

# the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

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## PROFITABILITY THE FOCUS OF JANUARY PFI MEETING

What have we learned after this roller coaster year of cliffhanger weather and gut-wrenching fluctuations in the hog market? As farmers prepare to close the books on 1995 and look ahead to 1996, profitability is a real concern. What is the key – getting better at what you are already doing or doing things differently?

Low farm profits in recent years have prompted creative responses from farming families around the state. Groups are forming around the need for better records, better planning, better management of particular kinds of systems. Farmers are creating new ways to reach consumers, adding more value on the farm or reducing price uncertainty through contracting. People are finding creative ways to stay on the farm. And more often than not, profitability means the low-cost practice, the practice that works with nature in a farming system, the practice that returns control and responsibility to the manager.

*Profitability* is the over-riding theme of the PFI annual meeting set for January 5-7 at the Ames Starlite Village Best Western Motel. A full day of workshops, talks, producer posters, and socializing on Saturday, the 6<sup>th</sup>, will be preceded on Friday by a field trip to a hoop house hog production facility and evening entertainment by a farmer and storyteller.



### Duffy to Keynote, Workshops Set

ISU Extension agricultural economist Michael Duffy will set the direction for the Saturday program with a keynote address: *Profitability: What are we trying to achieve?* Duffy, Associate Director of the

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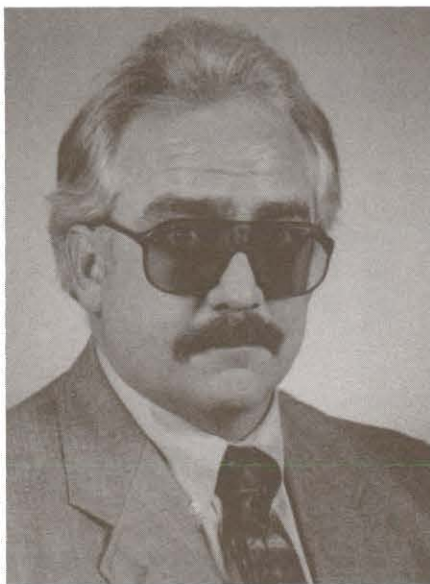
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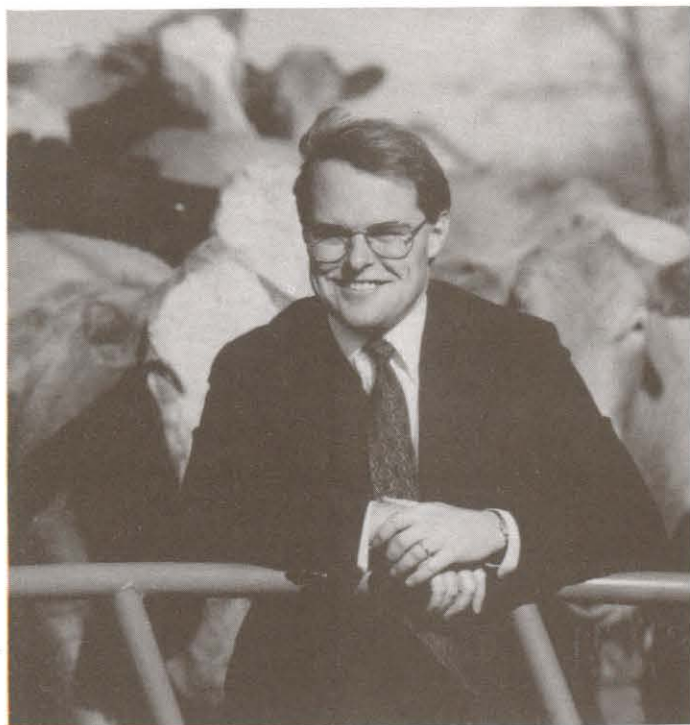
Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, has researched and spoken widely about profitability issues facing producers. Without minimizing the seriousness of those issues, he is thoroughly versed in the opportunities – even advantages – for diversified and moderate sized farms.

Duffy will also participate in two workshop sessions on Saturday. Other workshop participants include Neil Hamilton, director of the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University; Joan Blundall, associate director of the Seasons Center for Community Mental Health, in Spencer; Mike Mamminga of the Meat and Poultry Inspection Division of the Iowa Department of



**Michael Duffy, Sustainable Ag Achievement Award recipient, will speak on profitability.**

***But the heart of the program is PFI members themselves.***



**Neil Hamilton will take part in a contracting workshop.**

### **Mike Duffy to Receive Sustainable Ag Achievement Award**

PFI gives an annual award to someone who has advanced the cause of profitable, environmentally-sound farming in Iowa. This year's award will be given to Mike Duffy, an ISU Extension economist.

Mike has researched and written about farm management issues, including how farm size and enterprise diversity relates to profits and resource utilization. He has been a strong supporter of efforts to improve farm profits while protecting the resource base that farming depends on. As Dick Thompson said when discussing this award, "He's interested in the whole picture. This is an award that is long overdue."

Mike received a B.S. in natural resources in '75 and an M.S. in agricultural economics in '77, both from the University of Nebraska. He got his Ph.D. from Penn State in '81 and then worked as an economic researcher for USDA in Washington, D.C. until his came to ISU in '84.

At ISU Mike was an area farm management specialist until he moved to his present position on campus. His current responsibilities include the annual land value survey, cost of crop production estimates, and the Iowa farm cost and returns publication. He is also the Associate Director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and professor-in-charge of the ISU Beginning Farmer Center.

Agriculture; and Michael Cotter, a farmer and storyteller from Austin, MN. But the heart of the program is PFI members themselves. In workshops, district caucuses, producer posters, and socializing, the meeting is by and for the members.

### **Meeting Arrangements**

There will be no pre-registration for the meeting, but pre-notification is requested for those taking part in youth activities, the Friday field tour, and posters (see below). Attendance is free to current members and the \$10 cost of a year's membership to all others. The \$7 (adults) \$4 (children) noon meal is an additional option. A

**(Continued on page 4.)**



## Winter Meeting Workshops

**Direct Marketing Meat:** Mike Mamminga, Robert Recker, Cindy Madsen, Roger Lennox (Mark Tjelmeland moderator)

There are consumers who want the quality of sustainably-raised meat and there are producers who can supply those products. What are the ways they are getting together? What does the law require in terms of handling the product and the money? Several producers will speak from experience, and Mike Mamminga will represent the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Meat and Poultry Inspection Service.

**What About an Off-Farm Job?:** Mike Reicherts, Kathy Koether, Mark Bruns (Joan Blundall moderator)

An off-farm job can be a short-term or a long-term strategy, and economic necessity or choice. What kinds of things should you be aware of as you consider taking a job off the farm? Three PFI members will speak about their experiences with off-farm work. Joan Blundall will offer observations on how people can handle the challenges presented by work off the farm.

**Hoop House Hog Production:** Mark Honeyman, Archie Kuntz, Laurie Connor (Vic Madsen moderator)

A growing number of Iowa hog producers have "hoop dreams." Does this system really offer productivity without the capital investment of other confinement operations? This workshop will follow on the Friday field trip and will feature the experience of two Iowa farmers who are using hoop systems. The Leopold Center has granted funding to bring Laurie Connor, a researcher from Manitoba, Canada, to this workshop to describe comparative performance of fabric-covered systems in that northern climate.

**Making a Place for Children on the Farm:** Rueben and Frances Zacharakis-Jutz, Jessica Frantzen, Eve Abbas, Bryan Hoben (moderator Margaret Smith)

Many parents want their children to share their love of farming, but where on a modern farm can kids find opportunities to get involved? PFI

members – both adults and youngsters – will talk about the finding the fun in farming.

**Keeping Track: Records and Decision Making:** Tom Frantzen, Dave Lubben, Mary Drier (Mike Duffy moderator)

You don't know where you're headed without some kind of map to guide you. Your map is your record of where you have been, and it informs your decisions for reaching your future destination. PFI members will compare different approaches to farm records and decision making. (Session 1 Tom Frantzen and Mary Drier, session 2 Tom Frantzen and Dave Lubben.)

**Biological Controls for Iowa – Taking It to the Field:** Joe Fitzgerald, John Obrycki, Kris Giles (Mark Roose moderator)

PFI cooperators are working with ISU entomologists on biological controls for alfalfa weevil, potato leaf hopper, corn borer, and other pests. While some techniques are well established, several new methods are in the experimental stage. There are opportunities for producers and scientists to develop new methods together through PFI on-farm research.

**Farming in Stories:** Michael Cotter

Michael Cotter, Minnesota's best known storyteller and a lifelong farmer from the Austin area, will lead workshop participants in a session that explores how storytelling can help develop our gifts of creativity while connecting people with the land and each other.

**Production Contracts: When and How:** Don Davidson, Paul Mugge, Ken Rosmann (Neil Hamilton moderator)

Farmers are creating new ways to add more value on the farm or reduce price uncertainty through contracting. What should farmers look for in a contract? What do processors want? Neil Hamilton, who recently published *A Farmer's Legal Guide to Production Contracts*, will engage a panel of PFI members and workshop participants in a discussion of these kinds of questions.



**Minnesotan Michael Cotter will tell stories about farming Friday evening and in the Saturday workshop.**

block of rooms is being held for Jan 4-6 by the Starlite Village Best Western. Make motel reservations by Dec. 25: Starlite Village, (515) 232-9260 or (800) 903-0009. (Request the PFI group rate.)

### **Pre-Register for Youth Activities**

Youth activities are being coordinated by Donna Bauer. Parents planning to bring children must pre-register their children by contacting Donna ahead of time at 712-563-4084 or returning the form on page 5. There will be a \$5-per-child charge payable to Donna at the meeting to cover activity expenses.

### **Hoophouse Hog Facility Tour**

On Friday afternoon, Mark Honeyman, Director of Outlying ISU Research Farms, will host a

group at the hoophouse hog facility on the Rhodes Research Farm, which is about a half hour drive east of Ames. The pigs in the unit will be approaching market weight at that time. Tour participants will see how this deep-bedded, unheated production facility has performed going into an Iowa winter. Discussion will continue in the workshops the following day, where Canadian animal scientist Laurie Connor will report on performance of hoophouses in Manitoba. Transportation will be provided to the first 20 participants. Pre-register by contacting the PFI coordinators at 515-294-1923 or returning the form on page 5.

### **Bring a Poster!**

Producer posters were one of the most popular parts of the annual meeting last year. Again the call goes out to any and all, young and old. Bring a poster and join the PFI cooperators and *Sustainable Projects* participants on the walls! Pre-register your poster by calling the PFI coordinators at 515-294-1923 or returning the form on page 5. You will receive a simple guide sheet for designing and constructing your poster.



**Laura Jackson, left, leads a search for the new prairie seeding at the Stewart field day.**



**Friday Evening: Stories from the Farm**

At 7:30 on Friday evening, Minnesota's best-known storyteller, Michael Cotter, will be on hand with stories that are personal, yet with themes that are common to us all. Michael has farmed his whole life in the Austin area of Minnesota. He combines farming and storytelling in ways that remind us of what is truly important.

**Saturday Evening: Prairies and Farming**

The Saturday evening presentation, *Iowa's Prairie Heritage - Integration with the Farm*, will be given by Laura Jackson of the University of Northern Iowa. She will show slides of plants native to Iowa, describe the "rules" of prairie ecosystems, and compare the prairie to farming ecosystems of the past, present, and future.

With several PFI farmers, Laura Jackson is researching the potential of prairie species in grazing systems. This work may develop ways farming can coexist with elements of the native landscape. Also, pictures by Iowa photographer Helen Gunderson that show changes in Iowa's land over time will be on display at the meeting.

**WINTER MEETING AGENDA**

Place: Ames, Starlite Village Best Western, 13<sup>th</sup> & Dayton Rd.

Friday (January 5)

Evening: (Check-in)

7:30 - *Stories from the Farm*,  
Michael Cotter

Saturday (January 6)

7:30 - Registration Opens

8:30 - 9:00: Welcome by PFI President  
Vic Madsen

9:00 - 10:00: *Profitability: What Are We  
Trying to Achieve*, Michael  
Duffy

10:00 - 10:20: Sustainable Ag Achievement  
Award

10:20 - 10:30: Break

10:30 - 11:30: Workshops I (select one)

11:30 - 1:00: Lunch

1:00 - 1:20: PFI business meeting

1:20 - 1:45: District Meetings

1:45 - 3:00: Workshops II (select one)

3:00 - 4:15: Posters & Displays (refresh-  
ments)

4:15 - 5:15: Workshops III (select one)

5:15 - 6:00: Posters

6:00 - 7:00: Supper

7:30 - 9:00: *Iowa's Prairie Heritage -  
Integration with the Farm*,  
Laura Jackson

**Registration for Children's Activities, Posters, and Friday Field Trip****(Return by Jan 1, please print)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Children's Activities:** \_\_\_\_\_ no. children X \$5.00 per child .. (Bring along with your kids.) . = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

name(s) and ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

**Posters:** \_\_\_\_\_ yes, I will bring a poster. Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**Friday hoophouse production field trip:** name \_\_\_\_\_

second person name \_\_\_\_\_

third person name \_\_\_\_\_

Return this form to: PFI, 2104 Agronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

For more information call: Rick Exner or Gary Huber (515) 294-1923.



## World Resources Institute Study of PFI

Gary Huber

Earlier this year PFI was asked to be part of a study sponsored by the World Resources Institute (WRI). WRI is using eight case studies – two from each continent – of efforts to reduce pesticide use and farm sustainably. They want to learn why these efforts started, why they work or don't work, and what the implications are for public policy. Of particular interest are efforts that involve collaborations of farmer organizations and public institutions.

This request came at a time the PFI board had begun to examine the direction PFI should take to continue to be relevant. Board members spent time during their July meeting discussing future directions. (See sidebar for a listing of possible future focuses drawn from this discussion.) The board saw the WRI study as an opportunity to gather information that would help their deliberations.

The PFI study began in September and included four focus group interviews conducted by Selzer-Boddy, Inc., a Des Moines research firm. Two groups were convened in Mount Vernon on Sept. 1 and two in Carroll on Sept. 18. At both locations one group was active PFI members and the other past members or non-members who knew of PFI.

The study also included personal interviews conducted by Dr. Aaron Harp, a rural sociologist at the University of Idaho. These interviews were of

### Possible Future Focuses for PFI from July 1995 PFI Board Meeting

Help change negative perceptions of alternative farming practices and goals.

Look into the whole area of niche crops and specialty products.

Develop alternative marketing models.

Teach better decision-making skills.

Put more emphasis on promoting PFI.

Work toward long-term financial stability for PFI.

ISU researchers and administrators, PFI leaders, and others who have observed PFI's evolution.

Some observations drawn primarily from the focus groups are given next, followed by ideas for future directions for PFI.

- The formal relationship between PFI and ISU enabled development of an effective network of informal relationships between PFI farmers and ISU researchers. These informal relationships are the foundation of the PFI-ISU collaboration.
- Individuals and organizations both gain from the partnership. PFI farmers gain from the help of ISU scientists in conducting on-farm research. The scientists gain from field-level problems that ground their research in practical concerns. The results are effective problem solving for individuals and enhanced credibility for PFI and ISU.
- The collaboration provides research results that would not otherwise be available, and PFI farmers have benefited economically with lower chemical costs and equivalent or greater net profits.
- Although PFI farmers have made changes, many Iowa farmers have not. Broadening the reach of the organization is needed.
- PFI farmers want on-farm research that includes measurements of environmental impacts of the practices being studied.
- PFI research results are not always presented in a way that makes them easy to use, and participants suggest including more information about farm



**Vic Madsen leads a board discussion about future directions while Gayle Olson records comments.**



operations involved in the trials as a way to improve the usefulness of the results.

- PFI farmers want to be able to take PFI research results to bankers or government staff as evidence to support the practices they use or want to use. However, they are uncomfortable doing this, in part because they feel the results are not compiled in a way that non-farmers can appreciate them.

Looking to the future, focus group participants had many ideas for roles PFI could play. Two that came through very strongly were:

- Collaboration for Marketing – Participants want help finding the right markets for their products, which they feel are of unique quality. They feel PFI could help by building marketing coalitions.
- Collaboration for Community Building – Participants see community declines all around, and they would welcome PFI taking a direct, pro-active role in community building.

The following article, which describes a recent meeting sponsored by WRI of all eight projects, notes that a book of the cases studies will be published next spring. While having PFI be part of this book is noteworthy, the more tangible benefit is the insights that can help PFI be relevant in the future. Planning to help this happen will continue. ☛

## World Resources Institute Meeting in Washington, D.C.

Rick Exner

PFI board member Jeff Olson and I attended the *Global Workshop on Partnerships for a Safe and Sustainable Agriculture*, a conference of the eight projects taking part in the study coordinated by the World Resources Institute (WRI). Each of us presented our "case study" of collaboration between a grassroots organization and an institution. In our case that was the PFI-ISU relationship. The meeting took place in Washington, D.C. just before Thanksgiving. (Unfortunately, our sightseeing was curtailed by the government shutdown.)

WRI is really interested in examples where public-private cooperation is helping people farm in ways that are profitable, environmentally sound,

and supportive of rural institutions. And there were some inspiring examples. For instance, Father Francisco Lucas works with a coalition of Asian NGOs (non-governmental organizations) based in the Philippines. He described the crucial importance of *community* in achieving lasting changes in farming practices. Amadou Diop, of Rodale International, explained how farmers in Senegal, West Africa, train other farmers in soil-building and natural plant protection methods. Miguel Altieri, from the University of California, described the low-tech, neighborhood-based facilities that grow beneficial insects and other biological control agents in Cuba.

PFI was one of only two U.S. projects at the meeting. I was surprised by the similarity of issues facing groups worldwide. "Self-replicating" communication models (like farmer-to-farmer) and community or group-based approaches are working well – especially in light of declining international funding for integrated pest management and sustainable agriculture.

Despite this funding trend, we were joined at the conference by representatives of prestigious entities like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the World Wildlife Fund, the Pesticide Action Network, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Their presence reflected the importance of the topic – as well as the stature of the World Resources Institute and the reputation of workshop chair Lori Ann Thrupp. WRI will publish the eight case studies in a book next spring. ☛

## Sociological Study of PFI Farmers

Mike Bell

Last fall I approached the PFI board about doing sociological research on how farmers start down the path of sustainable agriculture, and the role of a group like PFI in that transition. The board endorsed the project, and the SARE program of USDA provided funding. Preliminary research began with a focus group session at last February's PFI cooperators' meeting, and I attended every field day I could this summer.

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# SHARED VISIONS



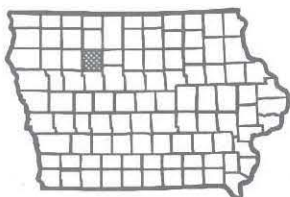
*farming for better communities*

## Seven Groups Accepted into Shared Visions Community Groups Network

In September these seven groups were selected for the *Shared Visions* community groups network.

### Cattle Feeders' Community Alliance - Pocahontas County

Ken Schultes, a local veterinarian, was one of the main people behind the formation of this group. Ken, along with Bill Winkleblack, a banker from Rolfe, talked to some local farmers, agency



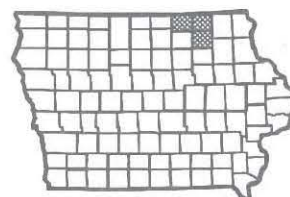
personnel and business people about bringing cattle back to the area. They met twice before deciding to apply to become involved in *Shared Visions*.

Some ideas for group goals drawn from their application are to:

- Increase local awareness that cattle feeding is a sustainable value-added industry with profit potential for rural north central Iowa;
- Help family farmers diversify by adding value to forages and grain through cattle while decreasing expenses for grain enterprises through the use of animal wastes on cropland;
- Locate sources of cattle with superior health and genetics and align area feeders with groups in other parts of the state that are exporting these cattle;
- Develop arrangements between local lenders, investors, agri-businesses, consultants, cow/calf producers, and cattle feeders to share the benefits of the superior quality of their product;
- Encourage area cattle feeders to improve management skills and locate profit and loss centers within their operations;

The group has not met since being accepted into *Shared Visions*.

### Coalition for Holistic Agricultural Resource Management (CHARM)



Founding members of this group are five farm couples from northeast Iowa and one farm couple from across the border in Minnesota. They came together last March sharing a desire to improve their decision-making skills through the use of Holistic Resource Management (HRM). During late summer they added an NRCS District Conservationist, a loan officer at a credit agency, and a farm management instructor at a technical college to the group.

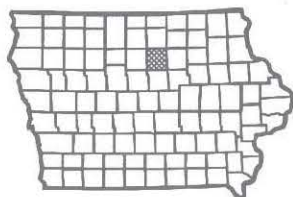
Members see the group as a way to provide each other with support,



guidance and encouragement as they seek sustainable systems of farming. They identified openness and confidentiality as necessary to their work, and they want to build community both within their group and with others.

They have met twice since being accepted into *Shared Visions*. They rotate their monthly meetings among their farms. At each farm, they discuss the goals of the hosting couple and help analyze decisions they are facing. An outside facilitator will lead a day-long meeting on November 29 to bring everyone in the group to a common level of understanding of HRM.

### Hampton Area Rural Development Action Committee



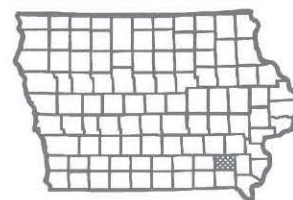
This group formed last February out of a desire by the Agriculture and Industry Committee of the Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce to increase youth involvement and explore adding value to local commodities. Group members represent a cross section of the community, including bankers, business people, educators, and farmers.

The group met monthly through May and then formed subcommittees to investigate some issues in more detail. Four priority areas identified were:

- Value-added crop production;
- Value-added livestock production (ie. drug-free livestock);
- Trees for added income;
- Expanding the November "Farm-City Banquet" and the March "Spring Tillage Fair" to address economic opportunities for area producers;

In August the group decided to apply to participate in *Shared Visions*. Their first meeting since being accepted will be December 4.

### Jefferson County Group



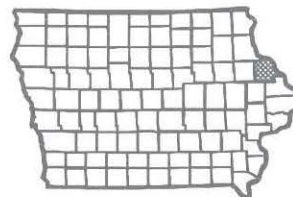
This group came together to apply to be involved in *Shared Visions*.

Members represent a cross section of the Jefferson County area, including farmers, business people, and other local leaders, such as a county supervisor and the mayor of Fairfield. Issues listed on the Group Application form include:

- Strategies for reducing or eliminating pesticides;
- Alternative and perennial crops such as perennial grains, nuts, berries and other fruit;
- Passive solar greenhouse for growing produce;
- Crop rotations;
- Demonstrations and tours of group projects and videotaping of projects so that they are readily available to all.

The group's first meeting was November 21.

### Northeast Iowa Congregational Supported Agriculture Group



This group's members were involved in an effort earlier this year to help farmers market livestock, vegetables, and other items to members of church congregations in the Dubuque area. The person organizing the effort was not able to continue the project. Subsequently, two other participants encouraged farmers who had been involved to complete Individual Application forms as part of the group's application to *Shared Visions*.

The group, mostly farmers, met for the first time on November 15. Many members did not know each other, so time was spent discussing their interests and the purposes the group could serve.

Most are new to the concept of Congregational Supported Agriculture, but all

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feel that alternatives to traditional ways of marketing are necessary. Some group members plan to attend a Community Supported Agriculture conference in Madison, Wisconsin on December 2. The group will meet again on December 11.

### Prairie Talk

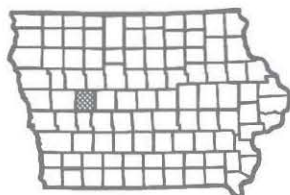
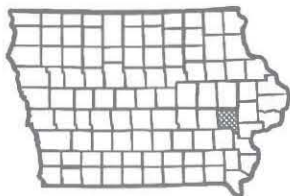
This group, dedicated to educating themselves and others about sustainable and organic farming practices, did not exist prior to applying to *Shared Visions*. The group's organizers were Judy Jedlicka, Jane Woodhouse, and Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, all from the Solon area in Johnson County. They each identified and asked others to become involved, bringing the group's size to twelve people. Eight are women and four are men; half are farmers and half are non-farmers.

They have met twice since being accepted into *Shared Visions* and are developing a shared vision and goal for the group. They are also identifying and locating materials on organic farming practices, as well as people with expertise and interest in the topic. They have also begun to educate themselves by attending conferences and meetings related to their interests. (See the article beginning on this page written by group member Bob Joly about a conference he attended recently in Wisconsin.)

### Total Resources Management Services (TRMS)

TRMS is a non-profit organization established several years ago by the Carroll County Soil and Water Conservation District. TRMS sponsored the group that applied to become involved in *Shared Visions*. Group members are all interested in establishing a manure brokering service in the County.

They met in August to discuss ideas related to this topic, including some broader than the brokering idea,



such as composting and methane production. They want to investigate various options and develop and implement a plan to achieve those that are workable in their county. The group will meet for the first time since being accepted into *Shared Visions* on December 5.

### Rural-Urban Conference Report

by Bob Joly, Prairie Talk

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Urban-Rural Conference, presented by Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, took place Oct. 27-29 in East Troy, WI. The conference was well attended with approximately 100 presenters and participants sharing information in over 25 wide-ranging workshops, forums and panels. Major funding was provided by Williamson Street Grocery Cooperative in Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection-Sustainable Agriculture Program. Nearly 30 other organizations were contributors and/or co-sponsors.

Wonderful lunch and dinner food was provided through the coordinated efforts of local farmers and chefs from Chicago, Madison, and Mukwonago. Day care was provided by Waldorf teacher Cindy Aldinger. This year's theme was, *Whole Farms, Whole Foods, Whole Lives*. My wife, son and I attended to gather information for our Solon, IA, based *Shared Visions* group, *Prairie Talk*.

Keynote speaker Fred Kirschenmann, biodynamic farmer from North Dakota, set the tone for the weekend with his address, "Putting Culture Back Into Agriculture: How Farmers and Consumers are Making the Choice." He succinctly laid out the differences, as he sees it (and I agree), between *agriculture* and *agribusiness*. Agribusiness, responding to often distant capital control, emphasizes the price/supply model which relies on cheap labor, cheap materials, and the least environmental control. The farmer is an expendable employee.

Agriculture, on the other hand, is the farmer you see driving that pickup truck and that tractor in the field.



Agriculture is what makes you plant your own garden so that you can eat a warm, juicy tomato in the summer. Mr. Kirschenmann said that many consider it 'patriotic' not to question the industry-driven food system. "Why should we care how food is produced as long as there is enough?" Well, we do care how it is produced, and we care about who is producing it. We are the patriotic culture in agriculture.

Caring alone will not save the family farmer. Farming is a business and market forces have to be understood. Kirschenmann's point is that different markets have to be established. In the past farmers have failed to develop an environmental ethic, while environmentalists have failed to develop a production ethic. The two groups must be brought together, and a good way to do so is by developing local (regional) networks: a farmer/customer model where each knows and supports the other.

At the conference I attended workshops entitled, *Holistic Resource Management*, *Community Supported Agriculture*, *Face to Face at the Farm Gate*, and *Whole Farm Systems*. My wife attended, *Women in Agriculture: Our Growing Role*, *At the Heart of a Healing Agriculture*, *Building Community Around Food*, and a tour of Altfred Kusenbum's biodynamic dairy farm.

Between workshops we were able to check informational booths for news from local and regional organizations, and on upcoming events. Faye Jones, Education Outreach Coordinator of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Organic Crop Improvement Association, maintained a table with dozens of publications from the group's library.

The 5th Annual Rural Urban Conference was a great gathering of those of us who want and are willing to work for *Whole Farms*, *Whole Foods*, *Whole Lives*. Michael Fields Agricultural Institute can be reached at: 3287 Main St., East Troy, WI, 53120. 414-642-4028.

## Group Networking

Networking between community groups for mutual learning is a feature of *Shared Visions*. Last summer members of the Central Iowa CSA group traveled to Benton County to visit members of the Farm Fresh CSA group. Earlier this fall there were two additional networking events for groups involved in *Shared Visions*.

On September 1 members of the Audubon Graziers traveled to the Neely-Kinyon Field Day near Greenfield. After the event they spent an hour and a half talking with members of the Neely-Kinyon group. They discussed how to involve non-farmers, which both groups viewed as a challenge. One idea was weekend farm stays. Another was using the direct marketing of food to build relationships, which they felt made sense, but faced problems of cost and convenience. They also identified a need for research on how to develop an infrastructure for farm-scale processing.

On September 12 two groups were linked using Iowa's fiber optics network: Ag Connect from southwest Iowa and The Promised Land group from the Grundy-Hardin county area. Members of Ag Connect used facilities on the campus of Southwestern Community College in Creston; members of The Promised Land group used facilities at the

**Continued on next page.**



**Clark BreDahl of the Neely-Kinyon group makes a point during the discussion with members of the Audubon Graziers group.**



Grundy Center High School. Mike Duffy of ISU Extension, Rich Pirog of the Leopold Center, and Gary Huber participated from the originating site on the Iowa State campus.

The meeting helped the groups gain an understanding of each other's approaches. For example, Ag Connect's focus is on providing beginning and retiring farmers one-on-one assistance and connections to others with expertise, which they can do because the group has a full-time director.

The Promised Land group, on the other hand, lacks resources to provide this kind of service. Over time its emphasis has moved toward examining practices and strategies that will help beginners be successful.

The landscapes and types of farms in each area also distinguish the groups from each other. The Grundy-Hardin county area has some of the highest cash rents in the state, which makes it hard for beginners to compete for land. As well, farmland in the area is perceived as being best used for rowcrops, which limits options for beginners.

On the other hand, in the area of Ag Connect cash rents are lower and more land is suited for livestock. However, farms owned by retiring farmers often have some cropland, quite a bit of CRP, varying amounts of timber, and buildings and fences that need to be repaired or replaced. The challenge is to develop a mix of enterprises on these farms that will lead to successful beginners.

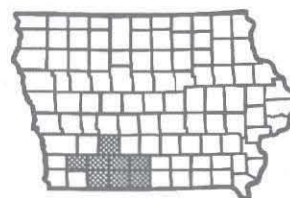
Networking opportunities for groups will continue. At the end of November members of the Farms Forever group from Louisa County will visit Benton County to talk to members of the Farm Fresh CSA group and representatives of the Iowa Producers Cooperative. Representatives of all the groups involved in *Shared Visions* will come to Ames on January 5<sup>th</sup> for a networking conference.

## Current Group Updates

Eight groups have been involved in the *Shared Visions* community groups network. Here are short updates on each.

### Ag Connect

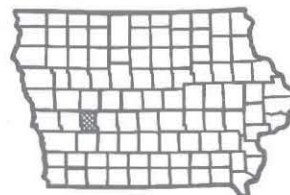
This regional program is helping beginning farmers get established in southwest Iowa. *Shared Visions* is supporting the development of a database of retiring farmers in the area. Ag Connect has surveyed over 10,000 owners of land in the eight-county area to identify potentially interested landowners and obtain information on their concerns and needs.



Ag Connect has made its first match. Ag Connect will work to bring David and Polly Sproles of Bristol, Virginia, into the operation of Cheryl and Don Narigon near Nodaway in Adams County. The match was announced at a press conference on the Narigon farm in early September. Other matches are also in the works.

### Audubon Graziers

Six successful pasture walks were hosted by group members this past summer. Each included supper, a guest speaker, and the walk. The group shared a booth at the county fair with the local ISU Extension office and a recycling group. The booth included a group display and a grass identification contest. Twelve members also traveled to the Adams County CRP Research Farm field day, and five attended the Neely-Kinyon Farm Field Day near Greenfield.



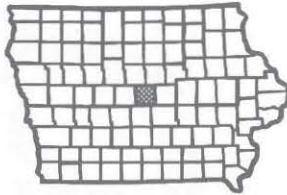
The group's next meeting will be on December 7 when Bob Blomme, a local veterinarian and group member, will talk about winter grazing of stockpiled forages and cornstalks. The group has also been





invited to give a presentation at a Management Intensive Grazing conference in Des Moines on February 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.

### Central IA Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project



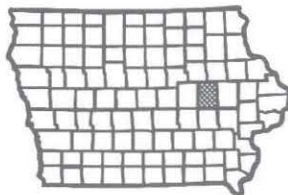
This group recently completed the first year of its CSA project. CSAs connect producers of food with consumers who purchase shares at the beginning of the season. This CSA had 27 members who received fresh produce each week throughout the growing season. The group also had some success in its attempts to link consumers with livestock, honey, and fiber producers.

They held monthly potluck picnics during the summer, two field days, and a fall harvest celebration to help develop relationships between the producers and members. The Central Iowa CSA is currently evaluating their experience from the perspectives of the members, producers, and organizers. They are also organizing the First Annual Iowa CSA Workshop on December 9. (See the announcement in the Notes and Notices section of this newsletter.)



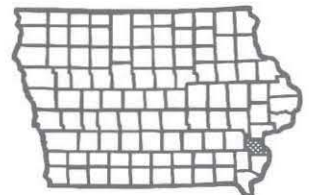
Members of the Central Iowa CSA enjoyed a wonderful meal during the group's fall harvest celebration.

### Farm Fresh CSA



This Benton County group also recently completed the first year of their CSA project with 22 members receiving vegetables each week. Ten members also signed up for shares of apples that they received this fall. Members have been spread across a fairly large geographic area, with some as far away as Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. The group hosted an "Open Gardens" day at the end of June and recently surveyed members for feedback on the experience. They are currently recruiting members for next year.

### Farms Forever



This Louisa County group sponsored three events on area farms this summer called "Evening Entrees." (See the article by Kathy Dice that starts on the next page for a summary of these events). The group, which meets monthly, is now developing plans for another project. Their ideas have focused on working to develop an organization that will serve as a broker to link local, sustainable producers with markets for their products. The group is currently researching this topic.

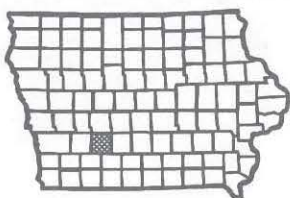


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### Neely-Kinyon Farm Committee

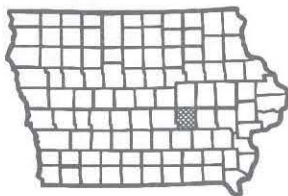
This group, which was formed to plan for the use of the Neely-Kinyon Research Farm just south of Greenfield, held a successful field day on the farm on September 1. Over 150 people heard about research on specialty soybean production and marketing practices, non-traditional inputs for corn, impacts of storage methods on hay quality, and intensive grazing management of dairy replacement heifers. The results of this research are currently being summarized in a report.



The group's project being supported by *Shared Visions* will engage community members in an exploration of value-added concepts related to the Neely-Kinyon farm. The process will probably begin this coming January. The desired outcome is a community-based effort to establish value-added opportunities that encourage diversified, self-sufficient, family farms.

### Poweshiek Area AG2020

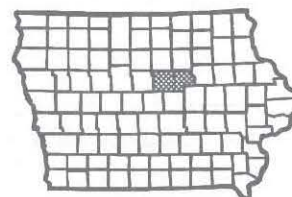
This group's goal was to help area CRP owners use their land in ways that were environmentally sound and financially profitable. They helped conduct a 1994 CRP field day that demonstrated options for bringing CRP land into production. They also surveyed over 500 owners of CRP land in their County to identify interests and determine the extent to which facilities existed to support livestock. They then held a half-day workshop for nearly 40 of these owners. All these activities were quite successful. Based on an analysis of a survey of members last August, the group chose to end its efforts with these successes.



Steve Barnhart, forage specialist with ISU Extension, discusses forage quality during the Neely-Kinyon farm field day.

### The Promised Land Beginning Farmer Program

This group formed to establish a community-based beginning farmer program in the Grundy-Hardin County area. Their original plans were to develop details of how the program would work, create a guidebook for people wanting to start farming, establish a system of community supports, and test the program with a pilot operation. The group has since decided to focus on developing the guidebook. The group held a Farm Profits Forum near Eldora in early September to generate information and ideas for this guidebook. (See the article by Don Davidson that starts on the next page.)



### A Summing Up of Farms Forever's Evening Entrees

Kathy Dice, Farms Forever

The Louisa County Shared Visions Group (now known by the snappy name of Farms Forever) developed the idea of holding evening farm tours as a way to provide information on alternative agriculture and publicize the group's existence. Despite the name, Evening Entrees (EE) were meant to give only "a taste" of alternative agriculture.







**Stan Tate, IDNR District Forester and member of the Farms Forever group, discusses timber management at one of the group's Evening Entrees.**

Our goal of increasing membership was accomplished when Lois and John Wanfalt joined the group as a consequence of being asked to host the first EE on their place, Turkey Run Berry Farm, on May 21. Despite, or because of, this EE being held on the evening of the first dry day in three weeks, attendance was light, 14 people. However, interaction between the audience and speakers was very good, with the audience answering questions as well as the speakers. The two hours was not enough for all the desired discussions on the raising and marketing of raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, asparagus and crawdads. All who attended were well pleased with the information gained.

The second Evening Entree was held at Chestnut Acres on July 6. Topics that evening included a demonstration of grafting multiflora rose to spread disease and discussions of timber management and the commercial possibilities of chestnuts. The audience of 25 was most intrigued by the grafting demonstration and IDNR district forester Stan Tate's ideas for timber management. Once again the 7 to 9 pm time slot was too short. Some participants continued discussions with Stan until well past 10 pm.

The third and final Evening Entree was our most popular. Approximately 85 people attended the pasture walk that was combined with the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Louisa County

Soil and Water Conservation District. Group members, soil commissioners, staff, retired staff and the general public participated in either the pasture tour or dried flower workshop. All enjoyed the delicious, free meal that followed. The free meal, snow-balling publicity, and combination of events all contributed to the huge turn out. A great deal of networking occurred during the tour and meal as many participants swapped advice and phone numbers.

Overall our group was well pleased with the Evening Entrees. The offering of childcare and refreshments was appreciated each evening, and our publicity improved with each event. We should have stressed the group's name more; some people never knew that we hosted the event.

## Farm Profit Forum Ideas

Don Davidson, Promised Land Beginning Farmer Program

For several years we've been hearing a common lament: "We NEED more FARMERS in the COMMUNITY!" True, the face of Iowa's agricultural landscape is graying. The farming torch is passing from the generation of Roosevelt and Eisenhower to the generation of Reagan and Clinton. But there are few of the latter to accept it. Why?

Farm profitability is a likely culprit. In the '50s gross farm receipts were almost double that of gross farm expenses – a margin of 50%. But in the '90s, this margin has shrunk to 15 to 20%! Therefore, bigger farms and more animals are needed to make a living comparable to our urban cousins.

What is profit? How does it relate to farming? In the 1980s we heard, "Farming is a business, NOT a way of life!" Yes, farming is a business, but it is also a way of life, just as are the mom and pop stores on Main Street and any other business. The commonality is that a farming lifestyle, like any other, needs to be financially sustainable to be able to continue. This is an especially critical need for beginning farmers.



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People sat in a large half-circle to discuss farm profits and beginning farmers at a church camp near Eldora.

Beginning farmers must make good choices at the start of their careers to keep themselves on the road of success. The *Promised Land Beginning Farmer Project* was formed by some Grundy and Hardin County farmers and community people to help beginning farmers make the right choices. We are working toward this goal by developing a beginning farmer guidebook that will outline a process new farmers can use to build a base for successful farming operations.

To help our group begin generating ideas for the guidebook, we hosted a forum on September 9<sup>th</sup> to define farm profitability and discuss how beginning farmers might achieve it. About 25 group members, local farmers, community people, and PFI members attended. Here are some ideas that came from our discussions.

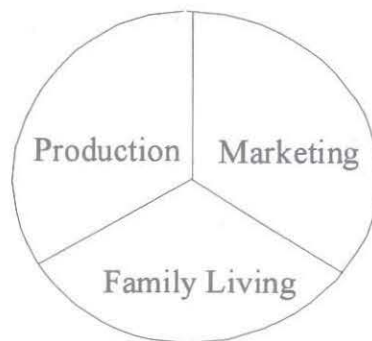
The forum group decided that farm profits should be rephrased as "adequate profits." This distinction was made as a result of a "how much is enough" discussion. The group's discussion of a definition of adequate profits included these ideas:

- Profits = Gross sales – cash costs – depreciation
- Profits should be enough to cover family living costs
- Profits should only be re-invested in the operation to the extent that they will improve long-term stability



- Profit isn't always a "money" issue – other things, such as time for family, are important

We felt that farming systems, in order to be profitable for beginning farmers, needed to be low in investment, high margin in cash return, and assessed for risk. (Robbing banks is highly profitable, but extremely risky.) Profits are determined by production (costs) and marketing (returns) and should be high enough to cover family living costs – the profit circle! This circle, shown here, helps think about the components of profits more broadly than is typically the case.



Some ideas developed by the group on farm profitability as it relates to beginning farmers were:

- A. Put start-up money into something that is appreciating in value and can regenerate itself (livestock) instead of something that is depreciating in value or requires maintenance (machinery).
- B. Evaluate your return to labor, on a per hour basis, and find the best use for your labor in the farm operation. For example, one could take a grain farm, hire all the work done on a custom basis, and make a small return of, say, \$10 per acre. But the return per hour of labor expended is relatively large (\$100 to \$150 per hour) because the only labor expended is for decision-making. Thus, labor for tractor-driving is freed for use in high-profit enterprises. The key is to work smarter, not harder.
- C. Lay out a spending plan (cash flow or budget) and refer to it often. We've been taught to keep records, but usually records are only looked at once a year – TAX TIME! Keep your records, but periodically compare actual expenses and income to the planned expenses and income to see if



you are staying on course. Evaluate and re-plan as necessary. A plan should make cost control easier to do, but you must take time every month to do the record-keeping and planning.

- D. Farmers of the future are going to need to spend as much time marketing their products as they do producing them. Marketing may have to be more active, like direct marketing to consumers.
- E. New farmers should have sufficient money in hand to start their farming enterprises. Borrowing too much will more than likely always keep you in the hole. Some enterprises, such as grass dairying and market gardening, provide a "pay-as-you-produce" type of cash flow. Off-farm income during the start-up phase is a welcome addition as long as it doesn't compete for time with high income parts of the operation.
- F. The best way for new farmers to get access to land is to buy a small parcel and build from there. Most current landowners prefer the security of cash rent, and competition for rental land so extreme that it makes it difficult for beginners to compete for this land. Look for land that other people don't want, and figure out a way to use it to your advantage.

The group also contributed personal experiences about farming enterprises that could meet the goals of new farmers:

- Seasonal grass dairying in Iowa has shown that it can provide net profits of \$300 to \$500 per acre.
- Market gardening is very labor-intensive, but well worth the returns once markets are established.
- A lamb-to-finish pasture-based sheep operation provides for the second-highest return after dairying.
- Grass-pastured chickens provide a quick turn-around for the money – six weeks from chick to meat.
- Replacement dairy calves can be purchased as bottle calves and raised to a grow-out stage (700 lbs.) for a net of \$150 per head.
- Pasture farrowing is a time-honored way of producing pigs. Pasture finishing isn't as time honored, but it



**Tony Stonecypher of near Floyd talked about his experience getting started in farming using grass-based dairying.**

sure is cheaper than confinement, and healthier for all, too.

We will be developing this guidebook through the winter and hope to have it ready by March 1<sup>st</sup>. If anybody reading this article has some comments we could add to the guidebook, please feel free to call me at 319-824-6347.

## Summer 1995 Arkansas IFS Networking Conference Report

by Gary Huber

Every six months people from each of the 18 Kellogg-funded Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) projects attend a networking conference. These conferences are designed to further the goals of the IFS network, which include developing leadership capacity, influencing public policy, empowering local communities, and fostering institutional change. Another goal is to create a network of people and organizations that shares information, experiences, and expertise to encourage farming systems that are sustainable.

Each conference is hosted by one of the projects. The first was in Montana, the second in Washington, D.C., the third in Iowa, and the fourth in California. The fifth



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**Tom Frantzen presents an Amish hat as a gift to Harvey Williams, a farmer from Marianna, AK, who hosted IFS networking conference participants.**

was hosted in August by the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC), the grantee for the Arkansas IFS project. Five people representing the *Shared Visions* program attended the Arkansas conference.

At this gathering, we worked on setting a goal for the network using the Holistic Resource Management decision-making model. We broke into smaller groups to explore the topics of public policy, marketing strategies, sustainable farming systems, and social justice. These sub-groups discussed ways the network could advance these concerns, both at the level of the eighteen projects and at the national level. We also participated in exercises providing insights into personal leadership styles.

A highlight of the conference for me was the time spent visiting farmers and others that AFLDC has worked with over the years. Crops in the Mississippi delta where the conference was held are mainly rice, cotton, and wheat. We visited farms where these were the main crops, as well as farms growing vegetables for fresh markets. We were also invited into peoples' homes, shared food with their families and friends, and came to know firsthand what southern hospitality is all about. ☺



**(Sociological Study of PFI Farmers Continued from page 7.)**

We are now ready to begin the main part of the research – in-depth interviews with farmers and spouses. I say “we” because there will be four researchers collaborating on the project.

*Mike Bell:* That's me. I'm an assistant professor of rural sociology at ISU, and the author of two books on rural life and the environment.

*Sue Jarnagin:* Sue is a doctoral candidate in sociology at ISU and a long-time member of PFI.

*Donna Bauer:* Donna and her husband Ted are PFI cooperators near Audubon, and Donna is a recent graduate in sociology from ISU.

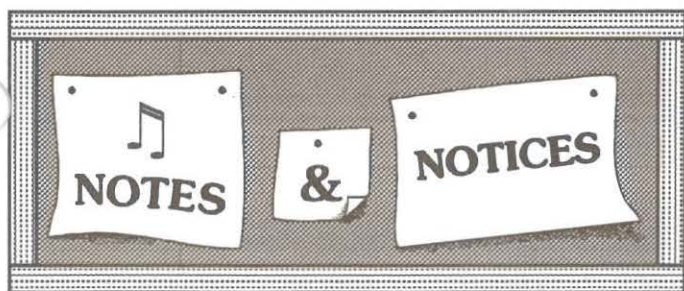
*Greg Peter:* Greg is a master's student in sociology at ISU.

But these are not the only collaborators. We want all PFI members who participate to consider themselves collaborators too. This winter and on into the spring and summer we will be asking PFI folks to participate in two different ways. We're hoping about 40 PFI households will consent to in-depth interviews at their homes, and we'll also be asking about a dozen families to welcome one of us into their home for an overnight stay.

We're excited about the overnight stays because we think they will allow for a much more personal understanding of farming than the usual techniques of social research. (Households that participate in the overnight stays will be reimbursed.) We will also be interviewing a sample of Iowa farm households who are not PFI members.

Our goal is to get back to you on our findings by the 1996-97 winter meetings of PFI. We want to hear your reactions and suggestions. Ultimately, we would like to put together a book about the transition to sustainable agriculture in Iowa, and the role of PFI in that transition. We, along with the PFI board, hope that what we find out will be a help to other people in farming and other farming organizations interested in the question of sustainability. If you have any questions or comments, please call me at 515-294-2179. We welcome you input. ☺





### ♪ **Maria Rosmann Appointed**

Maria Rosmann received a two-year appointment to the National Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Council of the USDA. The group is comprised of members from the public sector and private citizens. Maria attended her initial meeting Sept. 25-26, in Washington, D.C. Maria Rosmann serves as PFI Public Relations Coordinator.

### ♪ **New Grazing Newsletter from Wisconsin**

*Pasture Talk* is a newsletter "serving the Upper Midwest and the Great Lakes grazing communities." Publisher Jeff Bump contacted PFI looking for an Iowa producer to contribute to the magazine. In return, he sent us volume 1, number 2.

The 16-page publication we received promotes planned grazing with farmer profiles and news of innovations and farm tours. At the same, there were technical articles by a livestock nutritional consultant, a veterinarian, and a Wisconsin county agricultural educator. Also appearing was a column called "Grazing the Net" that followed current discussion topics on the Internet. The pros and cons of grazing corn were featured.

*Pasture Talk* is published monthly. A year's subscription costs \$24. Contact Jeff Bump, The GreenBull Press, P.O. Box 620732, Middleton, WI, 53562-0732 (608-831-3787).

### ♪ **Meetings Scheduled**

#### **Value Added Conference Set for Dec. 9**

ISU Extension and North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) are co-sponsoring a Dec. 9

conference titled *Value Added Strategies for Farmers - With Opportunities for Rural Communities*. The conference will be from 9 am to 4 pm at the Muse-Norris Conference Center on the NIACC campus in Mason City. Introductory remarks will be made by Senator Charles Grassley. Former Congressman Cooper Evans will follow with a talk titled, *Prospects for a Profitable Agriculture*.

The remainder of the day will involve breakout sessions covering nearly 30 topics, such as *Live-stock Production and Marketing Groups*, *Requirements and Opportunities for Organic Production*, and *Accessing Available Resources for Value Added Industries*. Admission will be \$30, which includes handout materials and lunch. Questions should be directed to your County Extension office or the NIACC conference coordinator (1-800-392-5685 - Ext. 358).

#### **First Annual Iowa CSA Workshop Set for Dec. 9**

*Taking Root and Growing* is the theme of this Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) workshop, which will be held at the Iowa 4-H Education and Natural Resources Center near Madrid. (CSAs connect producers of fresh, healthy food with consumers who purchase shares at the beginning of the season. Thus, consumers share the risks with producers, but they know where their food comes from and how it is grown.)

Speakers will include Verna Kragness, co-founder of a CSA from near Osceola, Wisconsin, that just completed its 6<sup>th</sup> season, and Dan Nagengast, farmer-member of the Rolling Prairie Farmer's Alliance from Lawrence, Kansas, a cooperative of eight farmers. Workshop sessions will include people from three Iowa CSAs and will cover challenges and solutions for emerging CSAs. Registration is \$15. For more information, call Jeff Hall at 515-231-4421.

#### **Iowa Farm Business Association Market Outlook Meetings Dec. 12 and 13**

The IFBA will sponsor two three-hour seminars by Leroy Louwagie on the theme "Market Outlook-Where to from Here?" The agenda lists four items:



A) *Will price ration corn usage?* B) *An early peak in prices?* C) *Hedge all '96 production?* and D) *There are profit potentials!* The Dec. 12 sessions are set for 1:00 pm at the Red Fox Inn in Waverly and 7:00 pm at the Amana Holiday Inn in Amana. The Dec. 13 sessions will take place at 1 pm in the Villager Restaurant, in Walnut, and 7 pm at The Hotel, in Spencer. Non-IFBA members will pay \$35 per person. Members pay \$30, or \$35 for husband and wife.

### **CARD Policy Conference Dec. 13**

The Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) will hold its 1995 Fall Agricultural Policy Conference Wednesday, Dec. 13, at Kirkwood College in Cedar Rapids. Speakers and topics include: Neil Hamilton, Drake University Law Center, *Agricultural Production and Environmental Policy*; Ray Bjornson, Hormel Foods, *Developing New Uses for Agricultural Products*; David Johnson, Meredith Corp., *Consumer Trends: Implications for the Agricultural Processing Industry*; Varel Bailey, farmer and legislative aide, *The Role of Government in Agriculture*; Loren Kruse, *Successful Farming Magazine*, *Positioning Agriculture for the Future*; Mike Duffy, ISU agricultural economist, *Beginning Farmers: Who will Farm the Land?*; Cornelia Flora, ISU rural sociologist, *The Quality of Life in Rural Communities*; and Stanley Johnson, CARD, *Large-Scale Landscape Management: New Approaches to Rural Development*. For more information call Judith at 515-294-6257.

### **Feb. 7 and 8 Grazing Meeting**

ISU Extension will hold its second conference on management-intensive grazing Feb. 7 and 8 at the Westmart Ramada Inn in West Des Moines, which is at the intersection of I-80 and 74<sup>th</sup> Street, or Exit 121 on I-80 just west of the I-80 and I-35 interchange at the west edge of Des Moines.

Featured speakers will be Jim Gerrish, grazing consultant from the Forage Systems Research Center in Linneus, Missouri, and Ben Bartlett, district dairy/livestock specialist for Michigan State University. There will be general and breakout sessions, plus self-help sessions on paddock numbers and layout. Registration is \$45 in advance (by

January 30) and \$60 at the door. This includes the Wednesday evening dinner and the Thursday morning breakfast buffet. Rooms for overnight stays cost \$52 plus tax. For more information call 515-294-2240.

### **Feb. 10 Organic Farming Conference in Decorah**

The Natural Food Associates of Iowa Annual Conference will be held on Feb. 10 in Room 117 of Valders Hall on the campus of Luther College in Decorah. Registration is at 8:30 am and the program will end at 4 pm. Speakers will focus on growing and marketing organic foods, on creating effective partnerships between organic farmers and consumers, and on relationships between health concerns and food quality. Cost is \$10. An organic noon meal is extra. Call David Burns for more information (319-238-3795).

### **Nebraska Dairy Grazing Conferences Set for Feb. 15 and 16**

*It's About Grass, Milk, and Money* are the titles for two Nebraska dairy grazing conferences. The first will be Feb. 15 in Hartington, which is in northeast Nebraska. Call Mike Lechner at 402-254-6821 for more information about this event. The second will be in Fairbury, which is in southeast Nebraska. Call Bob Stritzke at 402-729-3078 about this conference. 🌿

### **SWINE PRODUCTION SYSTEMS WORKSHOP FEBRUARY 21**

Jerry DeWitt  
Sustainable Ag Extension Coordinator,  
ISU Extension

Contrary to some commonly-held perceptions in today's agriculture, there are viable production and management options for swine producers regardless of size. In order to discuss opportunities and learn about alternative strategies including economics, outdoor production, hooped structures, deep-bedded systems, remodeling, and open-front systems, a special one-day workshop is planned for February 21, 1996 at the Scheman Building in



Ames. This workshop will include Iowa producers discussing their operations and experiences with these systems. Sponsors include ISU Extension, The Leopold Center, The Iowa Pork Industry Center, The Beginning Farmer Center, and the Iowa Pork Producers Association.

This will be a good opportunity to learn some new ideas and talk to other producers across Iowa who are working in these areas. For more information on registration, contact your Extension Office (after January 10) or call the PFI Coordinators or me at 515-294-1923. We will also have more information for you at the PFI annual meeting in Ames on January 6.

## FARMING SYSTEMS SYMPOSIUM ATTRACTS DIVERSE GROUP

Rick Exner

While conference goers got a "taste of Iowa," there was also the flavor of California peaches, Mexican hot sauce, and pure Canadian water. And that was just the farmer contingent! Producers attended from around the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The Farming Systems Symposium, Nov. 5-8, in Ames, also hosted staff from Midwestern Extension and NRCS offices, representatives of nonprofit organizations, and agricultural scientists from all over North America.

The meeting isn't easy to categorize because of the diversity of people attending and because of the range of topics. There was no "steel" on display, yet the subject matter wasn't entirely "up in the clouds" abstractions. In workshops and posters, producers and others described how they use a "systems perspective" to make decisions about technologies, practices, and farm design.

The symposium title, *Linkages Between Farming Systems and Rural Communities*, helped raise

**There was no "steel" on display, yet the subject matter wasn't entirely "up in the clouds" abstractions.**



**At the farming systems conference Nolan Jungclaus (right) explains his Swedish-style hog production to two Mexican farmers and a translator from Nicaragua.**

awareness of systems that are even larger than the individual farm. The tone was set with a pre-conference bus trip to two farms (Dick and Sharon Thompson, Clark and Linda BreDahl) and the western Iowa town of Fontanelle, where 50 participants enjoyed Sunday dinner and discussed issues with community representatives.

Evening storytelling sessions, discussions over meals, and an old-fashioned community dance also provided opportunities to make new acquaintances and share ideas. By the end of the meeting, we *felt like a community!* Thanks to everyone who presented a poster, helped out with a session, or just came and took part.

## STRAYER SEEDS IN RECEIVERSHIP

Rick Exner

In October, financial troubles at Strayer Seeds culminated in a state takeover of the company. Several PFI members who were owed money by the firm for pesticide-free soybeans had reported difficulty getting payment for the 1994 crop. An October 12 press release from the Iowa Department of Justice read in part:

*The Iowa Attorney General's Office filed a consumer protection lawsuit Wednesday alleging that Strayer Seed Farms, Inc., of Hudson, Iowa, has failed to pay for over \$1 million of edible soybeans that farmers have delivered to Strayer.*

**Continued on next page.**



**Strayer Seeds has been in business since 1904 and has exported soybeans since the 1970s.**

Black Hawk County District Court Judge George Stigler issued a temporary restraining order Wednesday ordering Strayer Seed Farms to halt solicitations or promotions of their merchandizing program in Iowa.

Stigler also named the State as temporary receiver in order to protect and fairly distribute assets that could go to farmers. A receivership would allow the State to propose an equitable distribution of assets, to be approved by the court. The suit noted that the defendants have received approximately \$368,000 in payment for edible beans. Those funds have been held in an escrow account established by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

The lawsuit alleges that the defendants promoted an "edible bean" merchandizing program using print advertising and sales presentations that promised farmers a lucrative marketing opportunity and high returns for alternative crop of edible soybeans. . .

The suit indicated that about 100 farmers in three states have delivered their edible beans but still are owed over \$1 million by the defendants. The suit, which was filed by the Attorney General's Farm Division, asks the court to order a permanent injunction on the alleged illegal activities, order restitution to farmers who delivered beans but have not been paid, and assess penalties for violation of the Iowa Consumer Fraud Act.

Articles in the Des Moines Register noted that Strayer Seeds has been in business since 1904 and has exported soybeans since the 1970s. Bob Brammer, of the attorney general's office, is quoted as conceding the problem is "not the typical flat-out scam." The Register reported that the market for "specialty" soybeans, largely dependent on Japan, has recently softened. At the same time the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

chose to apply the bonding requirement for grain dealers to specialty grain dealers like Strayer.

The Attorney General's suit offers some compensation to producers, but it also effectively removes Strayer as a specialty grain dealer. There has long been speculation over the long-term prospects of the specialty soybean market, but few people would call it a scam. The problem small businesses face is maintaining growth in the face of a fluctuating market. On October 24, Strayer Seeds filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The move leaves open for the company the possibility of a future reorganization.

## **PFI SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS 1996 WANTS YOUR IDEAS!**

While you're dreaming by the fire this winter, remember PFI. *Sustainable Projects* is a program established by Practical Farmers of Iowa to help Iowans turn dreams into action. The program makes small grants to Iowans with ideas – ideas for projects, educational efforts, on-farm trials, and so on. About the only thing off limits in the program is major input and equipment purchases (see guidelines on the application form, opposite page).

*Sustainable Projects* will accept proposals until Feb. 1, 1996. (You won't get a reminder before then, so put this application form somewhere handy!) A committee of PFI members and ISU collaborators will review these proposals and determine by March 1 which ones will be accepted. Since 1990, *Sustainable Projects* has approved 39 project proposals from Iowans. In 1995, these five projects were accepted, for a total of \$2,460:

- Tom Frantzen, New Hampton – *On-Farm Research on Perennial Bushes*
- John and Beverly Gilbert, Iowa Falls – *Pork Mix Pasture System: "Just Add Salt and H<sub>2</sub>O"*

**You won't get a reminder before then, so put this application form somewhere handy!**

Continued on page 25.



# SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS 1996

## PROPOSAL FORM

### PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA

*Sustainable Projects* is designed to help citizens of Iowa carry out activities that focus on agriculture and the environment. Sustainable agriculture has been described as preserving the soil and water resources as well as the people involved in agriculture. What could a Sustainable Project be? Maybe you want to undertake an on-farm trial like those used by the farmer cooperators in Practical Farmers of Iowa. Maybe you would like to create a specific program for the local school or FFA that teaches about the relationship of farming to the environment. Perhaps you are part of a group that needs some support to have an educational booth at the county fair. Maybe you could use some funding to bring your community leaders together on a related issue. Be creative!

Proposals for up to several hundred dollars will be accepted. (PFI cooperators, for example, receive up to \$400 for an on-farm trial.) It is legitimate to include in the proposal payment for your own time. Itemize labor and other costs in the budget you submit. Large equipment purchases will *not* be funded; however, equipment leasing may be used in proposals to defray equipment costs.

In return for funding your Sustainable Project, we ask that you agree to share both the results and the process that you went through carrying out the project. That will help us to build on past experience and share the successes of the program. A credible "feedback," or reporting plan is one of the criteria on which proposals will be evaluated! Plan on sharing your project with a poster or display at the PFI annual meeting.

Projects will be chosen by a committee consisting of PFI members and board representatives, the PFI coordinators, and representatives of ISU and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Proposals for 1996 are due by Feb. 1. Committee decisions will be announced by March 1. Project reimbursement will be made upon receipt of a final report.

Please return this proposal form to: Practical Farmers of Iowa, 2104 Agronomy Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Name of Project \_\_\_\_\_

Name Submitting \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

(OVER, PLEASE)



Please print or type. Use additional paper if needed.  
Please include an itemized budget.

Please describe the problem that this project will address and why there is a need for the project.

Please describe what you will do in the planned project. Be specific.

How will you communicate to the public about the project? What kind of reporting to Sustainable Projects will you carry out?

What is the amount of money you need to carry out the proposed project? Please itemize.



(Sustainable Projects Continued from page 22.)

- New Melleray Abbey, Peosta – Rye for Chemical-Free Weed Control
- Bob Welander and Gayle Olson, Mt. Pleasant – Youth Preserving Agricultural Expertise
- John Wurpts, Ogden – Biological vs. Conventional Fertilizer, 5<sup>th</sup> and Final Year

## AN IOWA FARMER AND HER DAUGHTER IN CHINA

Denise O'Brien

For the past two years I have been preparing to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women without ever really knowing if I would actually go. In March, 1995, I was participating in a Preparatory Committee Conference at the United Nations in New York when I was asked by the Ms. Foundation for Women if I would go to the conference as a grantee. This, they explained, meant that my travel and expenses would be covered by the Foundation.

In return I must agree to participate in the post-Beijing activities that the Foundation sponsored. I would also work within my own community to educate people about the issues that were discussed and debated at the NGO Forum (Non-Governmental Organizations). The Foundation agreed to take along my 17 year-old daughter, Briana. It was a mother's dream to be able to experience such an event with her teenage daughter!

I must explain that there were two events going on in China. One was the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women. This event was where the official government delegation met to vote on the official document, *The Platform for Action*. The other event was the NGO Forum on Women. This was where many grassroots organizations sponsored and participated in workshops to share information and to network. There were approximately 500 workshops per day starting at 9:00 a.m. and ending around 9:00 p.m.

The work I had been doing in preparation for the Forum was done under the name of Women,

***It was a mother's dream to be able to experience such an event with her teenage daughter!***

Food and Agriculture (WFA). Kathy Lawrence (a woman from Brooklyn who's heart is with farmers) and I put together this task force in order to encourage the United Nations community to give sustainable agriculture and women farmers a voice. Kathy and I did most of our work over the Internet and met many people interested in WFA.

Kathy, under the WFA name, set up a workshop that overlapped and intertwined with the NGO Forum. The workshop, "The Global Agriculture and Food Changes: Women's Contribution and Concerns in Achieving Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security" ran from August 30<sup>th</sup> through September 10<sup>th</sup>. The workshop was done in cooperation with the China-European Union Centre for

Continued on next page.

### My Experience in China

Briana O'Brien

My experience in China is one that will stay with me forever. I was there as a youth representative and thus attended a lot of workshops concerning the issues of youth. I met so many neat people, and they have all inspired me to continue the work that they are doing now.

One thing about the trip that really stands out in my mind is a visit we took to a local farming community. It was so nice because after being gone for about a week it was great to see a place that reminded me of home and fresh air that I could breathe. We went to a dairy farm and horse and cattle farm where the animals were being raised for meat. I guess horse meat is pretty popular over there. We also had a chance to talk to a few of the farmers and hear their history of farming. One thing about this community was that the farmers were the highest paid people, which we don't find here in the U.S.



Agriculture Technology and the Center for Integrated Agriculture Development-Women in Rural Development Program of Beijing Agriculture University.

Throughout the twelve days of the workshop, approximately ten women from Kenya, Canada, Australia, China, Sri Lanka and the United States met daily to exchange information on various workshops attended. The women also discussed *The Platform for Action* document and what changes needed to be made in order to incorporate what was being discussed the workshops.

One aspect of the ten-day workshop was a visit to the village of Dou Dian. Literature describes Dou Dian as the "new modernized socialist village" with a population around 4,000 people. We spent the day visiting the village's diverse economic enterprises.

With the mandate that agriculture is the foundation, this village set up other enterprises for the employment of the non-farmers. We toured a sewing factory where the workers were sewing winter coats for the European markets. Other enterprises include manufacturing pharmaceuticals, a cement factory, a carpet factory, and a meat packing plant.

What impressed us the most was that the farmers were paid the highest wage, and agriculture was recognized as the foundation of the economy. We went on to visit a beef feedlot, a feedlot for the production of horse meat (my daughter was not too enthusiastic about horses being raised for meat), and a dairy operation.

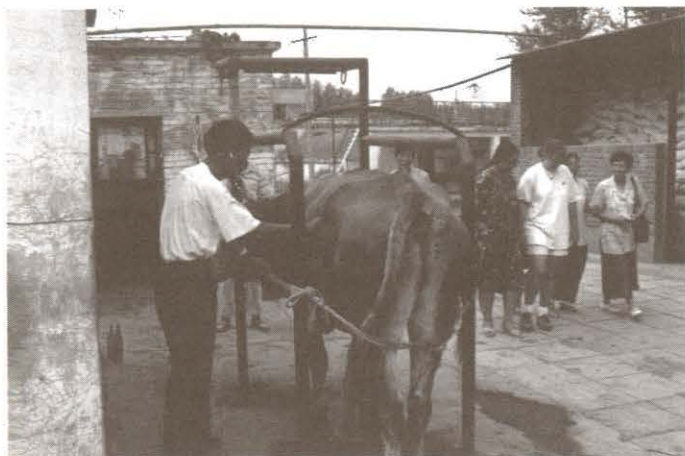
***What impressed us the most was that the farmers were paid the highest wage, and agriculture was recognized as the foundation of the economy.***

The highlight of this site visit was looking at a bio-digester of hog manure. This digester provided 40 households with gas for heating and cooking. There were 1200 hogs that produced the manure to feed the bio digester. I was surprised that there was no smell associated with the digester and that the slurry from the digester was used as fertilizer for the fields. We observed many households that, besides using gases from the digester, had solar hot water equipment on top of their houses.

It was obvious that China has a huge population. For example, when we were at the horse/beef feedlots there were many people mixing feed, cleaning feed floors and hauling manure manually. Agriculture in the United States has replaced this type of labor with machinery.

The village is a showpiece for China and our group realized that we were seeing the best. But all of us agreed that this is what all countries do when visited by a delegation of foreigners. The literature and our guide made the village seem like a utopia where all the people in the village gather to make decisions. We knew in reality that China is a communist country just emerging into the market economy of the rest of the world. Our visit with the people of the village revealed that they have similar values and expectations of their life's work as we do.

Following the visit to the village, our focus returned to the NGO Forum and *The Platform for Action*. We attended and participated in more workshops and discussions concerning sustainable agriculture and rural life. As WFA, we sponsored a workshop under the title of "Open Forum: Rural Women Speak Out." As workshop planners we were not sure how this would turn out and were pleasantly surprised to find a roomful of women from around the world eager to participate.



**A visit to the farm, vet checking steer.**





**Mixing supplements with wheat straw. The woman on the left is the farm manager.**

The format of the workshop was that everyone would get the microphone for four minutes and talk about anything they wanted. Women shared success stories of rural enterprise development and livestock production. They also shared concerns about the lack of access to credit, the lack of opportunities to pursue education, and the lack of technical assistance. Women identified serious problems with water contamination and the overuse and dependence on pesticides and herbicides.

This workshop lasted for two hours, and the conclusion by all is that it was a success. Communication was helped by simultaneous translation in several languages, although English was the predominate language.

***We made friendships that will continue to be nourished by our common denominator, the commitment to providing food and the commitment to assuring that our rural communities survive.***

The post conference work now is to evaluate and determine whether or not we had an impact on *The Platform for Action*. The experience of working with other farmers from around the globe was one of the highlights of the NGO Forum. In working through problems that are impacting all our rural communities, we gained an understanding

and an appreciation of women's participation in agriculture all over the world. We made friendships that will continue to be nourished by our common denominator, the commitment to providing food and the commitment to assuring that our rural communities survive. ☺

## **PFI PROFILES: JEFF AND GAYLE OLSON**

Rick Exner

It's one of those mid-October days with just not enough hours when we arrive at the farm of Jeff and Gayle Olson north of Mt. Pleasant. Gayle is preparing for a meeting in Winfield in connection with her work as the Extension Community Development Field Specialist for Southeast Iowa. After giving up on the radio, she gets Jeff on the telephone for us. Yes, he can be at the house in three hours for a picture. As if there weren't enough to do, they have agreed to be the subjects of a PFI Member Profile . . .

The Olson farm is near Swedesburg, about 10 miles north of Mount Pleasant, in Henry County. In addition to corn and soybeans, alfalfa, rye and oats find a place in support of a cow-calf herd and a feeder pig finishing operation. (They are temporarily out of the hog business.) The row crops are ridge-tilled, which helps in wet conditions like those of last spring. With all the rainy days, Jeff says he had time to tune up the planter so that it "almost planted on water." Ridge tillage has also played a part in several of their on-farm trials over the years – from weed management, to fertilizer placement, to strip intercropping.

Jeff was elected to the PFI board of directors from southeast Iowa in 1992 and serves as board vice president. He helped to bring well-known grazer Joel Salatin to speak in Iowa City in 1994, and Jeff has represented PFI at events from

***With all the rainy days, Jeff says he had time to tune up the planter so that it "almost planted on water."***

Continued on next page.



Fairfield to Florida. He says he enjoys working with the other board members, "a group of people who like to fix their own equipment." PFI Board meetings require a long drive to Ames for Jeff, but he has been known to combine pleasure and work. When he can, he brings along his bass guitar and sits in at a community dance or tune-swapping session.

Jeff and Gayle came to PFI in 1989, when their county Extension agriculturalist suggested they would be interested in on-farm research. They had participated in the Resourceful Farming demonstrations of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and were exploring alternatives in farming.

Jeff and Gayle met at the Iowa State Fair while they were in college. He was on the staff at the 4-H Youth Inn and she was on the State 4-H Council. In 1977, Jeff graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in agricultural engineering. In 1978 Gayle graduated from ISU with a sociology degree. That was the year they were married and made a home in the area where Jeff was raised.

Although Jeff rented some land from his father, Harold, he found lots of work in addition to farming. Putting his experience and engineering degree to use, he built hog houses and grain elevators, sold feed, was a partner in a construction business and a consultant for Hawkeye Steel.

Off-farm work came naturally to Gayle as well. She worked as Extension Youth and 4-H leader in Henry and Louisa Counties. When their second child came along, Gayle looked for work that would give her more flexible hours. This led to teaching health education classes and forming "Tie One On," a business in which she

***"...The keys to problem solving are framing the problem in the right way and then being creative about potential solutions."***

made and sold scarves. In 1988 she completed a Master's Degree in Home Economics Education with an emphasis in health education.

In 1991, Gayle began work at the Institute of Agricultural Medicine and Occupational Health, in Iowa City. Through the job she helped to bring PFI into a study of pesticide exposure, and the Institute's van made stops at a number of PFI events to promote farm safety.

Then in December, 1993, Gayle began work with the ISU Extension Service as Community Development Field Specialist. Her office is now in Mount Pleasant, which is much closer than Iowa City. On the other hand, she serves all of southeast Iowa, so travel and meetings now take up a lot of her time.

But Gayle likes the work. "What I'm doing at those meetings is *facilitating*, helping people, communities, or organizations plan. I'm helping them ask the questions in ways that will let them make better plans. The keys to problem solving are framing the problem in the right way and then being creative about potential solutions."

Jeff says over the years off-farm work has been both an economic necessity and an opportunity to use and develop skills. It comes naturally to Gayle,



Jeff and Gayle Olson, of Winfield.



he says. "She is just always doing something, going somewhere."

Jeff's off-farm commitments include volunteering with the RC&D and serving as a district soil commissioner and as PFI cooperator and district director. He also earned a Master of Professional Agriculture degree from ISU in 1993. "What sometimes suffers," says Jeff, "is an organized home." They find themselves trying to cut back on outside activities in order to give the children more focused attention.

The household now includes Kinsey (14), Torey (11), and Ian (5). The girls are involved in volleyball, basketball, and softball, and they are associate members of Explorer Post 1846, a Scout unit that interprets the crafts and tools of the mid-1850s. Kinsey especially shares her parents' interest in music, playing piano and in the school band.

Torey is the naturalist. (She also plays piano and flute). Jeff says she can spot and identify every hawk, and she keeps track of all the owls in the neighborhood. For the last two summers, Torey has taken part in PFI camps at the 4-H Education Center near Boone.

There was a time when the Olsons' farming practices were controversial in the community. Their use of reduced tillage, reduced rates of some production inputs, and integration of livestock and crops have all raised a few eyebrows. But Jeff cites the late spring nitrate test as an example of technology that benefits both the producer and the environment. And he asserts PFI on-farm trials like those of deep-banded fertilizer are investigating questions that really don't yet have answers.

Jeff says the landlords see that he is reducing expenses. And Jeff, who has experienced some ambitious flops in past on-farm trials, affirms that he is working at being a "better farmer," making sure ridge-till cultivation is completed and weeds are

***The Olsons have "family goals," and an important one is what they call "making a difference."***

controlled. He says they "don't win the high-input yield contests anymore" but the landlords are happy.

The Olsons have "family goals," and an important one is what they call "making a difference." At one time a family goal was to farm a certain number of acres, Jeff says, but now "there's enough for everybody." He "used to think of everyone as a competitor." Today Jeff believes "we need more cooperation, fewer loners." A few days after we met he went to work harvesting the crop of a neighbor who had health problems in the family.

"For awhile independence was held up as a goal," reflects Gayle. "Now we're seeing that interdependence is more valuable to everybody. That applies to business and to communities as well as the environment – interdependence is what makes it sustainable. In Extension to Communities we call that 'social capital.' Social capital is the wealth of resources represented in those relationships."

... Three hours later the appointed meeting time rolls around. Unfortunately, rain is also rolling in. But Jeff's pickup is in the drive, and Gayle is home between meetings. We walk out to the front yard for a photo, Jeff joking that being together is not their "natural state." During harvest, he's even been sleeping in a trailer out by the grain dryer.

After the pictures, Jeff follows us back toward the field where we have hand-picked some research plot corn. Before he returns to work, Jeff finds a tarp to throw over the back of our pickup to keep the corn dry. He scoops up a handful of soybeans from the ground. They are "tofu" beans, and Jeff is pleased that they are of good size. And despite the late planting, soybeans are yielding reasonably well. With that brief exchange we part, each hurrying to beat the oncoming precipitation. I will complete the interview by telephone, fax, and electronic mail, accommodating this active couple in the middle of a busy harvest season. ☛

***He says they "don't win the high-input yield contests anymore" but the landlords are happy.***



## USDA WORKING GROUP MEETS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Ron Rosmann, Harlan

On September 8, 1995, I had the opportunity to address 50 national program leaders and administrators in Washington, D.C., at the opening session of the newly formed USDA Working Group on Sustainable Agriculture. The goal of this working group, as commissioned by Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard Rominger, is to increase USDA's awareness and knowledge of sustainable agriculture and to address the barriers to wider adoption and success of sustainable agriculture.

The group recognizes that sustainable agriculture involves more than the science and education function of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE). It involves commodity programs, farm credit programs, marketing, regulations, conservation programs, and has positive implications for rural and community development.

***The goal of this working group .... is to increase USDA's awareness and knowledge of sustainable agriculture and to address the barriers to wider adoption and success of sustainable agriculture.***

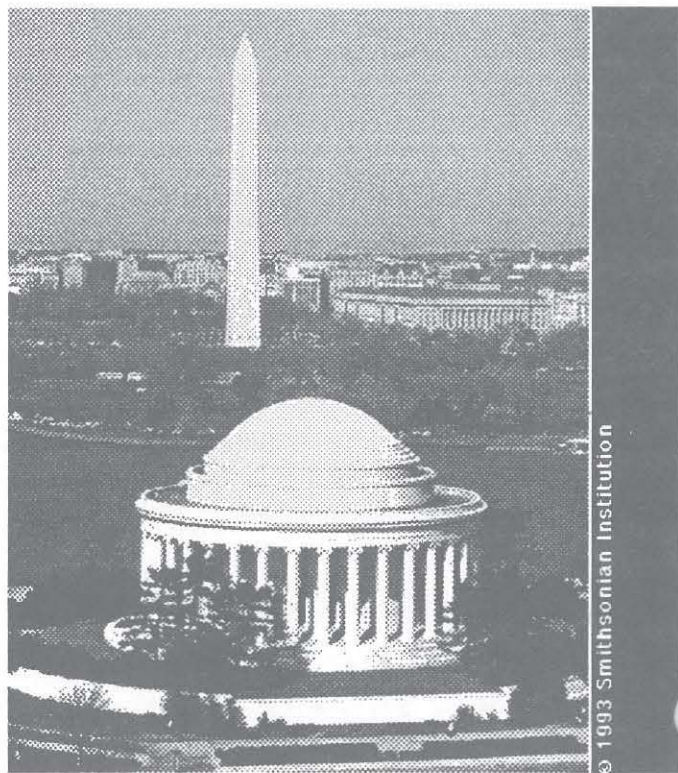
Specifically, the overall task of the group is to develop a plan of action resulting from the workshops to address identified barriers through existing USDA programs, resources and administrative authority. From this, an action team will be selected to provide leadership in implementation of the action plan and measure and report progress to the sub-cabinet group and the Deputy Secretary.

My presentation to the group consisted of two parts. First I outlined what I thought were some of the basic questions the group ought to discuss and deal with throughout the duration of their six training sessions. Secondly, I tried to provide the

group with a reality check by specifically describing our farm.

On our own 480-acre farm in Iowa, we are trying to take a managed-natural systems approach. This is in stark contrast to the rapidly increasing industrial model with its dependence on purchased inputs. By managed I am referring to timeliness, on-farm research trials, information sharing, and management-intensive grazing. Linkages among researchers, producers and Extension educators are vital in this managed system. By natural systems, I mean working with nature and all her attributes. This conjures words like crop rotations, integration, recycling and composting of nutrients, tillage systems such as ridge tillage, wildlife and predator-prey relationships, microbiological life in the soil, soil tilth, and a sense of natural rhythm and balance. This list is endless in its possibilities.

My expectations are not as high as they used to be. Thirteen years ago, I thought there really was a chance of changing mainstream agriculture. Now I am beginning to realize how complex and powerful the drive is toward corporate industrialization of agriculture. My two worst fears for the future are these: 1. Most of us involved in agriculture will work for the cooperatives and the corporations; 2. The



The Jefferson Memorial and Washington Monument.



***Now I am beginning to realize how complex and powerful the drive is toward corporate industrialization of agriculture.***

skills and the creativity that go into the kind of farming we espouse will disappear as our numbers diminish.

Other speakers for the opening session included Dr. Katherine Reichelderfer-Smith of the Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, and Dr. Richard Harwood, Professor in Crop and Soil Sciences, Michigan State University. Dr. Jerry DeWitt, ISU, was also scheduled to be one of program speakers but due to the death of his father-in-law, was unable to attend.

I had the opportunity to bring along one of my sons, Daniel, 12. This is the perfect age to see our nation's capital, the many museums of the Smithsonian Institution, and the many other government buildings and attractions on the Mall of the Capital. Because we were there the weekend after Labor Day, the crowds were small.

Our hotel was only about five blocks from the capital itself. Dan and I walked up to the capital in the evenings when literally no one was around. It's an impressive sight in the full moonlight. Perhaps the highlight of our sightseeing time was the new Jewish Holocaust Museum located just to the southwest of the Agriculture Bldg. It is both an enlightening and disturbing testimony to the atrocities committed against not only Jews but also against Catholics, the mentally and physically handicapped, women and children, and others deemed inferior in the eyes of Adolph Hitler and the Nazis.



## FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

### Progress Report on the Trail to Grass

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

A farm could be compared to a ship at sea. The passengers would like to be getting somewhere, but how can they tell? They can compare their position to other ships that they know of in the same ocean, but what if they are all going around in circles? While it is good to communicate with other ships (neighbors), each vessel needs its own navigation system as well as a journal of the voyage.

We made important changes on our farm during the past year. A healthy exercise for any operation is to view the changes that were made, revisit the notes on the decision to make those changes, and observe what effect the changes are having today.

We initiated keeping written notes on important decisions in 1992. Today these notes are in a three-ring farm management binder. Along with an improved process of decision making, this written history is of great value today. It is very easy to forget the reasons used to make management decisions. A journal retains those reasons and offers great assistance in current problem solving.

We owned a 4x4 diesel pickup truck and an 18-foot gooseneck livestock trailer. While most livestock farms consider a truck and trailer as necessary equipment, we analyzed this ownership during a farm management meeting in 1993. Notes were taken. The notes became part of our farm management history. So what happened?

Our family agreed that owning and operating this equipment was not compatible with our long term goals. Not only did the operating expenses outweigh the savings, but my time spent hauling livestock was time not spent caring for livestock at

***The notes from our errors are usually more valuable than notes from good moves.***

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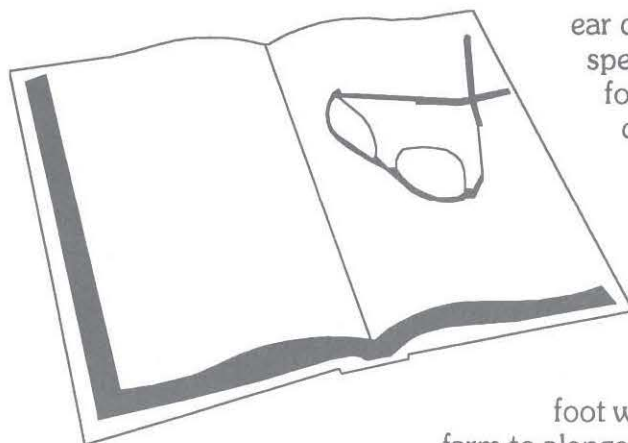


home. The truck and trailer were sold. Maintenance and depreciation stopped, quality of life went up, and livestock was still raised – and more profitably!

As the truck and trailer were sold, a decision was made to purchase a hydraulic trailer to move livestock around on the farm. This equipment reduced labor but more importantly opened up new pasture farrowing and gilt development opportunities. Small and large groups of sows, gilts, or pigs can be moved easily to harvest both pasture and row crops. We view both of these decisions as positive to our long term goals.

The disastrous weather of '93 resulted in a special problem in one of our cornfields. Even late in the season, the corn was too wet to put in a crib. The kernels were so well attached to the soft cobs that the job of separating them defied all attempts, even one with a neighbor's rotary combine. We discussed the problem and decided to feed the corn on the ear to our sow herd. The results were splendid. Processing costs were eliminated, as was feeding waste. The sow herd became more uniform because eating ear corn is slower and "greedy" sows cannot hog down more than their share. We continue to feed ear corn wherever possible.

Our farm management notebook contains notes on two more decisions both involving sow feed and



ear corn. One was to plant a special high lysine corn variety just for winter sow feed. Feeding this corn we have been able to reduce purchased soybean meal in the ration from 360 pounds per ton to just 100 pounds.

The other decision was to spend \$600 moving a six-foot wooden crib from a neighbor's farm to alongside the sow pens. Today this facility allows us to supplement the gestating sows' diet with ear corn year long with no drying, processing, or handling expense.

Hauling water to our pasture-farrowing sows was a routine activity on this farm. As a youth, I remember using a tank with steel wheels and dipping out the water with a five-gallon pail. In 1992, we decided to install an underground pasture water system. We hired a contractor to install the plastic pipe "on grade" to allow for fall "pre-freeze-up" draining. My only regret was using 1-inch and not 1¼-inch diameter pipe. Aside from that error, the water system eliminated countless hauling trips, broadened the flexibility of our pasture farrowing and paddock grazing operations, and ended the inherent problems of a gravity pressure water system.

Every decision did not turn out as well as the ones I just described. We have our share of blunders, and they are documented as well. The notes from our errors are usually more valuable than notes from good moves. While a sound decision-making process is vital, notes taken during the actual decision making have become a valuable resource for our farm's management.

The majority of the '95 farm management discussions are centered on moving more of the farm to grass. What type of stock, how to facilitate their care, and what fields to seed down are all important considerations. As the New Zealand graziers say, "The more we look at grass, the better grass looks." 🐾



The corn crib that found a home in the Frantzen hog operation doubles as a windbreak.



## FROM THE KITCHEN

Marj Stonecypher, Floyd

Fall is definitely here, or is it winter? Got crops all out October 26. Worked 'till midnight, but it's done. We usually quit about 9:00 or 9:30, but with rain moving in we wanted to get done. Then it takes a couple of mornings of late sleeping to get caught up. Right!!!! You farmers know all about it? Now to get the yards cleaned, stalks chopped and some chisel plowing before it freezes. Not to say anything about my yard and garden work that I need to finish. I try to do it while the grain is unloading.

Here are a couple of recipes I use for this time of the year.

### SQUASH CASSEROLE

- 1½ - 2½ lb. cooked squash
- 8 oz. sour cream
- 1 can cream chicken soup
- 1 large onion
- 4 small carrots
- 1 stick butter melted
- 1 small pkg. Pepperidge Farm Herbal bread crumbs or Stove Top



In blender grind carrots and onion. Mix all together and bake for 35 minutes at 350 degrees. Top with some grated cheese and bake for 15 more minutes.

Hint: Add 2 Tbsp. mashed potatoes to squash – will make it like whipped squash.

### QUICK BROWN BREAD

- 1 cup white unbleached flour
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 3 Tbsp. melted butter
- ¼ cup molasses
- 1¼ cups buttermilk
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 cups whole wheat flour (I used Hodgson Mill)

Mix white flour, baking soda and salt. Blend in brown sugar and wheat flour. Add melted butter, molasses, buttermilk and egg. Beat until batter is smooth. Pour into 9 x 5 x 3-inch loafpan. Allow to stand 20 minutes. Bake 45 minutes at 350 degree preheated oven. Turn out on wire rack to cool. (For muffins, fill 2/3 full. Bake 20 to 25 minutes.)

### PFI Membership Application and Renewal Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 County \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone # ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

This is a \_\_\_\_\_ new membership  
 \_\_\_\_\_ renewal

Do you derive a significant part of your income  
 directly from farming in Iowa?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Individual or family membership: \$10 for one  
 year, \$25 for three years.

Please enclose check or money order payable to  
 "Practical Farmers of Iowa" and mail to:

**Practical Farmers of Iowa**  
**2035 190<sup>th</sup> St.**  
**Boone, IA 50036-7423**



## CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence to the PFI directors' addresses is always welcome. Member contributions to *the Practical Farmer* are also welcome and will be reviewed by the PFI board of directors.

District 1 (Northwest): Paul Mugge, 6190 470<sup>th</sup> St., Sutherland, 51058. (712) 446-2414.

District 2 (North Central): Don Davidson, RR 1, Box 133, Grundy Center, 50638. (319) 824-6347.

District 3 (Northeast): Laura Krouse, 1346 Springville Rd., Mt. Vernon, IA 52314. (319) 895-6924.

District 4 (Southwest): Vic Madsen, PFI President, 2186 Goldfinch Ave., Audubon, 50025. (712) 563-3044.

District 5 (Southeast): Jeff Olson, PFI Vice President, 2273 140<sup>th</sup> St., Winfield, 52659. (319) 257-6967.

Associate board member for District 1: Colin Wilson, 5482 450<sup>th</sup> St., Paullina, 51046. (712) 448-2708.

Associate board member for District 2: Doug Alert, 972 110<sup>th</sup> St., Hampton, IA 50441. (515) 456-4328.

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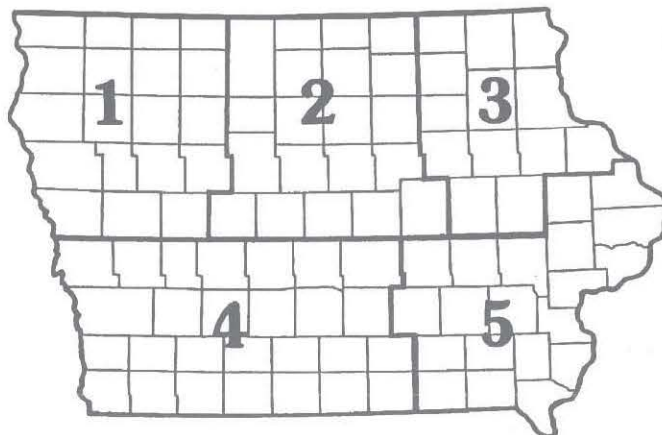
Coordinators: Rick Exner, Gary Huber, Room 2104, Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa, 50011. (515) 294-1923.

Internet: [dnexner@iastate.edu](mailto:dnexner@iastate.edu) [x1ghuber@exnet.iastate.edu](mailto:x1ghuber@exnet.iastate.edu)

Public Relations Coordinator: Maria Vakulskas Rosmann, 1222 Ironwood Rd., Harlan, 51537. (712) 627-4653.

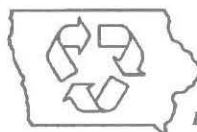


## PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA MEMBERSHIP DISTRICTS



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