

the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 11, #2
Summer 1996

FIVE DOLLAR CORN AND WHAT DO WE DO

Vic Madsen, Audubon

There used to be a television program, I think it was the Twilight Zone, that began with the phrase, "For Your Consideration". This little essay is also for your consideration; it is up to you to decide if I am writing from out there somewhere.

The message is that no matter what commodity prices are, the agronomy, animal science and machinery basics remain the same. To put a nut on a bolt with right hand thread, you turn the nut clockwise whether corn is one dollar a bushel or five.

There is a risk that in the euphoria or curse of high grain prices we will ignore the fundamentals of good science and farm management. Sustainable agriculture is not just for times when prices are low.

Earlier this summer as I watched soybean fields being sprayed, I was amazed by the combinations of herbicides, surfactants, and other ingredients and their complexity, cost, and the roasting and toasting

Continued on next page.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 PFI Board Goes on Retreat
— Dave Lubben, PFI President
- 3 Rolling the Cob
— Frantzen, Rosmann, Schlitter, Smith
- 4 Out and About, Summer 1996
- 5 Shared Visions
 - 5 New Group Projects Approved
 - 5 Projects Funded Stands at Nineteen
 - 7 July 23 Networking Meeting Report
— Virginia Moser, Farm Fresh CSA
 - 7 Upcoming Events
 - 8 Magic Beanstalk CSA Producer Tour
 - 9 Tri-State Growers' Alliance Project Report
— Pete Henkels, Dubuque
 - 10 Prairie Talk Open House
— Jane Woodhouse, Solon
 - 10 SARE Grants Awarded to Shared Visions Group Members
 - 11 Organic Farming Mentoring Project Receives Grant
 - 11 Rev. Norman White
- 12 Harvesting Humor
— Rich Pirog, Ames
- 13 Notes and Notices
 - November Meeting on Rural Communities Set
 - Direct Marketing Notebook Available
 - PFI Joins Year of Water Effort
 - PFI Joins Iowa Environmental Council
- 14 Footprints of a Grass Farmer
— Tom Frantzen
- 14 Farmer-to-Farmer Volunteers Needed
- 15 From the Kitchen
— Marj Stonecypher

...no matter what commodity prices are, the agronomy, animal science and machinery basics remain the same. To put a nut on a bolt with right hand thread, you turn the nut clockwise whether corn is one dollar a bushel or five.

effect on 3-inch tall soybeans. The rationale is that with high priced beans, we don't want any yield loss due to weeds. Maybe there is a point where we spend money to do more damage than a few weeds do for free.

We livestock people also have our little fads. Many, including me, have spent money on gadgets that you wonder about after the purchasing buzz wears off. The old rule of secondary effects still works. For example, someone spends much money for a state of the art farrowing barn with all the bells and whistles. Then to pay for it the farmer goes to five sow groups and early weaning. Soon the sows are burned out and so is the stockman.

It is normal to want to get as big a corn yield as possible when prices are high. But we need to remember that at the 25 ppm soil nitrate level on the late spring test, it's about as good as it gets. If someone wants to push to 30 ppm, well ok, but it is not good science to go to 50 or 75 ppm.

So "for your consideration" study basic agronomy, good stockmanship, and simple mechanics. You and your farm will be more sustainable. 🐾

PFI BOARD GOES ON RETREAT

Dave Lubben, PFI President

On July 20th, the PFI Board of Directors held a day and a half retreat at the 4-H Camp at Madrid. This was a chance for the Board to spend more time on some important topics.

Our first topic of discussion was making plans for our winter meeting. One suggestion was that we change the title to winter workshops so it's easier for people who aren't PFI members to come. We also had a long discussion on location, dates, themes, keynote speakers, and breakout sessions.

It was agreed to have the meeting Jan. 3rd at the Starlight Village in Ames. We'll announce the keynote speakers after we confirm their availability. Several ideas were expressed for breakout sessions, which we'll work on this fall. The PFI Board is asking anyone interested on being on the planning



Gary Huber and Doug Alert at the grill with part of the PFI Board's evening meal at their retreat.

committee for winter meeting please contact one of the board members. Our phone numbers are listed on the back cover.

The Board spent some time developing a mission statement. Our 3rd or 4th draft looks something like this: Practical Farmers of Iowa is farmers helping farmers make decisions. We do this by using on-farm research and demonstrations and by working with each other and agricultural scientists. The results are farming systems that are ecologically-sound, profitable, and good for families and communities. If you have any suggestions or comments on this draft, please share them with us.

This was a chance for the Board to spend more time on some important topics.

Upon the suggestion of Don Davidson, the Board decided to establish three standing committees: a winter meeting committee, a financial committee, and an education committee. The financial committee will look into grants and other fund raising ideas, as well as ways to cut costs, to deal with an impending shortfall of funds. The education committee will focus on communication and outreach ideas. Anyone interested in helping on a particular committee please contact a board

member. If it's the education committee that interests you, contact Don Davidson.

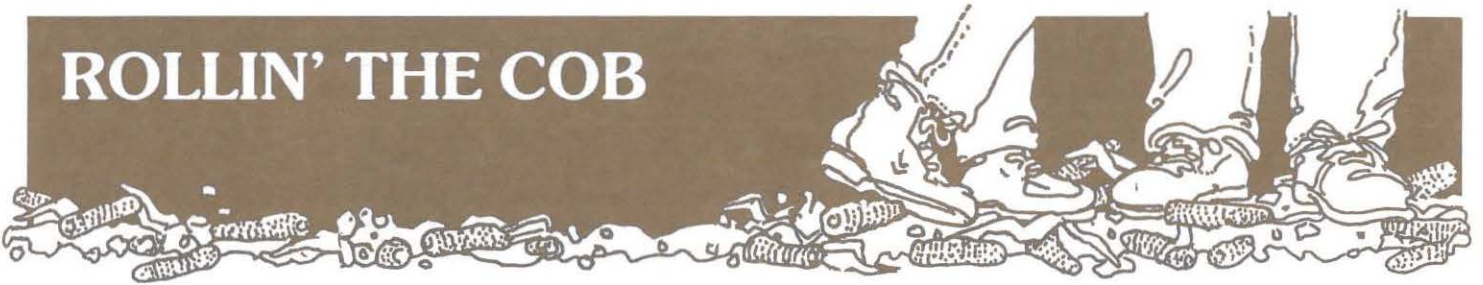
We also spent some time catching up on various activities in the districts. Doug Alert told of an activity that he and his wife Margaret tried in their area. They are starting a cluster group where they invited all the PFI members in their county over for supper and an evening of socializing. They thought it would be a great way to meet other PFI members in their county, and it turned out to be a big success.

Walt Ebert and Dan Specht told about five get-togethers they held during the late winter in the

Northeast District. They were looking for input from members on what PFI should be doing. The meetings that were more successful had a social aspect involved, such as sharing a meal. They noted that PFI members want to be involved, and meetings like these give them a chance.

Sleeping quarters were divided into snoring and non-snoring boardmembers. After the Board meeting several of us toured Ledges State Park and the Dick Thompson farm. 🐷

ROLLIN' THE COB



Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista
Ron Rosmann, Harlan
Roger Schlitter, Mason City
Margaret Smith, Hampton

This is the second appearance of a new column, *Rollin' the Cob*, in which four PFI members share their thoughts on some timely topics. Margaret Smith farms near Hampton with her husband Doug Alert, and she's the Extension director for Hardin County. Tom Frantzen and his wife Irene farm near Alta Vista, in northeast Iowa. Ron Rosmann farms with his wife Maria near Harlan, in western Iowa, and Roger Schlitter works with Farm Credit Services in Osage.

What the heck is "Rollin' the Cob?" Ron Rosmann says that's when someone comes into the yard and a discussion gets going. While you're talking, maybe you've got one foot up on the bumper of the pickup, or you're tossing sticks for the dog. If there are a few corncobs lying around, you may absentmindedly toe them about during the conversation. And that, says Ron, is "rolling the cob."

This "Rollin' the Cob" is a "quickie." In the interest of time we kept the column to a few bullets on two subjects. Remember, the cob rollers want to hear your comments and questions for the fall newsletter. Thanks again to Margaret Smith, Tom Frantzen, Roger Schlitter, and Ron Rosmann.

Current high feed prices make hogs look less profitable. Are they really?

Look at this in perspective. Remember:

- Livestock is the integrator on your farm. It is the livestock that remind you to look at the operation not as just a collection of enterprises but as a system that is more than the sum of its parts.
- Take the long view that market costs and prices will balance out over time. Of course you need enough liquidity that you are still in business when they do. Stay clear of hog production investments that leave you vulnerable to market swings.

Continued on next page.

- **I**f your farm is consistently not generating a profit, then, yes, enterprise analysis will show you where the leaks are. But if you are getting what you consider a reasonable return, you probably have no need for more statistics. A long-term strategy for using the land, labor and facilities you have is more important than a short-term decision to get in or out based on a one-time enterprise analysis. But make sure you use the records you *do* have to work toward those goals.
- **L**ook at the total bottom line – the one you don't get to until you sell your hogs. The Iowa farmer who grows grain to feed is enjoying a kind of vertical integration – without having to buy feed the way the 'big boys' must. So don't get hung up on whether you should sell your own grain to yourself for \$2, \$3, or \$5. A high valuation may look good to your banker, but what about the IRS?!

What are some inexpensive and easy ways to "unwind" in the summertime?

- **B**oth Roger Schlitter and Tom Frantzen think high school sporting events are a great way to relax with friends and family. Neither attends every game – that could become a chore in itself. Tom, whose daughter Jessica plays on the softball team, says he went through "major strain" during cultivating season last year. Now he realizes "I'll always have weeds, I'll always have work, but I won't always have a daughter playing softball."
- **M**argaret Smith and a friend spent a wonderful two days and nights camping out and canoeing on a river – just 15 miles from her Franklin County home.
- **R**on Rosmann echoes the sports theme. This June he and Maria had three boys on three different baseball teams. Ron also talked about the little family rituals that they look forward to: visiting the farm pond where the bass fishing is good; late night walks around the farm, or a trip to the ice cream store before bed. "We do quite a lot of grilling in the summer," says Ron. And when the grill starts up, the balls always appear for a game of catch. 🍷

Out and About, Summer 1996



Ron Rosmann describes cultivator adjustments during a June cultivator field day.



Dennis McLaughlin demonstrated ridge-tillage with terraces and turn rows.



Joe Fitzgerald and attendees at the July field day at New Mellaray Abbey.

SHARED VISIONS



farming for better communities

NEW GROUP PROJECTS APPROVED

The Dubuque-area Tri-State Growers' Alliance, Growing the Future from Jefferson County, and the Franklin County Rural Development Committee had new projects approved in July.

The Tri-State Growers' Alliance received \$1,850 to develop a new direct-market outlet for area farmers on the west end of Dubuque (see report on page 9). They also received \$550 for a project to develop production skills to meet market demands through field days on group member farms.

Growing the Future received \$2,400 to field test various alternative crops, including blue corn, black beans, grain amaranth, and several forages, such as chicory, Japanese millet, kura clover, and warm season native grasses. Another project component will examine practices to transition crop and CRP land to organic production. Several farms in Jefferson County will be involved in both these components of the project. The third component is outreach, including documenting project sites, hosting field days, developing a newspaper insert on the group, and having a booth at the County fair.

The Franklin County Rural Development Committee received \$2,400 to create awareness and demand for value-added products. Specific components of the project include 1) collecting and disseminating production figures on a hog breed to be used for a value-added pork product, 2) helping develop a logo for this product, 3) developing display materials for a booth at the county fair, and 4) providing samples of the value-added pork product at the fair booth.

PROJECTS FUNDED STANDS AT NINETEEN

Over the course of Shared Visions, nineteen project applications from groups involved have been approved, with \$35,326 provided to groups for these projects. The range of focuses has been wide. In the order submitted, here is a list of these groups and their project.

1. AG2020 (Poweshiek County) — \$1,197 to survey owners of CRP land in the County about the status of facilities for livestock production (water, fencing, buildings) and their interest in various options for future uses of the land.
2. The Promised Land (Grundy and Hardin Counties) — \$3,380 to determine the steps a commu-



Continued on next page.

- nity can and should take to help people start farming.
3. Ag Connect (SW IA) — \$2,400 to survey landowners in eight counties to determine 1) their willingness to use various arrangements to help beginning farmers and 2) the sustainable farming practices they would be willing to have used on their farms.
 4. Audubon Graziers (Audubon County) — \$2,116 to host monthly pasture walks on local farms, collect data in management intensive grazing, charter a bus to a field day in Adams County, and develop a grazing library at the local Extension office.
 5. Farms Forever (Louisa County) — \$675 to host three “evening entrees” in the Louisa County area designed to expose people to the operations of local families involved in alternative farming enterprises and involve more people in their group.
 6. Farm Fresh CSA (Benton County) — \$1,110 to support and document creating a Benton County CSA.
 7. Magic Beanstalk CSA (Story County) — \$3,184 to support and document creating a CSA in the Central Iowa area.
 8. Neely-Kinyon Farm Committee (Adair County) — \$1,400 to increase community involvement in the Neely-Kinyon farm near Greenfield by using it as a vehicle to explore adding value to agricultural products locally.
 9. Coalition for Holistic Agricultural Resource Management - CHARM (Chickasaw, Howard and Mitchell Counties) — \$850 to have an HRM instructor from Montana conduct a financial planning workshop.
 10. Northeast Iowa Natural Food and Farming Association — up to \$1,320 to cover costs exceeding income for an organic food and farming conference in Decorah.
 11. Prairie Talk (Solon area) — \$2,400 to develop and facilitate the use of a resource library on organic agriculture housed at the Solon Public Library.
 12. Audubon Graziers — \$1,367 to continue their pasture walks, data collection on management intensive grazing, and grazing library. They also added cost-share scholarship funds to allow local graziers to attend educational events.
 13. Farm Fresh CSA — \$3,182 to address needs identified during implementation of the group’s first project: better overall coordination, better distribution, improved documentation, increased skills in extending the growing season, and better connections to customers.
 14. Magic Beanstalk CSA - \$2,630 to address needs identified during implementation of their first project, which were primarily related to coordination and outreach.
 15. Farms Forever — \$915 to develop and distribute a directory of Louisa County producers.
 16. Franklin County Rural Development Committee — \$2,400 to create awareness and demand for value-added products by 1) collecting production figures on a hog breed to be used for a value-added pork product, 2) helping develop a logo for this product, 3) developing display materials for a booth at the county fair, and 4) providing samples of the value-added pork product at the booth.
 17. Growing the Future (Jefferson County) - \$2,400 to field test alternative crops and practices. Another component was outreach, including documenting project sites, hosting field days, developing a newspaper insert on the group, and having a booth at the County fair.
 18. Tri-State Growers Alliance (Dubuque area) — \$1,850 to develop a direct-market outlet for area growers on the west end of Dubuque.



19. Tri-State Growers Alliance — \$550 to develop production skills to meet market demands through field day seminars on group member farms.

JULY 23 NETWORKING MEETING REPORT

Virginia Moser, Farm Fresh CSA

Shared Visions had a meeting on July 23rd in Ames. Practically all the groups were represented — we have to remember that County fairs and other activities were happening.

Those of us that went the night before found impeccable rooms — very comfortable — in the ISU Memorial Union which is being refurbished. It is a beautiful old building. We had a get together that evening and anytime we can do this we come away having learned something.

We are all in the process of evolving and becoming identified locally. We need the direction of where to go from here. This was the purpose of the meeting.



Vic Madsen of the Audubon Graziers and Tom Buman of the Carroll County group share some ideas during a break and the July 23rd networking meeting.



The programs and monies that are available are tremendous. We heard from the Leopold Center and Vision 2020, which is also being funded by the Kellogg Foundation.

We all need to know how to access the resources needed to continue to evolve and grow, and there were plenty of people there to help. This was a much needed meeting. I came away with a lot of good ideas as did everyone else, I'm sure. We need more of this.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date/Time: Sat., Sept. 21/1:30 pm

Event: Growing the Future farm tour

Location: Francis and Susan Thicke farm near
Fairfield
1745 Brookville Road
Fairfield, IA 52556
515-472-8554

Directions: Just outside the west edge of Fairfield on Hwy 34, turn north on Brookville Road (at Sessler car dealership), go 3 miles, on right side.

Description: Planned grazing for dairy and demonstrations of alternative forage species such as kura clover, millet, chicory, berseem clover, and native grasses. People who are interested can also view the on-farm milk processing and bottling facilities that are used to produce milk under the Thicke's Radiance Dairy label.

Date/Time: Sun., Sept. 22/5:00 pm

Event: Audubon Graziers Pasture Walk

Location: Scott Alt rental farm near Audubon
1283 J. Avenue
Audubon, IA 50025
712-563-2464

Directions: At Landmands Bank on Hwy 71 in Audubon, go east 2.5 miles, on north side. Look for large white granary and small machine shed.

Continued on next page.

Description: An end-of-season pasture walk showing the results of the first year of intensive grazing on a 90-acre pasture that had previously been over-grazed and abused.

Date/Time: Sat., Oct. 12 (time to be announced)

Event: Magic Beanstalk CSA Community Harvest Celebration

Location: Gates Hall, Story County Fairgrounds, Nevada, IA

Description: Locally grown food, music & dancing, and activities for children. Contact Robert Karp at 515-232-8961 for more information.

Date/Time: Sat., Oct. 26/1:30 pm

Event: Growing the Future forestry tour

Location: Keith Shafer's property near Fairfield
Rt. 1
Fairfield, IA 52556
515-472-2043

Directions: Go south of Fairfield on Hwy 1 about 7.5 miles to 270th St., turn east and go 1.8 miles.

Description: Sustainable yield timber management and tree plantings.

Date/Time: Monday, Nov. 25/6:00 pm

Event: Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce/ Hampton-Dumont FFA Farm and City Banquet

Location: Hampton-Dumont High School Cafeteria
101 12th Ave NW
Hampton, IA 50441

Description: Mel Coleman, founder of Coleman Natural Meats, will give the keynote presentation at this event, which the Franklin County Rural Development Committee is help-

ing support. The banquet is open to the public. Tickets are \$5. For information call Pat Sackville at the Chamber offices (515-456-5668).

MAGIC BEANSTALK CSA PRODUCER TOUR

The farms of four producers involved in the Magic Beanstalk CSA were included in a June 23rd tour hosted by the group. Nearly 40 of the CSA's members and others visited each farm.

First stop was the farm of Dick and Sharon Thompson, who provide beef and pork to CSA members. Then came Marilyn and Harold Anderson, who raise angora goats and provide fiber products through Two Cedars Fibers. From there the tour went to TJ Family Farm of Mark and Connie Tjelmeland, who provide broilers and stewing hens to CSA members. Last stop was Prairie Sky Market Gardens, operated by Mark Harris, which supplies CSA members with fresh vegetables.



Harold Andersen demonstrates carding wool for the children who came along on the Magic Beanstalk CSA producer tour.



The weather cooperated until a few minutes into the tour of Mark Harris' farm when sprinkles brought people back to the food and refreshment table under a big maple tree. The tour was a nice opportunity for people unfamiliar with farming to learn more about the people growing and raising their food.

TRI-STATE GROWERS' ALLIANCE PROJECT REPORT

Pete Henkels, Dubuque

The West Side Farmers' Market in Dubuque opened 27 June 1996 as planned. The hours are from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm every Tuesday and Thursday. The pre-opening media coverage was very good on radio, television, and the local paper. Our local television station in Dubuque and also KWWL-TV in Waterloo covered opening day activities. The public responses have been very good and everyone likes the idea of a market on the west side during the week.

There has been a good customer base and every week there seems to be new customers in addition to the repeat customers. The first hour and a half to two hours is the busiest and after that there seems to be a steady if not high number of shoppers.

We have had between eight and sixteen vendors on any given day and had a total of 35 different vendors at one time or another. Every week there is a new vendor or so. The vendors have had fruits and vegetables, baked goods, herbs and cut flowers. The only crafts have been one vendor with bird houses in addition to vegetables.

The problems have been 1) a shortage of produce for the number of customers and of course running out of product before the end of the day, 2) lack of shaded area for the vendors (inside the greenhouse did not work as it was too hot), 3) a minor problem being parking and congested traffic during our busiest times.



Members of the Tri-State Growers' Alliance visit the site of the new market they have started on the west end of Dubuque.

One vendor has been vending tomatoes since we've opened. He grows them in a greenhouse in Bellevue (30 miles south) and that has really increased or maintained the customer traffic. Sweet corn is coming in the last week and a half and that has had a very positive effect, and I expect melons in two weeks which should give the market another shot in the arm.

In summary, everything is progressing pretty much as I expected. It is a typical first year operation with start-up details to be ironed out. Lots of the vendors are first time vendors and their marketing methods and techniques will be improving with experience. The clerk concept works quite well except he cannot take care of more than a couple or three vendors product. Luckily most of the vendors stay with and sell their own produce which is better for both the seller and buyer.

I feel the market as is will provide a provide a very good feel and background for us to plan and proceed in the future. We have not done any advertising since the market opened as the customer flow and demand has exceeded the supply. As the season goes on and corn, melons, apples, pumpkins, squash, and so forth becomes available, we will advertise if our supply warrants it.



Continued on next page.

PRAIRIE TALK LIBRARY UPDATE

Jane Woodhouse, Solon

Prairie Talk has developed a collection of books, videos, and audio tapes on organic farming which are housed in the Solon Public Library. These books are available through interlibrary loan from your public library.

ISU Extension offices should have a copy of the "Prairie Talk Organic Farming Resource List." A complete list can be obtained by sending a SASE to Prairie Talk, P.O. Box 733, Solon, IA 52333. To request an item contact your public library with the title or author's name.

Topics in our library collection include: organic field crops; transitioning to organic; crop rotation and soil fertility; weed control; biodynamic agriculture; insect and pest control; livestock and veterinary; pasture management; lawns and orchards; market gardening; growing flowers and herbs for market; and community supported agriculture.

In addition, we have on loan to us Harold Wright's sustainable agriculture library. Harold's generous support of our project is very much appreciated. These books are also available through our library. In addition to the topics mentioned, his collection includes books pertaining to land stewardship, protecting the environment, soil conservation, water quality, and sustaining the community.

Some time this fall the holdings of the Iowa public libraries will be available through a computerized cataloging system called SILO. This will facilitate information on our resources as they can be searched by author, title, and subject. Check with your local library for more details.

It should be mentioned that access to our collection has not been flawless. If you experience any problems obtaining materials through your library, please give us a call. I can be reached at 319-644-3291 and Susan can be reached at 319-644-3052. Suggestions of titles are always welcome.



SARE GRANTS AWARDED TO SHARED VISIONS GROUP MEMBERS

Six Iowa producers were notified this summer that their producer-initiated grant applications to USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program had been approved. All six are involved in groups that are part of the Shared Visions program.

Two that submitted applications on behalf of their groups were:

- Jeff Hall (Magic Beanstalk CSA) - \$9,850 for a project to link people in Iowa interested in CSAs for mutual learning and development of their CSAs.
- Francis Thicke (Growing the Future): \$10,000 for an organic farming mentoring project (see the following article).

The other four members of groups that received individual SARE producer grants were:

- Tom Wahl (Farms Forever): Comprehensive Integrated Agroforestry Project.
- Steve Weis (CHARM): Comparison of Finishing Pig Performance in Hoophouse Building vs Conventional Slatted, Curtain-Sided Building.
- Tom Frantzen (CHARM): Non-Chemical Suppression of Perennial Weeds.
- Karen Varley (Neely-Kinyon Farm Committee): Rural Action Ag Center.



ORGANIC FARMING MENTORING PROJECT RECEIVES GRANT

(Editors' note: This article was first published in an insert developed by Growing the Future for the Fairfield Weekly Reader.)

The USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) has awarded a \$10,000 grant for a local Organic Farming Mentoring Project.

The grant was written as a cooperative effort between GROWING THE FUTURE and a newly organized Southeastern Iowa Organic Farming Co-op assisted by Dick Blackburn of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The grant will bring together six experienced, successful organic farmers (mentors) and six men and women (apprentices) who would like to begin farming organically, or to transition from conventional to organic methods. The grant is for the 1997 crop year.

The group will meet next winter and spring to plan production strategies, such as equipment, crops, seeds, and soil fertility. During the growing season the group will visit field sites of both mentors and apprentices to help solve problems and fine



Members of Growing the Future pose for a picture after a recent meeting.

tune operations. Mentors will be available throughout the season to help with farm problems on an individual basis. A documentary video will be made of the project.

For more information on the Organic Farming Mentor Project, or if you have land you would like to have farmed organically, call the project coordinator Francis Thicke at 515-472-8554.

REV. NORMAN WHITE

Rev. Norm White passed away on August 28th. He was a founding member of the Tri-State Growers' Alliance and was largely responsible for the group's existence and success.

Father White was also a passionate friend of family farmers. He will be missed. The following Bible reading that Rev. White had chosen for his funeral captures what this honorable man's life was all about.

Isaiah 61:1-3

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has annointed me;
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly,
to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to
the prisoners,
To announce a year if favor from the Lord and a
day of vindication by our God,
to comfort all who mourn;
To place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem
instead of ashes,
To give them oil of gladness in place
of mourning,
a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.
They will be called oaks of justice,
planted by the Lord to show his glory.*



HARVESTING HUMOR

Rich Pirog, Ames

(Editors' note: Rich Pirog is an agriculture educator and an associate member of PFI who in his spare time teaches workshops on humor.)

Years ago at my first farm meeting in Iowa I sat down to the noon meal next to an elderly farmer with snow white hair; his large, rough hands carefully partitioning roast beef and potatoes. I leaned in his direction.

"Have you farmed here all your life?" I asked. He looked up from his plate toward the ceiling and thought for a moment. "No... not yet!" he finally replied. We looked at each other and laughed.

Laughter is infectious. When someone laughs, others join in. Go to the Farm Progress Show, the State Fair, or any major agricultural event and it's the humorous speakers that draw the crowds.

Healthy humor, where the laughter is with others rather than at others, often creates the teachable moment in presentations, conversation, or the printed word. We all know humor to be beneficial; medical research clearly links laughter with good physical and mental health.

No doubt farming is one of the most stressful and challenging occupations today, fraught with a mix of bad weather, constantly changing government programs, loss of the family farm and rural community, and an urban public that has forgotten what it means to live and breathe with the land. With the serious problems on many of our farms and in rural towns, there appears to be little to laugh about.

Some on the farm battling despair may perceive attempts at healthy humor as insensitive. Although humor can help ease tension, the timing of humor for those immersed in crisis must be chosen carefully.

The reality of humor's power as a survival tool in times of stress cannot be disputed, however. In the concentration camps in Europe during World War II, author Viktor Frankl documented the jokes

and laughter that helped prisoners maintain a sense of meaning and purpose - even under the horrors of Nazi oppression.

Captain Gerald Coffee, prisoner during the Vietnam War, endured under brutal treatment and isolation by maintaining, his sense of humor. Once, while seated at a wood table waiting for his interrogators, he glanced down and found the words: "Smile! You're on Candid Camera!" scratched in the side of the table. The words gave him strength to make it through the interrogation and another day.

Humor might be the most important management and survival tool in the farmer's toolbox....It can sprout the seeds of optimism that break through a crust of despair to emerge green and succulent, reaching toward the sun.

Terry Anderson, journalist, Iowa State University alumni and hostage in Lebanon, expressed surprise in his recollection of the amount of laughing he and fellow hostages engaged in. Humor gave these three men and many others under similar circumstances the power to distance themselves from severe trauma. They serve as examples for all of us, including those on the farm.

The word humor derives from the Latin, meaning moisture. It's easy to see from this derivation why humor is often viewed as a social lubricant, breaking the ice and easing tension between people as they seek to communicate and understand one another and the world.

The word humus also derives from the Latin, meaning earth. Humus is the organic component of soil, created by the decay of animal and vegetable matter, supplying nutrients for plant growth. Humus production is part of the life process; a constant renewal along a circular path.

The connection between humor (moisture) and humus (earth and soil) is critical. Farmers, under stress to make a living while preserving the land, need humor to ease their concerns much as they need moisture to ensure an adequate crop. Without any moisture, the soil dries up and blows away. Without humor, the light of hope can appear very dim.

Farming might be viewed as a high wire balancing act without a safety net. There are lots of struggles to get from one side of the wire to the other, whether it's a cropping season, calving, lambing, or farrowing. Balancing such a system may add stress and tension that won't be alleviated by working faster or putting in longer hours.

Humor might be the most important management and survival tool in the farmer's toolbox, illuminating the frequently crazy and bittersweet, but always wonderful relationship between life and the land. It can sprout the seeds of optimism that break through a crust of despair to emerge green and succulent, reaching toward the sun.

At a recent meeting an Iowa farmer told me, "Humor, more than anything else, helps keep me connected to what really is important. A good laugh is like manure on my farm. It does the most good when I spread it around".

Humor is always there, like a sixth sense, waiting to be used to bring back a balance that renews hope and spirit. Which reminds me, have you heard the one about...

8, 1996 at the Churches Center for Land and People in Sinsinawa, WI. Keynotes and panels will involve participants in a variety of topics, including frameworks for vision-building and decision-making. For information call 608-748-4411.

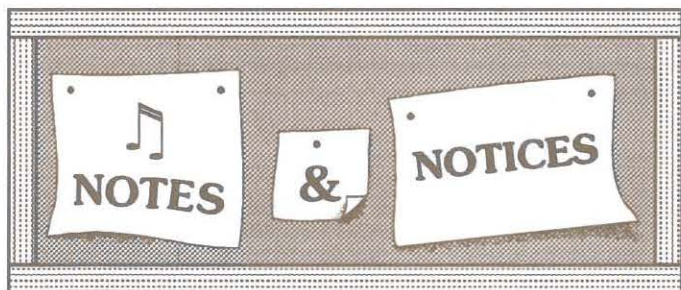
DIRECT MARKETING NOTEBOOK AVAILABLE

The Direct Marketing Resource Notebook contains over 100 pages of practical direct marketing information and ideas for farmers, educators and organizers. The Notebook was produced by the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and is available for \$20 from the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, PO Box 736, Hartington, NE, 68739. For information call 402-254-2289.

PFI JOINS YEAR OF WATER EFFORT

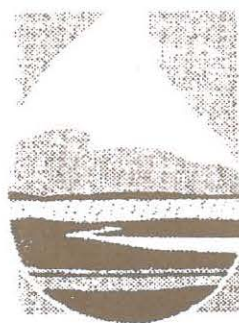
PFI has become one of over 30 organizations involved in the *Year of Water Celebration*, a year-long effort during 1997 to raise awareness of Iowa's unique water resources and renew efforts to continue to protect these resources.

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture will serve as a central clearinghouse to share information about events and activities organized during the effort. The *Year of Water World Wide Web* site is <http://www.ag/iastate.edu/yearofwater/>. For information contact Eldon Weber at 515-294-0893.



NOVEMBER MEETING ON RURAL COMMUNITIES SET

Quilting a New Rural Community: Perspectives and Decisions will be held Friday, November



Iowa Water
A Decade of Progress

Continued on next page.

PFI JOINS IOWA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

PFI has also become a member of the Iowa Environmental Council, which is an alliance of individuals and organizations seeking to protect Iowa's environment and shape a sustainable future through public policy, research and education, coalition-building, and advocacy. For information about the Council, call 515-237-5321. 🐦

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR FARMER-TO-FARMER EXCHANGES

Short-term (3-5 week) opportunities to work with Peace Corp Volunteers and their communities are available. Travel and expenses are reimbursed, but salary is not. Applicants must have at least five years relevant experience but there are no language requirements.

Below is a partial listing of the countries and their project focuses. For more information, contact Matt Zimmerman at 202-606-3403.

Mauritania — animal traction (Oct.-Dec.); forestry research (Nov.-Dec.); soil erosion (Nov.-Dec.)

El Salvador — livestock veterinarian (Nov.); citrus production/marketing (Nov.)

Ecuador — paper and plastic recycling (Nov.); livestock nutrition (Nov.-Dec.)

Dominica — dairy production (Nov.-Dec.) 🐦

FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

Last winter, as our family discussed our goals for the year, it was agreed that we would take a family vacation. We decided to take an Amtrak train ride to enjoy the country view and be able to sit back, relax, and let the driving to someone else.

We bought tickets for travel from LaCrosse, WI to Washington, D.C. through Pennsylvania. Our return route would go through Virginia and Indiana back to Chicago. We could tour our nation's capital and visit the Salatin Polyface Farm on the way home.

The motivation of this planned vacation helped us to work together as this rather difficult year unfolded. Once again, spring brought cold, although dry weather, to our corner of Iowa. The severe winter revealed its effect on perennial plants.

Reports of tree damage and bare pastures were common. When I turned the cows and our sow herd out to graze, I really appreciated the presence of two "terrible weeds". Quackgrass and dandelions were about the only early grazing plants available.

The weather turned from cool and dry to cold with frequent rains by mid-May. This would last until mid June. The late spring provided ample opportunity to build fence. Last fall, we purchased the tract of land that separated our home place from the balance of the farm. Removing the "ancient" remnants and replacing with new fence provided lots of time for our family to work together. All total we built 2 ½ miles of boundary fence. Most of it was high tensile 12 ½ gauge electric, but some was 4 strand barb wire.

The vacation incentive provided a needed push once the rains stopped in mid-June. By August 1st



Movable chicken pens on Joel and Teresa Salatin's Polyface Farm.

our summer work was completed and we anxiously hit the tracks.

The train ride to Washington D.C. was on time and very comfortable. The segment from Harpers Ferry to Germantown was especially beautiful. We spent 4 days visiting sights in Washington, D.C before heading out on the Virginia route towards home.

Visiting Joel and Teresa Salatin's "Polyface Farm" was a real treat. Their grass farm is nestled in the gorgeous Shenandoah Valley. The emphasis of this operation is to keep overhead expenses very low and concentrate efforts on direct marketing.

The Salatins' were very gracious hosts. A portion of their recently expanded grass farming is now done by two interns. These people live on the farm, and operate either the laying flock or the pasture turkeys on a commission basis. They share the Salatins' zeal for direct marketed grass based foods and desire to start their own farms. I was fascinated to discover their non-farm background. Joel told me that this was common.

The Salatins' are beginning to use broiler chicks from Cornish flocks that have a pasture background. If this is successful, it could help resolve some of the health problems common to pasture broilers. The innovative management concepts that we observed at the Salatins' will keep grass farming on the right track.

Leaving the "Polyface Farm", we visited the Museum of Frontier American Culture in Staunton, West Virginia. The excellent exhibits made this a worthwhile stop. Our returning route took us through the mountains of West Virginia. Changing trains in Chicago, we headed back home through splendid Wisconsin countryside.

Our vacation was a time to relax and a time to learn. We traveled through great scenery and visited a "farm of many faces". Now we go back to earning a living. ☺

FROM THE KITCHEN

Marj Stonecypher, 1321 March Ave.
Floyd, IA 50435-8058
515-398-2417

Marj was preparing for a wedding when we contacted her for recipies this time, so she was unable to give us a column. She did remind us that she would like readers to *send her some recipies!* Especially for lamb, she says. She will publish them here and give you credit.



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 190th 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 470th St., Sutherland, 51058. (712) 446-2414.

Colin Wilson, 5482 450th St., Paullina, 51046. (712) 448-2708.

District 2 (North Central): Doug Alert, PFI Vice President, 972 110th St., Hampton, IA 50441. (515) 456-4328.

Don Davidson, 18711 250th St., Grundy Center, 50638. (319) 824-6347.

District 3 (Northeast): Walter Ebert, RR 1, Box 104, Plainfield, 50666. (319) 276-4444.

Dan Specht, RR 1, McGregor IA 52157. (319) 873-3873.

District 4 (Southwest): Robert Bahrenfus, 15365 S. 12th Ave. E. Grinnell, IA 50112. (515) 236-4566.

Vic Madsen, 2186 Goldfinch Ave., Audubon, 50025. (712) 563-3044.

District 5 (Southeast): David Lubben, PFI President, 24539 Hwy 38, Monticello, IA 52310. (319) 465-4717.

Jeff Olson, 2273 140th St., Winfield, 52659. (319) 257-6967.

PFI Executive Vice President & Treasurer: Dick Thompson, 2035 190th St., Boone, 50036. (515) 432-1560.

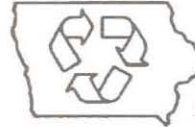
Coordinators: Rick Exner, Gary Huber, Room 2104, Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa, 50011. (515) 294-1923.

Internet: dnxner@iastate.edu xlguber@exnet.iastate.edu

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

PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA
MEMBERSHIP DISTRICTS**Acknowledgment:**

The Practical Farmer and the PFI on-farm demonstrations are supported, in part, by Iowa State University Cooperative Extension, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program of the United States Department of Agriculture.



Printed on
Recycled Paper

Practical Farmers of Iowa

2035 190th St., Boone, Iowa 50036-7423

Forwarding and Return

Postage Guaranteed

Address Correction Requested