for sub-heads in special projects.

**ATTRIBUTES:** First designed in 1902, the Franklin Gothic family has remained popular for so long because it conveys authority with warmth, boldness with finesse and tradition (especially via the traditional double-story “g”) balanced by creativity.

SANS-SERIF		SERIF FONTS
<b>Note:</b> Font below shown at 9-point text size (except where noted), 100% width and height.		
<p><b>Santana</b></p> <p>Santana Regular  <b>Santana Bold</b>  Santana Regular Condensed – (10 pt)  Santana Extra Condensed – (12 pt)  <b>Santana Black Condensed</b>  <b>Santana Black</b></p> <p><i>*Note: Italic forms can be created by manually adding a tilt in InDesign or Word.</i></p>	<p><b>Cheltenham</b></p> <p>Cheltenham Bold Condensed  <i>Cheltenham Bold Condensed Italic</i>  Cheltenham Extra Condensed Bold  Cheltenham Roman  <i>Cheltenham Italic</i>  <b>Cheltenham Bold</b>  <b>Cheltenham Bold Italic</b>  <b>Cheltenham Bold Headline</b>  <b>Cheltenham Bold Hd Italic</b></p>	<p><b>Chaparral Pro</b></p> <p>Chaparral Pro Regular  <i>Chaparral Pro Italic</i>  <b>Chaparral Pro Semibold</b>  <b>Chaparral Pro Bold</b>  <b>Chaparral Pro Bold Italic</b></p> <p><i>*Note: By way of example, chapter and first-tier sub-headings in this guide are all in Chaparral Pro.</i></p>
<p><b>USES:</b> A coordinating font. Use for cover teaser text and sub-heads in the quarterly newsletter; headlines on Practical Landowner Services documents; and whenever you want a little more artistic flair.</p> <p><b>ATTRIBUTES:</b> A modern yet mildly quirky font family that offers excellent heavy black and bold contrast. Speaks of an independent and artistic spirit – especially with characteristic dotted "o," capital "Q," and slanted lowercase "ð."</p>	<p><b>USES:</b> A coordinating font. Use for pull-quotes in the quarterly newsletter; headings and sub-heads in special projects; and in situations when you need to mix typefaces (mixing a serif and sans-serif font is a classic design tactic).</p> <p><b>ATTRIBUTES:</b> Developed by the same person who designed Franklin Gothic, Cheltenham is a highly readable font that is both elegant and casual.</p>	<p><b>USES:</b> A coordinating font. Use for pull-quotes in special projects, and in situations when you need to mix typefaces and you feel the personality of this font fits.</p> <p><b>ATTRIBUTES:</b> A versatile, hybrid slab-serif design that is reminiscent of the grace of 16th-century roman book lettering. Accessible and friendly with light and heavy forms, it is both functional and friendly.</p>
SPECIAL FONTS		<p><b>Remember:</b> These are general guidelines, and you have some flexibility in combining these fonts for best effect. Overall, use good judgment and strive to create a branded Practical Farmers look.</p>
<p><i>Excellentia</i></p>	<p><i>HansHand</i></p>	
<p><b>USES:</b> Both of these fonts are used in limited contexts, when a decorative script is needed. For instance, Excellentia is the font used for the "Welcome New Members" column in the quarterly newsletter, while HansHand is used often in SIP materials.</p>		

# 2. Visual Identity

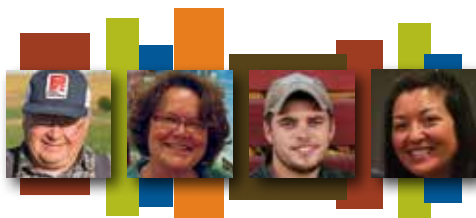
## 2.9 Common Design Elements

Some of our common art and design elements include rectangular color blocking, color bars, film strips and thick colored lines. In all of our outreach materials, we strive to incorporate photos of our members, especially images showing people interacting, leading or learning from each other. When you are creating outreach communications, consider using some of these common elements to help create a branded look:



COLOR  
BLOCKING

Example of color blocking and color bars in a special design project. (Note mixed use of fonts: *Santana Black* for headings; *Myriad Pro condensed* for body text; *Myriad Pro italic* for captions).



RECTANGULAR  
COLOR BARS

Example of rectangular color bars (squares are also in this category!) and use of the faces of Practical Farmers.

# :: Design Elements

## FILM STRIPS

Film strips are created by selecting a series of photos and separating them with colored lines or bars.



## COLORLED LINES



Adding a semi-thick colored line to your design is simple and harkens back to our visual brand, which features linear and rectangular elements.

## MIXING DESIGN ELEMENTS

Example of a design that incorporates several of our common design elements: film strips, color blocking, colored lines and many images of our members and people interacting. Also note the mixed use of fonts.



# 3. Writing for PFI

## ■ 3.1 Why Does Good Writing Matter?

As a member-driven organization centered around sharing farming knowledge and information, we work with many groups of people and create a wide array of outreach materials. Diversity is one of our strengths – but this diversity of audiences means it's even more important that we strive for quality and consistency in our writing and communication.

Why is consistency so important – especially in this Digital Age of acronyms, informality, instant sharing and short snips of conversation? Here are just a few reasons:

- **Credibility:** Sloppily written materials or those with grammatical errors can indicate ignorance or carelessness on the part of the writer, which may cause readers to question the accuracy of the content (and by extension, Practical Farmers as the messenger).
- **Professionalism:** Similarly, sloppily written materials can create a negative impression or make Practical Farmers look unprofessional.
- **Clarity:** Grammar and punctuation errors can result in ambiguities or misunderstandings, which can potentially damage PFI messaging.
- **Magnification:** In this age of instant sharing, whole sentences, paragraphs or more are often copied verbatim. If your writing gaffe slips through, the errors can be amplified.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Consistency saves time and money, and makes us more effective at fulfilling our mission.
- **Posterity:** These days, materials can live on indefinitely in cyberspace – along with any mistakes or carelessly crafted content they contain. Once we publish materials, there's no guarantee that an error won't come back to haunt us someday.

# :: Good Writing Basics

## ■ 3.2 Fundamentals of Good Writing

### Use Active Voice

Opt for active over passive voice unless you have a good reason to use passive voice. Active voice is direct, clear, more concise and emphasizes the agent of the action. It also makes clear to readers who is responsible for the action.

Passive voice, by contrast, emphasizes the receiver or object of the action and can be weak, awkward and wordy. It uses a form of the verb "to be" followed by a past participle. If the clarifying phrase defining "by whom or what" is omitted, readers may not know who performed the action.

While some use of passive voice can help mix up sentence structure, in most cases, active voice will make your writing clearer, more conversational and more dynamic through use of strong verbs.

#### Examples:

- **Passive:** Surveys have been collected [*by whom?*] from half of the membership.

**Active:** We have collected surveys from half of the membership.

- **Passive:** Four replications of cover crops were planted [*by whom?*]

**Active:** Cooperators planted four replications of cover crops.

- **Passive:** Farm transfer was the issue that was most asked about by meeting attendees.

**Active:** Meeting attendees asked the most about farm transfer.

**Note:** *Not all sentences using "was" are passive voice; some are simply in past tense. A clue is the use of the "by" phrase.*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Strive for Conciseness

Good writing should be concise, conveying what you intend in a manner that's clear and accurate. But don't confuse conciseness with brevity. Anyone can discard words haphazardly; the harder task is knowing which words to cut and which to keep. **Conciseness is a combination of brevity and completeness.**

## Avoid Slang and Acronyms

Avoid slang, acronyms or needless jargon in blog posts, mass emails and newsletter articles. Always spell out an acronym on first reference, and use the acronym only sparingly thereafter. This makes writing clearer, easier to read and more articulate. Remember: acronyms and jargon that make sense to you might not be familiar to others.

## Be Fresh: Avoid Clichés and Euphemisms

Try to be fresh and original in your writing. George Orwell advised: "Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print." This is sound advice that can be hard to heed, as our language is filled with clichés, euphemisms and double-speak.

**Clichés** are phrases that have been used so often, they've lost their original freshness and punch. In some cases, the original meaning has been lost. Take the time to invent fresh, powerful images and phrasing. The creative effort might be challenging – but it will likely pay off in the end. At the least, it will make you think more deeply about what exactly you want to say, and why you want to say it (another good habit for better writing).

**Euphemisms** are words or phrases that veil the truth or say something in a roundabout way. Many are used to avoid confronting difficult topics, or those deemed impolite – but others are used to intentionally deceive. While euphemisms may have a place in some social settings, avoid them in your writing. Aim to be direct and resist the temptation to be overly polite, deceptive or to cover up hard facts.



# :: Good Writing Basics

## Limit Use of "There is" / "It is" / "There are" Statements

Known as expletive constructions, sentences that start with "There is," "There are," "It is" and related forms tend to be wordier, weaker and more cumbersome. While these expressions can serve a useful role in specific situations when you want to convey rhetorical emphasis, overuse saps a sentence of its power. If you find yourself starting too many sentences with expletive constructions, try to reword your writing.

### Examples:

- **Wordier:** There are four requirements that applicants must meet to be considered. – (11 words)  
**Stronger:** Applicants must meet four requirements to be considered. – (8 words)

- 
- **Clunkier:** There was a lot of discussion about on-farm energy among attendees at the conference session. – (16 words)  
**Stronger:** On-farm energy sparked considerable discussion among conference session attendees. – (10 words)

- 
- **Passive:** It was decided that our group would meet once a week. – (11 words)  
**Stronger:** Our group has decided to meet once a week. – (9 words)

- 
- **Wordier:** There was a big study that just came out that showed the links between cover crops and water quality. – (19 words)  
**Stronger:** A big study just came out that showed how cover crops affect water quality. – (14 words)

- 
- **Exception:** It is imperative that we stay focused on our farmers.  
**Weaker:** Staying focused on our farmers is imperative.

*In this case, the expletive construction is stronger because it emphasizes the word "imperative," giving it more weight.*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Don't Overuse Noun Forms of Verbs (or Verb Forms of Nouns)

When verbs or adjectives are changed to nouns, it's called nominalization (e.g., "solve" becomes "solution;" "delicious" becomes "deliciousness"). A related phenomenon is the process of verb-ing nouns (aka, verbification) – taking a noun and using it as or converting it to a verb (e.g. "incentive" becomes "incentivize," or "conference" the noun is used as a verb instead).

Communication that's filled with nominalizations (or verbifications) tends to be wordier, sloppier, less clear, more grating to read or hear – and often more pretentious.

Nominalizations used judiciously are perfectly fine. But we're awash today in speech and writing that sounds hollow, affected or artificial – legalese, corporatese, academic-speak, trendy techno-speak and others. ***Resist the temptation to mimic these patterns, and remember that good writing is direct, clear, concise and authentic.***

### Examples:

- **Grating:** We need to think of ways to capitalize on field day attendees and incentivize them to purchase merchandise.

**More Authentic:** Let's think of some ways we can entice field day attendees to buy our merchandise.

- **Clunky:** The discussion focused on suggestions for how we can best utilize our members' farming knowledge to effect change.

**Stronger:** The board discussed how we can harness our members' farming knowledge to create change.

- **Wordy:** There was considerable erosion of farmland soil due to the intensity of spring rains hitting bare ground.

- **Stronger:** Considerable farmland soil eroded when intense spring rains hit bare ground.

# :: Good Writing Basics

## Proofread Your Work

We're all so busy it can be tempting to skip this step before submitting a document, sending an email or posting a blog or social media update. Don't skip this step. Remember, errors can amplify or be costly to correct. Before you submit, send or post:

- **Re-read your work:** Take a few extra minutes to read through what you wrote.
- **Check the style guide:** Does your writing adhere to style guidelines? Check to see that you included all pertinent or required details.
- **Does it make sense?** Ask yourself if what you wrote is as clear and concise as it could be. Will your audience easily understand you? Is your tone appropriate for the intended recipients? (*See sections on Audience and Voice, pgs. 28 and 29*)
- **Take a break:** It might help to step away from your work or email and return with fresher eyes, then re-read slowly to make sure you don't skim over minor errors. Some common culprits and small typos that are easy to miss – especially when still fresh in memory:
  - Misplaced apostrophes
  - Double spaces after periods
  - Incorrect spellings of similar-sounding words – e.g. *there* vs. *their*, or *it's* when you mean *its*
  - Minor misspellings – or big ones (like names!)
  - Improper noun-pronoun or subject-verb agreement – e.g. "A member gave their number"; "PFI shared their research"
- **Get a second reader:** Have someone else read your article, letter, news release, blog post, grant report, etc. It's always beneficial to get a second set of eyes reviewing material that comes from Practical Farmers.

This might seem like overkill, but it isn't! While some errors will inevitably slip through every now and then, spending a little extra time proofing can prevent errors that could tarnish Practical Farmers' professionalism.

# 3. Writing for PFI

## 3.3 Think of Your Audience

We work with lots of different groups: farmers of varying backgrounds, grantors, non-farmers, university researchers and more. With this diversity, it's important to write for your intended audience. This doesn't mean dumbing down your writing; it means knowing your audience and writing for its needs. Ask yourself:

- Who is your audience?
- What does it already know about the subject?
- What does it need to know?
- What questions will those readers have?

Writing for a general audience, for instance, will likely differ from how you write for a research report audience.

## 3.4 Voice: Show, Don't Tell

Our co-founder, Dick Thompson, believed in showing his approach and letting people make their own decisions, not telling them what was right or wrong. This idea is deeply rooted in Practical Farmers today. We believe our members are the experts when it comes farming, and our writing should always be mindful of this value. As an organization, we are:

- Helpful but not didactic
- Friendly but professional
- Knowledgeable but not preachy
- Hard-working but fun-loving
- Open-minded but mission-driven

In our writing and communication, we want to be familiar and friendly, authentic and conversational, understandable and accessible. As much as possible, we use our members' voices and stories to show how agriculture can be diverse, resilient, inclusive and respectful of people, communities and the ecosystem.

## ■ 3.5 Keep it Positive and Friendly

We've all dealt with people who've tried our patience, disagreed on something or simply had to say "no" for one reason or another. We pride ourselves on being welcoming and respectful – so always try to be positive in your communications, whether written or verbal:

- Even if you have to turn down a meeting, thank the person and be constructive in your response.
- When disagreeing with or correcting someone, do so respectfully.
- Don't forget to thank someone for taking the time to meet, lead, respond, assist, etc.
- When emailing, try to start with a greeting, even a simple one.
- Read your emails before sending to avoid sounding short, snippy or vexed. If needed, wait a bit until you're feeling more peaceful.

# 3. Writing for PFI

## ■ 3.6 AP Style – Our "House" Style

We use the AP (Associated Press) Stylebook to guide most of our spelling, punctuation and word usage practices.

### What's In It?

AP Style offers comprehensive guidance on issues ranging from capitalization and abbreviation to spelling, numerals, punctuation and how to handle many other questions of word usage. Updated annually by Associated Press editors, the guide is arranged in an A-to-Z format in print form or online with a subscription ([www.apstylebook.com](http://www.apstylebook.com)). Staff who wish to access the online version can get PFI's login details from Tamsyn.

### Why Use It at PFI?

Many editorial questions are less a matter of fixed rules than of conventions. With multiple staff writing and communicating on behalf of PFI, following a common style is essential for consistency. Originally developed for journalists, AP Style is widely used today by many other kinds of organizations, in part because it's practical and easy to use:

- Items are listed in alphabetical order with many cross-references to related items.
- It succinctly covers the most commonly asked writing questions.
- It is more streamlined and less formal than some other style guides.
- Many newspapers and magazines follow AP Style, so PFI press releases are in a ready-to-use format for news editors.

# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## ■ 3.7 Commonly Used AP Style Elements

### Numbers

In general, spell out one through nine. Use figures for 10 or above; in ratios; whenever preceding a unit of measure; or when referring to ages of people, animals, events or things. **Note:** Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun, such as in "that snow was a 5-footer." In this example, "5-footer" is the noun.

Figures are also used in all tabular material, for statistics and in many other specific cases.

Spell out numerals that start a sentence. However, this can sometimes be awkward. If so, it might be better if you rephrase the sentence. **Exception:** If the sentence starts with a calendar year, use Arabic numerals for the year.

#### Examples:

- We took two tables and 12 books.
- The 105-year-old farm...
- The goat is 3 years old.
- The 5-year-old experiment is done.
- 2014 will be a productive year.
- Fifty people attended.
- She planted 47 varieties in two fields.

### Decimals

Always use figures. Don't exceed two decimal places in textual material unless there are special circumstances. If the figure is a one-digit decimal less than one, put a zero before the decimal point. **Note:** Remember, if the amount is less than one, the unit of measurement is singular: 0.55 cubic foot, 0.75 mile. HOWEVER, in narrative cases, it can be better to spell out the fraction.

#### Examples:

- We got 4.5 inches of rain.
- Farms cover 1.25 million acres.
- We had a 2.1 magnitude quake.
- We only got 0.6 inch of rain.
- Blueberries can grow in soil that has a pH of between 4.5 and 6.8.

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Fractions

Spell out amounts less than one, using hyphens between the words (e.g. two-thirds, four-fifths, seven-sixteenths, etc.). Use figures for precise amounts larger than one, converting to decimals whenever practical.

**IN TABULAR MATERIAL**, use figures exclusively, converting to decimals if the amounts involve extensive use of fractions that cannot be expressed as a single character.

## Dimensions

Use figures and spell out inches, feet, yards, acres, etc., to indicate depth, height, length and width. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns. When serving as adjectives, these hyphenated forms take a singular unit of measure.

### Examples:

- *The exhibit space is 6 feet by 8 feet.*
- *The 6-by-8-foot space is a bit small.*
- *The CPMI center is a 6,000-square-foot facility.*
- *CPMI has 6,000 square feet of space.*
- *We have a 30-by-90-foot high tunnel.*
- *She has 10 acres of pasture, but in her 3-acre plot she'll grow produce.*
- *The farm is 2 miles from town.*
- *The experiment was set up in two 10-by-50-foot fields.*
- *The 50-foot-wide riparian buffer helps protect water quality.*

**In technical contexts:** Use an apostrophe to indicate feet and quote marks to indicate inches (5'6") only in very technical contexts.

## Distances

Always use figures.

### Examples:

- *To reach the farm, go 20 miles on pavement, then 2 miles on gravel.*
- *The stream was a 30-foot drop from the edge of the bluff.*
- *The lettuce rows were planted 9 inches apart.*



# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## Ratios and Proportions

Always use figures. Note that the word "to" is omitted when the numbers precede the word "ratio." However, if you start a sentence with a ratio, the first word should be spelled out.

### Examples:

- *Our data show that 4 out of 5 members have row crops.*
- *Goats need calcium and phosphorus in a ratio of 2-to-1.*
- *One in 4 farmers has hay.*
- *We fed the cows hay and grain in a 3-1 ratio. (**Note:** No "to" is used when "ratio" comes after the numbers).*
- *Mix 2 parts vinegar to 4 parts water.*

## Percentages

Always use figures. When percents are not whole numbers, always write as decimals, not fractions. For amounts less than 1 percent, precede the decimal with a zero. The wording is either "percent" or "percentage points," not merely "percentage" by itself.

**When "percent" is singular vs. plural:** The word "percent" takes a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows an "of" construction. It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an "of" construction.

### Examples:

- *They saw a 25 percent growth in yields after cover crops.*
- *Our merchandise sales have gone up 10 percentage points.*
- *She said 50 percent of the members were at the meeting.*
- *Soil organic matter increased 4.5 percent with cover crops.*
- *She said 50 percent of the membership was at the meeting.*
- *Response rates were between 55 and 60 percent.*
- *The value of high-quality farmland only decreased 0.6 percent.*
- *We had a 55 to 60 percent response rate.*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Commas

Do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series of three or more items. Do, however, use commas to offset items in a complex series (a list in which a conjunction appears as an integral part of one item).

### Examples:

- **Simple:** *The farminar will cover vegetable production planning, techniques and recordkeeping.*
- **Simple:** *Our programs are open to farmers, non-farmers and the public.*
- **Simple:** *We will accept cash, check or credit card.*
- **Complex:** *The new Farm Bill directs funding to beginning farmers, soil and water conservation, and microloan programs.*
- **Complex:** *Outreach Leaders might speak with the media, write letters and opinion pieces, call or email state legislators, and generally look for ways to share their farm stories.*

**Note:** *If you have a particularly complex and potentially confusing list, such as in this last example, consider offsetting items with semicolons instead.*

**Use Commas with Equal Adjectives:** Use commas to separate a series of adjectives that are equal in rank. How can you tell? If the commas could be replaced by the word "and" without changing the sense, the adjectives are equal: (e.g. a thoughtful, precise manner; a dark, dangerous street; a juicy, tasty tomato; a wide, muscular cow).

**No Comma Needed:** You don't need to use a comma when the last adjective before a noun outranks its predecessors because it is an integral element of a noun phrase, which is the equivalent of a single noun: (e.g. "a cheap fur coat": the noun phrase is "fur coat"; the old oaken bucket; a new, red tillage implement).

Commas are often used incorrectly, so refer to the AP Stylebook or to [www.apstylebook.com/online](http://www.apstylebook.com/online) for more thorough guidance on appropriate and correct comma usage. Tamsyn also has helpful desk references you are welcome to use.

# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## Periods

Only put one space after periods at the end of sentences.

If you know you have an entrenched habit of putting two or more periods after a sentence, do a "Find and Replace" on your document before you submit or send.

**In Quotation Marks:** Periods always go inside quotation marks.

**After Numbers in a List:** Put a period after the number or letter element of a list (regardless of whether a parenthesis is used).

## Slashes

Use very sparingly (or avoid altogether). Its use introduces ambiguity into your writing, forces the reader to interpret your intent and most often indicates laziness on the part of the writer. Decide what you mean to say and clearly articulate that. AP Style prefers hyphens to slashes, and only permits slashes in very specific (and narrow) circumstances.

### Invalid Uses

- Do not use "and/or" (*if you truly mean both, write "either X, or Y, or both"*)
- Do not use in place of the word "and"  
**Correct:** *"We invite farmers and non-farmers..."*  
**Incorrect:** *"We invite farmers/non-farmers..."*
- Do not use for telephone numbers

### Valid Uses

- Use in tabular material to indicate some fractions, measurements or speed (*e.g. bu/A; miles/hr; 3/8*)
- Use to indicate line breaks in poetry
- Use in descriptive phrases (*e.g. 24/7*)

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Hyphens

Hyphens are joiners. They are NOT the same as dashes. Use them to:

- Avoid ambiguity
- Form a single idea from two or more words (such as with compound modifiers)
- Spell out large numbers ending in -y (e.g. "fifty-five"; "twenty-one")
- Join certain prefixes
- Avoid double vowels
- Hyphenate justified text
- Separate figures in certain cases (e.g. ratios, odds, phone numbers)
- Denote suspended hyphenation (e.g. "A one- to two-hour drive...")

Do not, however, use a hyphen to set off parenthetical expressions – where there's an abrupt change or interruption (use an en-dash for that).

**Avoiding Ambiguity:** Use a hyphen whenever ambiguity would result if it were omitted:

- *He will speak to small-business men. (Businessmen normally is one word. But "he will speak to small businessmen" is unclear. Are the businessmen small?)*
- *She recovered her car. **VERSUS** She re-covered her car.*

**Compound Modifiers:** When a compound modifier precedes a noun, use hyphens to link all the words in the compound except the adverb "very" and all adverbs that end in -ly. Also

- *A reddish-green apple*
- *A well-known farmer*
- *A better-qualified candidate*
- *An easily remembered rule*
- *A very good crop*
- *She is quick-witted*

Many combinations that are hyphenated before a noun are not hyphenated after a noun, because you tend to word the sentence differently. But when a modifier that would be hyphenated before a noun occurs after a form of the verb "to be," the hyphen usually must be retained to avoid confusion:

- **Before:** *The first-quarter earnings*  
**After:** *Earnings in the first quarter*
- **Before:** *The herbicide-resistant weed*  
**After:** *The weed is herbicide-resistant*

**Duplicated Vowels & Consonants:** It's easier to read words like this when they're hyphenated: (e.g. anti-intellectual; shell-like; pre-empt; non-native).

# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## Dashes

While hyphens, en-dashes (short dashes) and em-dashes (long dashes) look similar, they are not interchangeable and are frequently misused and inconsistently applied. Here's what each looks like:

-	—	—
Hyphen	En-Dash	Em-Dash
	HOW TO CREATE	HOW TO CREATE
	Word: "xyz -- xyz" (spaces) InDesign: alt + -	Word: "xyz--xyz" (no spaces) InDesign: alt + shift + -

**Always use the en-dash** – separated by spaces on either side. This practice is much less visually disruptive than using the em-dash with no spaces. When writing (except in emails), avoid using two hyphens (--); your word processor should automatically convert to a proper en-dash (see above). For our work, there's no reason to use an em-dash.

### Use Dashes To:

- Denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence, a parenthetical reference or an emphatic pause
- Offset a list or series of words within a sentence
- Replace a comma when you want an idea or statement to stand out
- Attribute the speaker of a pull-quote

### Examples:

- *The pasture she used – a hilly part of the farm, with some trees – was perfect.*
- *The benefits of on-farm research – learning, testing, gaining new insights, adapting to changes – are why many farmers participate.*
- *It's more common to see ruminants mixed together – but adding a non-ruminant like pigs can have unique benefits.*
- *"I don't believe in land dynasties." – Helen Gunderson*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Dates, Years and Decades

**Dates:** Always use Arabic numerals, without "st," "nd," "rd" or "th."

Capitalize the names of months in all uses. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.; (March – July are spelled out). Spell out all months when using alone, or with a year alone. When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas.

**Decades:** Use Arabic figures to indicate decades of history. Use an apostrophe to indicate numerals that are left out; show plural by adding the letter "s": the 1890s, the '90s, the mid-1980s, the 2000s. There is no apostrophe before the "s."

### Examples:

- *The field day will take place on Tuesday, June 10, from 1 to 3 p.m.*
- *We have four field days scheduled for September 2014. The first of those events will be Sept. 4.*
- *From May through November we will host more than 30 field days.*
- *Farminars will begin on Nov. 5.*
- *The next annual conference will take place Jan. 22 to 24, 2015, in Ames.*
- *The Farm Crisis of the mid-1980s...*
- *Bob started farming with his father in the late '70s.*

## Times

Use figures except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 9-11 a.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Note:** Only use a colon when minutes are involved. Do not write "11:00 a.m." Avoid redundancies like "10 a.m. this morning," "10 p.m. tonight" or "10 p.m. Monday night." Instead, simply say "10 a.m. Tuesday," or "10 p.m. Monday."

# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## Time Zones

**When mentioned without clock reading:** When you need to point out the time zone, capitalize the full name of the particular zone: Central Standard Time, Central Daylight Time, Eastern Standard Time, Mountain Daylight Time, etc.

Lowercase all but the region in short forms: the Eastern time zone, Eastern time, Mountain time, etc. Spell out "time zone" in references not accompanied by a clock reading: Chicago is in the Central time zone.

**When accompanied by a clock reading:** The abbreviations EST, CDT, etc., are acceptable on first reference for zones used within the continental U.S., Canada and Mexico only if the abbreviation is linked with a clock reading (e.g. "noon EST," "9 a.m. CST").

Spell out all references to time zones not used within the contiguous United States: When it is 11 a.m. CST, it is 8 a.m. Alaska Standard Time.

***Note:** In most cases, you will not need to mention time zones, because most of our communication targets an audience within the Central time zone. Your audience is the key.*

## Highway Designations

Use these forms, as appropriate in the context, for highways and roads identified by number. Be sure to be consistent with the form you select (e.g., if you start using the word "route," don't switch to saying "highway" for the same road in the same piece).

- **Interstates:** Interstate 35 or I-35 – Only use the latter on second reference, unless space is of the essence; then use the abbreviated form on first reference.
- **U.S. Highways:** U.S. Route 30, U.S. Highway 30 or U.S. 30
- **State Highways:** state Route 17, state Highway 17 or Iowa Route 17 – (on second reference, you may abridge to Route 17 or Hwy 17)
- **County Roads:** County Road E57 – Always spell out on first reference. On second reference, abridge to "Co Rd E57 or CR E57). **Note:** *When a letter is appended to a number, capitalize it but do not use a hyphen.*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Addresses

- Abbreviate Ave., Blvd. and St. only with a numbered address: **e.g.** *600 Fifth St.; 1701 Duff Ave.*
- Without a number, spell them out and capitalize when part of a formal street. Otherwise, lowercase the generic words: **e.g.** *The festival is on Main Street; Turn left on K Avenue; Continue on the boulevard for several miles.*
- Lowercase when referencing more than one street name: **e.g.** *Go past Oak and Sycamore streets.*
- Always spell out similar words (alley, drive, road, terrace, etc.), but otherwise follow the rules above for capitalization.
- Always use figures for an address number.
- Spell out and capitalize First through Ninth when used as street names; use figures for 10th and above: **e.g.** *7 Second Ave., 100 21st St.*
- Abbreviate compass points used to indicate directional ends of a street or quadrants of a city in a numbered address. Do not abbreviate if the number is omitted (note that there are no periods in quadrant abbreviations – NW, SE, etc.): **e.g.** *222 E. 42nd St., 562 W. 43rd St., 600 K St. NW; East 42nd Street, West 43rd Street, K Street Northwest*

## Job Titles

Only capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before a name; otherwise, lowercase them. This includes when a title precedes a name but is offset by phrasing that includes commas.

### Examples:

- *Executive Director Teresa Opheim will open the board meeting.*
- *PFI's executive director, Teresa Opheim, will open the meeting.*
- *Mark Licht, extension field agronomist with ISU, will speak at the field day.*
- *Matt Liebman is an agronomist and professor at Iowa State.*



# :: Grammar, Punctuation & Word Usage

## ■ 3.8 PFI-Specific Style

The following is a list of current PFI-specific usage conventions::

- **board of directors** **not** Board of Directors – *(this is AP Style's policy too). This applies to references to "the board," and related titles.*
- **cover crop** when a generic reference, **not** cover crops – *e.g. "Our cover crop work"; "the cover crop research reports"; "cover crop species"; BUT "three species of cover crops"*
- **email discussion list** **not** listserv to describe our members-only email groups.
- **farmers market** (no apostrophe) **not** farmer's market  
***Exception:** The only exceptions to this are 1). if you're referencing the formal name of a market that has the apostrophe in the name; or 2). the sentence specifically intends to convey a possessive quality, as in: "The farmers market's ambiance was fun and relaxed."*
- **farminar** (lowercase) **not** Farminar  
***Note:** In general, avoid capitalizing words associated with our sub-programs, like Labor4Learning trainers and trainees, SIP mentors, master researchers, etc.*
- **folks** – be careful to avoid overusing this word. Used to excess, you (or we) can run the risk of sounding insincere or unintentionally pandering. If this word is creeping in too often, consider a simple, direct replacement like "people" – or depending on the context, words like "residents," "citizens," "farmers," etc.
- **Quoting** – we use present tense when quoting people in news releases and newsletter articles
- **row crop** **not** rowcrop – ***Note:** Follow the guidelines for "cover crop" above when deciding when to make the phrase plural. e.g. "our row crop research"; BUT "they raise row crops"*
- **Telephone numbers** – use the traditional form: area code in parentheses with a hyphen – *e.g. (515) 232-5661*

# 3. Writing for PFI

## 3.9 Printed Material

At Practical Farmers, we produce a lot of outreach materials as part of our core emphasis on information-sharing. This section describes some of our main printed publications and outreach materials and offers basic guidelines on writing for these outlets.

### Quarterly Newsletter – "the Practical Farmer"

"the Practical Farmer" is published four times a year in the following order: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. Most issues are 32 pages (though some might be 28 pages). The newsletter is a benefit of membership, and features:

- An executive director note (plus "Dog of the Issue")
- Articles in our core areas
- Summaries of on-farm research
- A book review written by a member
- An article summarizing a good discussion on one of the member email discussion lists
- A section for shorter PFI news items
- A Past, Present & Future ad highlighting someone who has left a legacy to PFI and ways to do so
- A list of new members who joined during the quarter
- An event calendar
- A "Join PFI" page
- Lots of photos
- Special content, depending on the issue

**Who can Write for the Newsletter?** With the exception of the member book review and an occasional article submitted (with prior invitation) by a PFI member, articles are written by Practical Farmers staff. We do not accept outside submissions from non-members.

**Style and Design Elements:** The quarterly newsletter incorporates several features of our visual style: full use of our color palette (including tints) on colored pages; colored boxes and lines; mixed used of font families; etc.

**Quoting in Articles:** Remember that we use present tense when attributing quotes, with the exception of the Member Discussion (which is usually in past tense, since the content refers to a past email discussion).

# :: Publications & Outreach



## Other Visual Design Features:

- **Body text** in Segoe UI font; **pull-quotes** in Cheltenham, Chapparral or Santana font families for visual contrast; **headlines** in Franklin Gothic
- **Sidebar text** might use Myriad, Franklin Gothic or another of our fonts
- **Drop caps** for major articles or news items are in Cheltenham Bold Condensed (colored red on color pages)
- **Photo-rich**, with images showcasing our members. **Note: Strive for at least one good-quality photo per spread, more if possible.**
- **The cover image** needs to feature members or people, and be high resolution (minimum of 300 ppi when sized to fit). Each issue aims to highlight different types of individuals, enterprises or activities.

# 3. Writing for PFI

## Research Reports

Most reports range from two to four pages and summarize results of a single on-farm research project. Reports are written by PFI staff and organized by priority area (such as field crops, cover crops, horticulture, etc.), and each has its own color scheme. **Note on style:** *Because of their scientific nature, research reports follow separate technical guidelines for some matters. See list below:*

### Research Report Technical Style:


- **Acronyms** – Spell out the first time and identify the initials in parentheses, then use the acronym throughout the rest of the document (except in captions, where you should re-identify it).
- **Capitalization** – Observe the following rules:
  - **Seasons** – Capitalize when accompanied by a year: **e.g.** *In Fall 2014, three cooperators studied cover crops; During Summer 2015, farmers measured their energy use. BUT New studies start next spring.*
  - **Phase / Period / Experiment / Round** – Always capitalize: **e.g.** *Experiment 2; Round 3*
- **Multipliers** – In tables and figures, use an "x" in place of the word "times"; in narrative settings, write the word "times" – **e.g.** *5.5x in a table vs. 5.5 times in the body of a report.*
- **Statistical style:**
  - Italicize statistical variables – *P, r, n, etc.*
  - To indicate significance – Put only the variable in italics: **e.g.**  *$P \geq 0.05$*
  - Put spaces before and after symbols: **e.g.**  *$P \leq 0.10$ ;  $n = 9$*
- **Tables, Figures and Photos** – Provide captions for all tables, figures and photos. Make sure these items can stand alone. Tables, figures and photos are often shared or featured separately in blog posts, articles and elsewhere – so captions must provide enough detail for these objects to make sense as self-contained entities.

**Acronyms:** Re-identify any acronyms in the caption, even if you've already spelled them out in the body of the report.

**Placement:** Put captions above tables, and below figures and photos.

# :: Publications & Outreach

## Field Crops



### Field Crops Research


#### Non-GMO Corn Strip Trial: Yield and Feed Value

**Staff Contributor:**  
Margaret Dumas - (515) 332-1880  
margaret@practicalfarmers.org  
**Book Links:**  
http://bit.ly/2h1jyph, bit.ly/2h1jyph

**Co-contributor:**  
John Hultine - Iowa State

**USDA** **ARS** **NCM**

**Staff Contributor:**  
Margaret Dumas - (515) 332-1880  
margaret@practicalfarmers.org  
**Book Links:**  
http://bit.ly/2h1jyph, bit.ly/2h1jyph



**Is it Harvested?**

A number of non-GMO corn hybrids have been developed to have increased tolerance to drought.

Four high protein or high lysine non-GMO corn hybrids were selected to test: Pioneer 3090, Pioneer 3090, Pioneer 3090, Pioneer 3090.

Yield and weight (protein, oil, and lysine) and moisture were different among the four hybrids.

Application of this research did not significantly affect the overall results.

**Report Timeline:**  
April 2013 - October 2013

**About the Experiment**

John and Ben Hultine and their family have a diversified hog, grain, and dairy farm south of Iowa Falls that has been in the family for more than a century. They raise corn, soybeans, hogs, and dairy cattle to provide an income for their family's food needs as well as for the market.

**Background**

Corn intended for livestock feed may require different nutrient concentrations than corn grown for ethanol or human food production. In some production, for instance, growing and feeding large hogs can be more profitable than feeding corn to livestock. However, growing and feeding large hogs can be more profitable than feeding corn to livestock. However, growing and feeding large hogs can be more profitable than feeding corn to livestock.

**Practical Farmers of Iowa**

**Summary analysis of treatments and feed value of corn**

John reported that the specially bred 2013 corn was comparable to other commercial varieties. If the nutrient profile of the specially bred corn is to be substituted for most commercial varieties, it can be substituted for most commercial varieties.

**Table 1**

Hybrid	Yield (bu/acre)	Protein (%)	Oil (%)	Lysine (%)	Feed value (\$/ton)
Pioneer 3090	11.00	11.50	4.50	0.15	110.00
Non-GMO 2013	11.00	11.50	4.50	0.15	110.00

**Table 2**

Hybrid	Yield (bu/acre)	Protein (%)	Oil (%)	Lysine (%)	Feed value (\$/ton)
Pioneer 3090	11.00	11.50	4.50	0.15	110.00
Non-GMO 2013	11.00	11.50	4.50	0.15	110.00

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Non-GMO 2013	11.00	11.50	4.50	0.15	110.00

- **Units of Measurement** – use the following abbreviations in all instances:

- bushel(s) – bu
- pound(s) – lb
- acre(s) – ac
- inch(es) – in.

*(The period needs to be included here to distinguish from the word "in")*

- ounce(s) – oz
- day(s) – d
- square foot – ft<sup>2</sup>
- bushels per acre – bu/ac –

*(This style applies to all related forms, such as plants/ac, seeds/ft<sup>2</sup>, etc.)*

Note that metric units are already standardized.

# 3. Writing for PFI

**Research Report Structure:** Research reports consist of five main sections:

- **Title** – This is the text that goes in the black bar on pg. 1
- **Biographical details** – This is the white-space area just under the title that lists the staff to contact, cooperators, funding and Web location
- **In a Nutshell** – This is the shaded box just under the biographical details. It gives a quick overview of the research and should address the following questions in a bulleted list (*Note: These bullets correspond to the sub-sections in the body of the report, minus the references section*):
  - What's the issue? (Background)
  - What did you do, and how? (Materials and Methods)
  - What are the impacts? (Results and Discussion)
  - What did you learn? (Conclusions and Next Steps)

You should have at least four bullet points in this section – but there is some flexibility here. You may include additional bullets if you feel there are multiple points within a category that should be mentioned, but which would be easier to absorb if given a separate bullet.

Remember, this section is an overview; readers should be able to skim it easily. It's better to break up larger blocks of text into more bullets, but don't make the section overly detailed either.

- **Body** – This section of the report is divided into four sub-sections:
  - **Background** – This section should include a sentence about the objective of the research report (often, this will be the last sentence of the background).
  - **Materials and Methods** – Explain how the research was set up and conducted.

*Note: Somewhere in the Background or Materials and Methods, give background on the farmer cooperator(s): location, size and type of operation, etc. The level of detail is up to the staff person writing the report.*
  - **Results and Discussion** – Report the findings of the projects
  - **Conclusions and Next Steps** – Explain the implications of the research, and any conclusions or recommendations you can draw.

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## Livestock



### Livestock Research

Apple Cider Vinegar Supplementation of Goats – Initial Report

**Staff Credits:**  
Margaret Davis – (319) 232-3888  
margaret.davis@practicalfarmers.org

**Cooperators:**  
• Doreen Anderson – Ruffalo  
• Kelly Bock – Rockwell City  
• Joanne O'Brien – Russell

**Funding By:**  
Walter Family Foundation  
[Web Links](#)  
[http://goatjournal.com](#)

#### Be a Herdhead!

- Apple cider vinegar has been long known to be a healthy remedy.
- Apple cider vinegar is said to have healthful effects for humans. Caring for livestock may also benefit from the medicinal properties of this healthy liquid.
- There have been several studies of goats supplemented with apple cider vinegar.
- Animals were weighed at the beginning and end of the trial and some and average body gains were calculated.
- The goats given vinegar had healthy enteric conditions.

Three Percent  
May September 2012



Healthy goats graze on alfalfa in Kelly Bock's yard.

#### Background

Apple cider vinegar (ACV) is acidic. Fermentation product, the lactic acid, is said to be healthy for humans. It contains mostly acetic acid as well as other nutrients, minerals, some amino acids, antioxidants, and other organic compounds (Lofgren and Kane 2006). While not extensive in itself, ACV is a very large molecule. When consumed by goats, it is broken down by the rumen bacteria. It is then absorbed into the bloodstream, where it can be used by the muscles and other organs. It is also used by the immune system to fight off infections. It is also used by the immune system to fight off infections. It is also used by the immune system to fight off infections.

#### Effects of ACV supplementation on goats

Goats were divided into two groups. One group received ACV and the other group did not. The goats were weighed at the beginning and end of the trial. The goats given ACV had a higher average body gain than the goats that did not receive ACV.

#### Table 1

Effects of ACV supplementation on goats

Group	Treatment	Starting weight (lb)	Ending weight (lb)	Gain (lb)	Gain (%)
Control	Control	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	ACV	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
ACV	Control	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	ACV	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0

#### References

Anderson, Doreen. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
Bock, Kelly. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
O'Brien, Joanne. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.

#### References

Anderson, Doreen. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
Bock, Kelly. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
O'Brien, Joanne. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.

#### Table 2

Effects of ACV supplementation on goats

Group	Treatment	Starting weight (lb)	Ending weight (lb)	Gain (lb)	Gain (%)
Control	Control	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	ACV	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
ACV	Control	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	ACV	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0

#### References

Anderson, Doreen. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
Bock, Kelly. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.  
O'Brien, Joanne. 2012. "Goats and Apple Cider Vinegar." *Goat Journal*.

- References** – Provide a list of sources used in a separate shaded box. We follow the citation style used by the "Agronomy Journal." Visit <https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/files/publications/style/chapter-01.pdf> for specific guidance and examples (the discussion about citations starts on pg. 1-10).



# 3. Writing for PFI

## Postcards

We send postcards for a range of reasons: to notify members in a specific area about an upcoming field day or event; to invite farmers involved in specific enterprises to a workshop we're hosting that's relevant to them; to invite the entire membership to special events like the Cooperators' Program dinner; and in rare cases, for special fundraising solicitations. We also create postcards, upon request, to share with field day hosts so they can help promote their event. Sometimes we email these as PDFs.

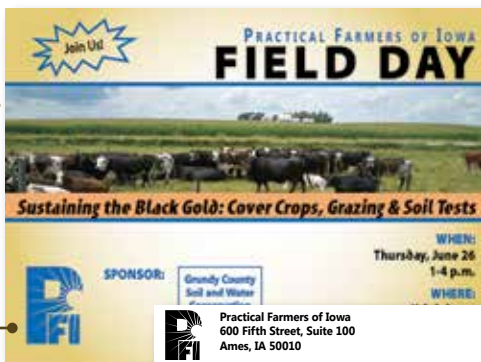
### Examples:

Use of image on the front

Color scheme that matches the year's Field Day Guide booklet

Summary of key details on backside, if appropriate

Size is 5.5" x 3.5"



**PFI** Practical Farmers of Iowa  
600 Fifth Street, Suite 100  
Ames, IA 50010

**HOSTS:**  
Denise O'Brien and Larry Harris  
(712) 243-3264  
hno@metcnet.net  
[www.rollingacres.wordpress.com](http://www.rollingacres.wordpress.com)

**DESCRIPTION:**  
Explore the possibilities that a moveable high tunnel can provide for extended season production. We will also discuss on-going research trials, vegetable production, use of cover crops and local marketing.

**COST:** Free

**THE FARM:** Rolling Acres Farm in southwest Iowa has been in organic production since 1976. The moveable high tunnel was constructed through

wholesale and restaurant market. They also sell to the Atlantic Hy-Vee and the Cass County Memorial Hospital.

**FOR DIRECTIONS:**  
Visit <http://practicalfarmers.org>

**TO:**



Use of filmstrips and color bars

Mixed use of fonts for typographic and visual efficacy



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## News Releases

With our heavy focus on farmer-to-farmer learning, we put on a lot of events – and send out a lot of news releases every year – so having a consistent style is important. A news release template is available on the office server, but here's a quick summary of key points:

### Basic News Release Pointers:

- **Use Letterhead:** The first page of a news release is always on modified letterhead with our current masthead (minus the letterhead footer). There's a digital version of this with the masthead graphic pasted in.
- **Font:** News releases are written in 10-point Segoe UI, with 13.5-point headlines in bold. Sub-heads (if you include one) are 12-point Segoe in italics. Try to keep sub-heads to one line.
- **Dateline:** For regional releases, use the location of the event. For statewide releases, use "Ames" as the location.
- **Quotes:** It's a good idea to try to include at least one quote – preferably from a member. We like to use staff quotes very sparingly.
- **Bolding, Lists & Sub-heads:** These can be helpful ways of highlighting key details, such as the date and location of an event, when an RSVP is requested, or when you find yourself writing lots of list items in a paragraph format. Ask yourself if a bulleted list would be easier to read or more effective. If you're writing a longer release, it's a good idea to break up the text with subheads. **Remember:** *Reporters are incredibly strapped for time, and need to glean key details in a quick skim!*
- **Headers and Footers:** For multiple-page news releases, include a header on subsequent pages with your contact details, and a short summary of what the release is about. Footers say "Page 1 of X" so newsroom staff know the release continues.
- **Boilerplate:** See pg. 7 for the current brand summary text that concludes all news releases, just after the traditional "####" signaling the end of a news release (but before the "Contact" section).

# 3. Writing for PFI

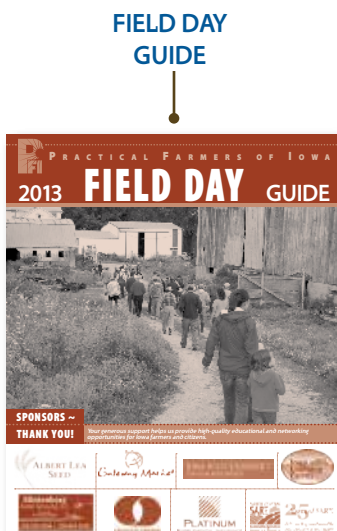
## Special Print Materials

In addition to the print products mentioned, we produce a range of special publications, such as brochures, an annual field day guide, a cover crop business directory, an annual report and more. We don't have rigid design templates for these publications – but for matters of fonts, colors and word usage, follow the guidelines in this style guide.

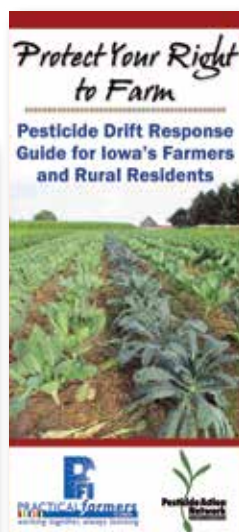
### Examples:



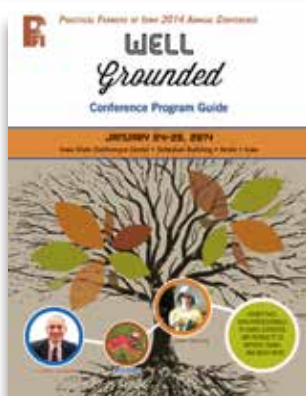
MEMBERSHIP  
BROCHURE



FIELD DAY  
GUIDE



DRIFT  
BROCHURE



CONFERENCE  
BOOKLET

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## ■ 3.10 Digital Material

### **e-Newsletter – "Practical News"**

This digital publication is our weekly email newsletter that goes out Friday afternoons to members, as well as non-members who have shared their emails with us or expressed an interest in staying informed without yet making a commitment to membership. Content must be directly related to PFI somehow to qualify for inclusion. Items that can often be found in "Practical News" include:

- Summaries of all our news releases
- Links to the week's blog posts
- Announcements about new publications, website updates, upcoming events we're organizing, etc.
- "Members in the News" – a section showcasing members who were featured in or interviewed by news media
- A photo of the week
- A "Member Spotlight" feature that includes a photo, basic membership stats and brief interview with a member

All staff may submit ideas for each week's issue via a shared Google document.

### **Website**

In spring 2014 we launched a redesigned website featuring new content; a design that's more intuitive, easier to navigate and updated for viewing on mobile devices; and a structure that better reflects our member- and farmer-centered focus.

**Questions? Updates?** Erica Andorf is our Web editor. All changes or additions must go through her (with the exception of the blog). Contact her at [erica@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:erica@practicalfarmers.org) if you have questions or content updates.

# 3. Writing for PFI

## "The Practical Blog"

Our blog is a place where staff – and the occasional guest PFI member – share news, updates, photos, reflections and other musings on our work and membership in a more informal setting. The blog is a unique space, because it's inherently more conversational and lets us speak more naturally with readers.

**Who Can Contribute?** All staff may write a blog post at any time. It's the one place on the website where all staff have access to add new content. We also occasionally invite members to write a post. Usually they'll send the content in an email and we'll post on their behalf. As with the quarterly newsletter, we do not permit non-members to contribute.

**Basic Rules:** Feel free to post a quick blog any time, but keep in mind:

- **Content must be related somehow to our work or members.** – *e.g.* A post about your vacation isn't relevant, but reflections on a chance encounter you had with a PFI member while on vacation would be.
- **Get permission to share.** If you think a private conversation you had with a PFI member would make a great blog post, always get prior consent before posting. The same applies to any comments shared by members on one of our email discussion lists.

### Blog-Writing Best Practices:

- Try to keep blogs on the shorter side, and strive to be conversational.
- Break up posts with sections headers, numbered lists or bullet points.
- Always include some photos or graphics.
- Try to think of fun, creative or enticing titles for your blog posts.
- Remember to tag your posts with relevant keywords (these sections are built into our blog editor)
- Post regularly! A blog should be an active space, but coming up with ideas can tough at times. Consider keeping a list of ideas you can use in a pinch.

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## **Social Media**

We currently use four social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. When posting for PFI, use good judgment, and remember that all posts must be directly related to our work or members. For more detailed guidance on personal conduct expectations, read PFI's Social Media Policy. This document (located on our server) outlines PFI's expectations and recommendations for staff using social media both personally and on behalf of Practical Farmers.

On the strategy side, here are some examples of acceptable posts you might find on our various channels:

### **Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/practicalfarmers](http://www.facebook.com/practicalfarmers)

- Posts and reminders about upcoming events, calls for applicants to some of our programs, PFI merchandise orders and related subjects – or occasionally, those of groups we partner with
- Posts featuring photos or video clips of our members or events
- Reshares of interesting posts or photos authored by our members
- Fun facts about our membership, milestones reached, etc.

### **Twitter:**

<http://twitter.com/practicalfarmer>

- Posts featuring photos or video clips of our field days or members
- Reminders about events, application windows, etc.
- Real-time status updates during conference sessions

### **LinkedIn:**

[www.linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa](http://www.linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa)

- Updates about major events or application windows
- Posts announcing when the quarterly newsletter or other publications are available on the website
- Notices about PFI job openings, membership renewals, fun facts, etc.

### **YouTube:**

[www.youtube.com/user/pfivideos](http://www.youtube.com/user/pfivideos)

- As our video site, this is the home for official PFI videos

# 4. Photos

## 4.1 Choosing Images

We try as much as possible to feature our members in images, and as the faces of Practical Farmers. This applies to all our outreach materials.

**Think about your goals and your audience**, and try to choose the best photos to help illustrate your point – but remember that we are member-centric: Always strive to include a photo of the member in question, even if you're including other types of images.

**When selecting images**, try to pick those that:

- Clearly depict the intended PFI member(s)
- Avoid awkward poses or facial expressions
- Are relatively recent (within five or fewer years is a good guideline)
- Show the subject on his or her farm, if possible, or if a non-farmer, in a nice setting – **Note:** *This is a general guideline; sometimes the intent or context is related to an indoor setting, and that's fine.*
- Are sharp and in focus
- Avoid microphone shots (where subjects are holding a mic)
- Are cropped or zoomed in enough so the PFI member (or other intended subject matter) is easy to see
- Were taken by Practical Farmers staff, or submitted by a member with permission to use.

### Quality and Resolution

**Images for the Web** can and should be smaller than those intended for print. A resolution of 72 ppi (pixels per inch) is sufficient. In general, .GIF and .PNG formats are better for graphics (both support transparency, while .JPEG does not), but .JPEGs are better for photos.

**Images for print:** In general, higher-resolution photos are 1 MB or larger in size and should be 300 ppi – but larger sizes will be needed for some things, like full-page cover images on the newsletter (5+ MB at least).

In general, .TIFF images are preferred (they are lossless and preserve layers and transparency), but .JPEGs are fine for photos and other graphics if you don't mind losing some quality. Other formats may include .EPS, .AI, .PSD and .PDF, depending on the circumstance or program you have access to.

## ■ 4.2 Photography Credits

We take a lot of photographs and have an extensive image collection to draw on when we need images. When using our own photos in material we create, it's not necessary to credit PFI or the individual staff member who took the photo.

### Sharing PFI Photos With Others

If you share our photos with other organizations, the media or individuals, ask that they include the following credit line:

"Photo(s) courtesy of Practical Farmers of Iowa."

### Crediting Others

If you use photos taken by others, always credit the person or organization who took the image. This is especially true for organizations and contract or freelance photographers.

e.g. – "Photo courtesy of Iowa Learning Farms."

**Photos shared by members:** It's a good idea to credit our members as well when they share photos with us. Sometimes they don't want or need credit – but you should always ask! If a member doesn't want credit, that's fine. Frequently, however, when members share photos with us they get copied to a folder or mixed with other photos.

**Keeping track of photos:** To ensure the photo doesn't get lost in our PFI collections, create a folder that indicates whom to credit, or rename the shared photo with wording that will make it clear who the creator is (e.g. "Cows on pasture\_credit to Ray Bratsch-Prince").

