

# the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa Newsletter

Vol. 14, #2  
Summer 1999

## Getting To Know You: PFI Women Tell All

Virginia Wadsley, Des Moines

Who is the PFI woman? That question was posed at a number of PFI gatherings as members pondered how best to meet the needs and tap the resources of women related to PFI. Then, last winter, PFI women told all – well, maybe not all, but a lot – as they responded to the “Getting to Know You” questionnaire sent to every PFI household.

From the responses to the survey, a composite picture emerges. The PFI woman is an active, educated person in her 40s who grew up on or near a farm, is married and highly involved with her family life, does volunteer or paid work off the farm, and is interested in a wide range of ag-related issues. Her greatest immediate needs are financial/material and emotional with a desire for more education and technical information. Long-term, her primary concerns are making ends meet



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(PFI Women continued from p. 1.)

and the future of her children, along with preserving and sustaining the family farm, the land, and rural culture. She likes to travel, read, write, and do crafts, outdoor, and nature activities, especially gardening. The PFI woman feels moderately connected with her community but has a low level of participation in PFI. She is interested in getting together with other PFI women for various kinds of sharing.

The above summary profile is drawn from the most frequent answers to the questions asked. However, responses revealed rich variations. Let's dig deeper.

### Behind the Profile

The questionnaire was created and responses tabulated by a group of "seven sisters" who coalesced informally. (The seven are listed in the last section of this article.) It was mailed to 306 named women and 215 other households on the PFI membership list in November 1998, and several were picked up at the January 1999 Annual Meeting. Eighty responses were returned, from which 77 were tabulated (forms from a woman who asked to be removed from the list and from a man were eliminated and two forms from one other woman were combined).

Women who responded are scattered widely across the state with a cluster in central Iowa (27% come from Story, Polk, and Boone counties). Perhaps this reflects an isolation expressed by one woman who said she would like all her PFI friends to move closer to her. Or it may indicate a nucleus of active women who can serve as a catalyst for growing PFI activity throughout the state.

Many of the questions were open-ended (difficult to tabulate but give a deeper, more personal picture of respondents) and every effort was made to remain faithful to the women's statements in categorizing and combining answers for summary purposes. The seriousness, breadth, and depth of responses was

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**The seriousness, breadth, and depth of responses was impressive and humor was prevalent.**

impressive and humor was prevalent. Words expressed great satisfactions and great longings; many were underlined to show strong feelings.

### The Heart of the Matter

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Who I Am, My PFI Involvement, My Interest in PFI Women's Activities, and What I Think. Respondents did not necessarily answer every question and some gave multiple answers to various questions so few totals add up to 77. Here's a closer look.

### Who I Am

The largest occupational category identified was farmer, market gardener, and/or livestock producer (29). Other fields named were agency and program personnel, education, homemaking, medical, arts and publishing, business administration, retail business, social work, clerical, communications, computer, and labor. Two each listed themselves as retired, student, or Jill-of-all-trades, and one is a volunteer. Eighteen listed more than one occupation.

A large number of the women operate small businesses. Fourteen said they run CSAs or sell at farmers' markets; eight are headed toward organic production. Specialized skills such as chicken production, raising herbs, dried flower arranging, managing a purebred sheep flock, making soap, and marketing were mentioned. Seven families are homeschooling their children. **How can we support these activities and create new opportunities for this abundance of talent and skills?**

Fifty-five percent (39) of those who gave their birth dates are in their 40s. Half that many (19) are in their 30s or 50s. Five are in their 60s and four each are in their 20s or 70s.

(PFI Women continued on p. 16.)

## THE BEST PFI CAMP EVER

Nan Bonfils

The PFI acronym was used to label the 1999 Camp as **Positively Fantastic Irresistible Camp**. Sometimes it's dangerous to put so much praise into a name before the event, but the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Youth and Family Camp lived up to its name, and some say surpassed it. Camp Director Shelly Gradwell wrote, "I just can't say enough positive things about this year's camp. It was really the best PFI camp ever." (Thanks in no small part to Shelly herself, we'd like to emphasize.) Sixty-one participants nearly doubled last year's number, and there was an excellent balance between folks from farms and more urban sustainable ag supporters.

The camp continued a half decade pattern of hands-on experiences with agriculture and the natural resources that enhance Iowa farms and communities. The schedule was packed with early morning bird hikes, educational classes, adventure activities, evening programs, and campfire songs and stories. "Camp was the best time in my life. It was like having a sleepover every night," wrote one camper

This year the camp was held at the YMCA Camp in Boone County to take advantage of a superior educational program led by an excellent staff of professional naturalists. Here are Shelly's thoughts on this year's staff. "Mike 'Marsh' Havlik, who has done programs at past PFI camps, now leads the outdoor education program at the YMCA Camp. He led an incredible mix of classes, activities, and programs. Mike taught most of the counselor leadership development day, in which counselors participated in activities that helped them learn about themselves, others, and lessons they can use throughout their lives. I am very glad that we added an extra day for counselors. These are teens

that have grown up through the years of PFI camp and are very talented, motivated young people – excellent role models for the campers. With a day just for them, we hope to show them our support for the farm projects they currently do, and the future agriculture and natural resource endeavors that they are considering."

Camp activities included: communities class, low ropes teams course, discovery hike, soils class, horse-back riding, archery, rappelling, climbing, crafts, journal writing, owl program, night hike, campfires, bird hike, creek walk and geology class, 7 generations Native American program, and dancing. One parent wrote, "The camp activities were really well organized and the staff was truly exceptional – great educators and role models. The natural history training we received was about the best I've ever encountered."



**"Positively the best!" The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual PFI Camp began with an anniversary party and ended with a picnic.**



The Y camp site also offered a variety of accommodations for campers of all ages and their families, plus flexibility in meal planning. Portions of the meals were grown by farmers and gardeners who attended the camp, and there was time set aside at each meal to recognize them. We had beef and spinach from Nan & Don, beef and lamb from the Bahrenfuse farm, pork and eggs from the Madsens, strawberries from the Mays family, lettuce from the Zacharakis-Jutz farm and salad greens from the Liebman garden. The food was praised by our campers and also the YMCA staff – we had the least amount of food waste of any camp at YMCA this year. Thanks to the food growers!

Camp ended with a family potluck picnic at the Boone County farm of Don Adams and Nan Bonfils. Turnout was much higher than expected, probably a testament to how much everyone enjoyed the weekend. "No one wanted camp to end!"

## Sowing Seeds for the Future of PFI



Any season is the right time to sow seeds for the future of PFI. Your gift to the Practical Farmers of Iowa Endowed Fund is welcome at any time. Created to assure long term financial stability for PFI, the fund began with an initial investment of \$25,000 from Jean Wallace Douglas through the Wallace Genetic Foundation. Additional donations have come from PFI Board members and individual members. Currently the fund is managed by the ISU Achievement Foundation. Your tax deductible gift will support profitable farming practices that are safe for people and protect the environment. Please join the PFI Board in growing the Endowed Fund by completing and sending in this form. Thank you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town /City & State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(Make check payable to PFI Endowed Fund)

Please send me information on other giving options

I'd like to talk with someone about other giving options  
My phone number is \_\_\_\_\_



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Return to: Practical Farmers of Iowa, 2035 190<sup>th</sup> St., Boone, IA. 50036

## STILL TIME TO CATCH A FIELD DAY

Summer isn't over yet and it's not too late to join in a field day. As we go to press, the calendar is still full of possibilities. Our cooperating farmers deserve our support, and a field day is a great way to introduce a neighbor to PFI. As Vic Madsen wrote in the last newsletter, "You'll learn something and while there may not be glitz and glitter, there will be caring, big-hearted, generous and friendly people. It doesn't get any better than that."

Aug. 27 Brad and Chris Harvey (Akron) Dordt College Ag Stewardship Center (Sioux Center) – manure mgt., grazing, Bt corn, seeding warm-season pasture

Aug. 28 Colin and Carla Wilson, Dan and Lorna Wilson (Paullina), Paul and Karen Muggge (Sutherland) – Swedish-style bedded farrowing, composting, tracking cropping system, small grains

Aug. 30 Arlyn and Annette Valvick (Swea City) – Nitrogen on soybeans, reduced inputs

Sept. 4 Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell (Farmersburg), Dan Specht (McGregor) – open-pollinated corn, alfalfa pest biocontrol, tracking cropping system

Sept. 12 Tom Wahl and Kathy Dice (Wapello) – agroforestry, fruits, nuts, intercropping herbs

Sept. 15 Larry and Judy Jedlicka, Susan and Jeff Zacharakis-Jutz (Solon) – hoophouse

hogs, organic cropping, alternative parasite control

Sept. 16 Virginia and Marion Moser, Mosers' Gardens (Garrison) – efficiency in CSA veggie production, coffee bean mulch

Sept. 18 Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf, One Step at a Time CSA (Kanawha) – efficiency in CSA veggie production, compost for broccoli

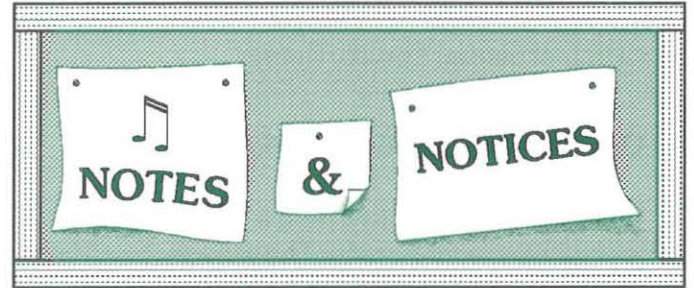
## The Editor Muses



Hotcha! Tomatoes are ripe, beans are bountiful, hay is rolling, sweet corn is here – it's summer and it's hot. Thank goodness for places to get wet and doses of air con at the PFI office. Hopefully you're reading this in August, with a good sampling of field days yet ahead. (See list p. 4 and above, plus photos p. 9-11.) Some other things to check out in this issue are Virginia Wadsley's summary of responses to the PFI women's survey (go, girl, go); Gary Huber's progress on brokering with producers for the Scheman All Iowa Meals, getting rave reviews (see p. 7); and Rick Exner's on-farm research, the back bone of PFI's credibility and reputation (see p. 19). God bless Shelly Gradwell, currently in Alaska, recovering from a remarkable PFI Camp (see p. 3). Plus, board member profiles continue with Steve Williams, Ken Wise, Mike Natvig, Ron Brunk and Walt Ebert (on p. ##). So to heck with the weeds. Grab a lemonade or something frosty and have a good read.

Cheers!  
Nan Bonfils

P.S. Next newsletter deadline is September 17. Your fall newsletter will be brimming with information about the Annual Meeting and Winter Workshops in Ames on January 14 & 15, 2000. Mark your calendar now! 🍷



### 🎵 PFI Board Meeting, September 8

The board will hold its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, September 8 in Ames. They will be doing some major decision-making about the annual meeting (January 14 & 15, 2000.) The roster of speakers for January is already growing. **Dr. John Ikerd** has accepted the board's invitation to join us as keynote speaker. He is an Extension Professor and Coordinator for the Sustainable Agriculture Programs at University of Missouri. If you have ideas about the program, speakers, child care, or meals, you should contact your district director before the September board meeting. You'll find names and numbers of board members listed on the back of this newsletter.

### 🎵 All Aboard for Value Added in September

PFI members are invited to join the Iowa Value Added Agricultural Caravan on September 7, 8, & 9. Highlights from a tentative schedule are listed here. For more information contact ISU Extension Value Added Ag Unit, Sara Duhrkopf at 515-294-0588 or Mary Holz-Clause at 515-294-0648.

September 7 stops include tours of organic soybean project in Jefferson, Mycal/Nicchii Soybean Flaking Process; aquaculture project; and OSIProcessing in Oakland. A presentation by Precision Beef, tour of Wallace Research Farm, Georgia Bred-Iowa Fed Project completes the afternoon. Evening barbecue with Cass County Cattlemen's Association.

September 8 stops include visits to a pumpkin farm, the Centerville Switchgrass Project, a prison project, Fairfield projects, an evening meal by

Johnson County CSA, followed by a discussion of Iowa Soy Specialties.

September 9 will cover a visit to a composting and egg laying facility, luncheon discussions with Kanawha CSA and Niman Ranch Projects discussions. The day ends with a visit to a 400 cow dairy, and a tour of Sleezer Fertility Center.

### 🎵 **October Composting Workshop**

All-day on-farm composting workshop on October 27 in Cedar Rapids. The workshop will help you get from fresh manure, animal mortalities, and crop residues to the finished product. It will show you how to use it effectively on vegetables and crops. \$15 registration fee includes materials. Co-sponsored by the Leopold Center For Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Recycling Association, BioCycle, and Iowa State University. For more information, contact Garth Frable of the Iowa Recycling Association at 515-265-1596, Frable3r@aol.com.

### 🎵 **PFI Annual Meeting January 14 & 15, 2000**

Y2K worries aside, you should have marked your calendar by now for PFI's Annual Winter Workshops. The meeting will take place in Ames on January 14 & 15, 2000. This date is a little later than some of our more recent annual meetings to give everyone a little more breathing room after the holidays. We also hope that more university students will attend. How about you?

### 🎵 **Women's Winter Retreat February 5 & 6**

The PFI Women's Winter Retreat will be February 5 & 6, 2000 at Prairiewoods: Franciscan Spirituality Center near Cedar Rapids. **Kate Hogg** has volunteered to put together the program. Carol Hunt is working with Prairiewoods to incorporate local foods for our group. Please contact Kate for details, 319-247-0223.

### 🎵 **SARE Producer Grant Recipients**

Congratulations to the PFI members who received North Central SARE Producer grants. **Tom Wahl**, Wapello County, has secured grant money through Farms Forever, a group that originated through PFI's

Shared Visions Project. The project goal is to help promote crop-bearing trees in wind breaks, field breaks, and buffer strips. Cost share money will also go to farmers for nursery plants, labor, and maintenance supplies.

**Don Adams**, Boone County, received a SARE grant to restore a few acres of oak savanna pasture to native plants, with an eye to eventually incorporating the savanna into his rotational grazing system. Don says "I've been thinking about this since Mike Natvig's field day in 1997. Nothing good happens fast, but a little help goes a long way."

**Rex Wilhelm**, Guthrie County, of Stuart is the only other Iowa farmer to receive a SARE producer grant this year. His project involves pasture aeration to improve production. Congratulations all. 🍷



## **OVER THE BACK FENCE**

Nan Bonfils

This edition of *Over the Back Fence* could be renamed "Tough Answers to Easy Questions" or

some variation. It evolves directly from the PFI women's survey, in which a number of individuals expressed quite specific concerns, and asked very deliberate questions. Knowing that the answers are not necessarily here in the PFI office, and knowing that the answers are not gender specific, I turn to the members for help with these topics. After all, it's the neighborly thing to do.

I've spoken with each of these women to be sure it's okay to print her name, number, and question. All the women in this column gave an emphatic "Yes." Some did hedge slightly as they had already found partial solutions to their problems since writing in the survey months ago. But they chose to go in print because "Maybe I have information that someone else needs. Just cause they didn't write about it doesn't mean...."

Now it's up to you. Read over the topics. And if you have insight to share, take the initiative, whatever your age or gender, and give that PFI neighbor a call. We're all in this together.

**Wendy Mickle** (515-438-4022) raises goats in Woodward. She had a few setbacks such as a flooded barn this spring, but she's back into production of goat cheese products. She wants help finding insurance for the processing.

**Michele Weber** (515-655-7321) and her husband David are gearing up for Y2K in Hedrick. Their attitude is "Prepare for the worst and hope for the best." She sent me an interesting sample flyer of tips from a group in Fairfield. She's still collecting information, if you have any hints to share.

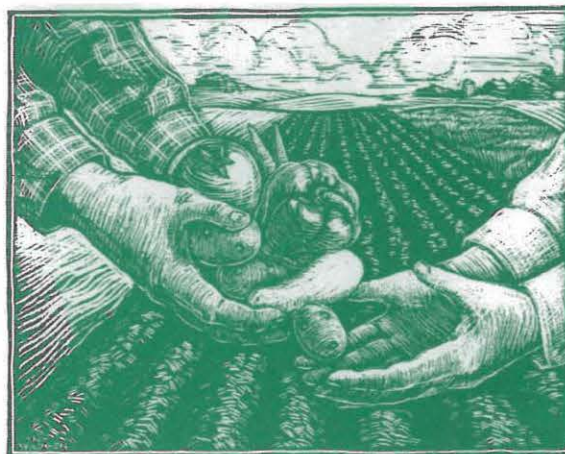
Last fall **Angela Tedesco** (515-278-4522) of Johnston, was stumped trying to get start up capital for a new venture. She's "skinned that cat" for now, but is still open to your ideas and may have a few leads for you, as well.

**Beth Henning** (515-277-2427) lives in Des Moines. She inherited farmland. "There must be others out there like me who may not be a producer but still want to support sustainable agriculture. How do you deal with cash rents when you want longer commitments, more rotations? How does a landlord make the transition from traditional to sustainable?"

Last one this round, **Lin Zahrt** of Turin (712-353-6772 or dlzahrt@pionet.net) expressed a need for "getting more PFI members nearby", as did **Carla Wilson** of Paullina (712-448-2708 or c.c.wilson@juno.com). Lin and her husband David operate a bed and breakfast on their farm near the Loess Hills, so they are consistently meeting new people. Still, Linn wonders how to get more people in their region engaged with PFI. Not a bad question for anywhere in the state!

Carla chimed in, "I don't have any greater desire for women PFI members near me than men. I just want more people to know about PFI." An excellent reminder that this whole Over the Back Fence exchange is not designed for women only. If any reader has helpful information for the folks listed here, jump in. This is an equal opportunity zone. 🍌

**Jot down this new phone number for Field to Family- 515-232-5649. The fax is 515-232-5661.**



## FIELD TO FAMILY PROJECT UPDATE

Gary Huber

Much is happening with PFI's Field to Family project, including various hunger and nutrition efforts. But, in this update, I will focus on our work to source food directly from farmers for events at various conference centers.

The meals at these events, most of which are held at the ISU Scheman Continuing Education Center, are turning out to have wonderful educational value. People eating these meals during the last few weeks included about 115 ISU Extension staff who attended a value-added ag meeting at Gateway Holiday Inn in Ames. There was also a meal for about 150 Iowa School Food Service workers at their annual training meeting. Another meal was served to nearly 100 people who are involved with the Institute for Public Leadership, which includes representatives from the three branches of government in Iowa.

Menus that list the producers and their home towns and products are given to the people eating these meals. The food is also described by someone during the meal, which greatly increases the impact. As well, food service staff have given their perspectives, which helps attendees understand how the people preparing the foods experience this new way of doing business. The response from those attending has been tremendous. The experiences are so tangible that people immediately recognize the importance of knowing where their food is coming from.

These meals can be very inspirational as well. An example is a dinner in late May at the Hotel Fort Des Moines. Cal Peternell, a chef from the Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, worked with four



**Cal Peternell of Chez Panisse, in the white hat, surrounded by some of the best local chefs in Des Moines.**

local chefs to prepare the meal. Attendees included guests from as far away as New York and California, as well as farmers who are raising hogs for Niman Ranch. Niman Ranch pork was served. Field to Family helped source the other foods from nine local farmers, some who also attended.

Paul Willis, a PFI farmer from Thornton who is a main force behind the Niman Ranch pork effort, was instrumental in putting together the team that made this meal happen. Bobby Buechler, a television producer from San Francisco, came up with the idea of doing a meal in Iowa, and he helped with the logistics. Hotel Fort Des Moines graciously offered their facilities along with the services of two of their chefs. Chefs from Brix Restaurant, Bistro 43, and the Des Moines Club helped with the meal. ISU Extension's Value-Added Ag program provided important support.

The meal was meant to give farmers and others the opportunity to experience the kind of meal that is possible when you start with the best products Iowa has available. No one was disappointed. Here is how Patricia Unterman described the meal in a story in the San Francisco Examiner:

*"The tables were set with plates of bright red radishes, green tops still attached, crusty, locally baked bread and organic Iowa butter. Centerpieces of what looked like wild irises also came from an organic garden. We started with bountiful plates of tender green salad, and wild Iowa asparagus, thin and delicate, spread with a relish of morels and spring onions. (I saw people collecting asparagus by the roadside on the drive down.) This was flanked by a toast spread with a delicious pork confit called*

*rillettes; and another topped with an egg salad made with organic local eggs. Everything tasted bright and alive; the flavors practically leapt off the plate.*

*The main course starred pork loin, butterflied, filled with fresh herbs, tied back together and then roasted. The meat was full of character, juicy and tender. It had a delicious layer of fat around the outside, and the fat marbled in the flesh contributed to the pork's moist texture and big, sweet, almost nutty flavor. You really couldn't hope for a better piece of meat. Because potatoes were not in season, Peternell decided on polenta - with Iowa cornmeal - probably very similar to what the pigs ate themselves. The entree plate was finished off with braised greens.*

*A warm rhubarb galette would have done the pastry department at Chez Panisse proud. Peternell told me he had to make the galette dough three times to get it right, but preparing the meal, he said, had been fun. He'd gotten lots of help from chefs from local restaurants and the hotel kitchen, and the ingredients he had to work with turned out to be beautiful.*



**Brent Halling, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, makes his point to Jerry DeWitt, Shelly Gradwell, and others.**

*The meal was so universally appealing that every single hog farmer, slaughterhouse manager, pork processor and organic grower at the event understood. When the chef walked into the dining room at the end, everyone spontaneously rose and applauded - for a long time. Peternell told the group that he only cooks with the best ingredients*



**...a wonderful event that will lead to more establishments looking for the kinds of foods many PFI members grow and raise.**

at Chez Panisse and he got the best ingredients here, too. He thanked everyone for growing them.

A pork farmer asked to say a few words. He said he was very grateful to the Californians who offered the pork producers in the room a small grain of hope for survival, and that being able to sell their pork to people who appreciate it meant everything. It was a genuinely moving moment. If the six or so hog farms that I saw were any indication, these producers were struggling. They were waiting for the market to catch up to their product. After eating this pork both here and in Iowa, I have a feeling that they won't have to wait too long."

PFI member John Gilbert was the farmer who, on behalf of the Niman Ranch producers, expressed his heartfelt thanks for the "small grain of hope for survival." It was a touching moment at the end of a remarkable event.

Earlier that day we sponsored a lunch next door at the Racoon River Brewery where almost thirty local chefs came to meet with Cal Peternell and learn about the principles and practices of the Chez Panisse. A principle of Chez Panisse is the belief that the best-tasting food is organically-grown and harvested by people who are taking care of the land for future generations. A practice is to offer one fixed-price menu of three to five courses, with this menu changing every night given the season and what is available locally. To achieve this practice, Chez Panisse has established a network of over sixty nearby suppliers, whose concerns are the same as the restaurants: "environmental harmony and optimal flavor."

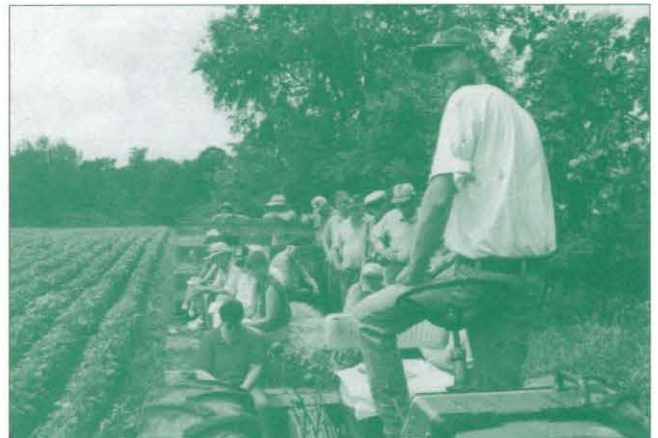
The chef's lunch, like the meal that evening and those we have helped with since, was a wonderful event that will lead to more establishments looking for the kinds of foods many PFI members grow and raise. With this in mind, we are always looking for farmers who have these kinds of products. Call us at our new number (515-232-5649) if you want to talk about how you might fit in, or you can email us at

ftf@isunet.net. While there are details to be worked out - transportation, quality issues, etc. - these are some of the topics we are addressing with support from recent grants from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the ISU Agricultural Foundation.

**Please note, the office for the Field to Family Project has moved to 300 Main Street, Suite 1, Ames, IA. 50010. The new number is 515-232-5649.**

## SUMMER FIELD DAYS OUT AND ABOUT

Photos by Rick Exner



**Mike Natvig (above) leads the way at his Northeast Iowa field day. For more about Natvig, see p.15.**

**Charlotte Borlaug Culbert (left), niece of Nobel winner Norman Borlaug, was a special guest.**

(More field day photos next page.)

## 1999 Summer Field Days Out and About



Consultant Ron Doetch, left, says farmers can't afford not to grow small grains. He is working with Iowa growers through PFI board member Walt Ebert.



Steve and June Weis, Osage, talked about their hoop-houses and composting death losses at one of the hottest field days of the season.



Joe Fitzgerald and entomologist Laura Weiser at the New Melleray Abbey field day in June.



Angela Tedesco talked up the advantages of mesh-lined boxes for veggies. She was joined by Marcia Miquelon of *Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits*, who showed several ergonomic and efficiency options.



Firing up the flame weeder, an event that never fails to hold attention at New Melleray Abbey field days.



The TV crew at Wayne and Ruth Fredericks' field day was less interested in hogs than in the 15 inches of rain that had hit north central Iowa that week.

## 1999 Summer Field Days Out and About



David Weis raised and direct-marketed pasture poultry as an FFA project.



Roger Weis, center, discussed the field of oats that had been drilled onto ridges.



Discussions are always animated at Dick and Sharon Thompson's field days.



Joe Lynch, Onion Creek Farm, demonstrates one way to trellis a tomato vine.



Nebraska stowaway Chuck Francis squeezed in for the field day at Steve and Wendi Williams' farm, in southwest Iowa.



After the field day, Wendi and Steve Williams rounded 'em up for the Niman Ranch truck.

## KEEPING THE ROWS STRAIGHT: YOUR PFI BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In this issue of the newsletter, we complete the series of profiles of PFI board members. Three of the five district representatives wrote their own profiles here; the other two responded to a questionnaire and then let the editor have at it. (Yes, they did get to read the piece prior to publication.)

These are the folks who represent you, the members, in making decisions for the organization. Board members are elected for two-year terms and meet quarterly in Ames. (The next meeting is September 8.) In between they get together via the phone, email, fax, and general jawboning. Communication lines are open year 'round. You'll find board member phone numbers and emails, when available, on the back of this and every newsletter.

### **Ken Wise, District 1, Northwest Director**

I moved to the farm when I was eight years old. I was a Navy brat. My folks wanted their kids to be raised on the farm. We had a diversified farm – raising purebred Chester White hogs, a small Brown Swiss



*In our times of losing small towns, PFI has created a sense of community, even though our members are scattered across the state.*

dairy cow herd and ponies. The farm was a great influence on me, as were the various off-farm jobs I've had.

In high school I ran a garbage route, picking up trash with our 620 John Deere and a Heider wagon, hauling it to the dump. At the same time, I also worked weekends at the Lytton Creamery making butter (value added). After high school I worked at putting up grain elevators for a time; and while attending Fort Dodge Community College, I worked at a radio station. I worked for the railroad as a gandydancer in Iowa and Minnesota while attending Mankato State University. I loved the work, but I could not attain seniority.

In the late 70's my dad wanted to rent the farm, so I decided to give it a try. My first two years were bad, with drought, and then hail. Maybe this was for the best, as I never went too far into debt. I rented forty acres from my grandma, who questioned the consequences of depending on pesticides. Contrary to her opinion, I took all the newest recommendations for crop production, and the profits were lower than expected. Afterwards we eliminated a lot of inputs.

At that time I began hearing about some people who were on the same wavelength, who wanted to start an organization. In the summer of 1985, I attended a meeting in Dennison, Iowa and I've been a PFI member ever since. I'm currently farming 310 acres; 160 of those acres are my parents' home near Lytton.

My family plays an important part in my choice to farm. My wife, Karen, teaches K-8 art for the Rockwell City/Lytton School District, but is a very good tractor driver. She does a lot of the cultivating. Our children, Meryl, 16, and Ben, 13, help with the field work, fencing, and animal chores. Martin, our 7-year-old, loves the animals of course and does as much as he can to help.

We raise cattle, sheep and goats, but also keep enough pigs around to be a bother. Adding to our list of critters are horses, a donkey, peacocks, and various fowl, which offer a nice variety for the "petting zoo" we've shown around to local nursing homes, schools, and community events. We also help the Winkleman Foundation with transporting and stocking animals for Grandfather's Farm at the State Fair.

In the past we were growing soybeans for Pioneer's Better Life program, but presently we are making a transition from pesticide-free crops to selling organic. We use various tillage practices, but emphasis is on ridge-till. We try to stay open to new ideas, but they have to be regenerative in nature, or at least sustainable.

In our times of losing small towns, PFI has created a sense of community, even though our members are scattered across the state. We are only a meeting, a field day, or a phone call away. My hope is that PFI will continue to grow and network with each other to maintain quality farms. I feel that if we pursue our beliefs, and keep farming as a way of life, then profits will surely follow for us and for our local communities.

### **Walt Ebert, District 3, Northeast Director**

My wife, Gartha, and I have six children, three girls and three boys. These six have provided us with eighteen grandchildren and two great grandchildren. As is not uncommon nowadays, none of our children are farmers. They include a chiropractor, a UNI grants administrator, an insurance representative, a John Deere employee, a nurse, and a printing executive. A joy we have from our family is that they don't just get along, they like each other.

As I am writing this, our hometown, Waverly, is experiencing a record flood. Four of my grandsons have been helping sandbag. I'm doing my part.

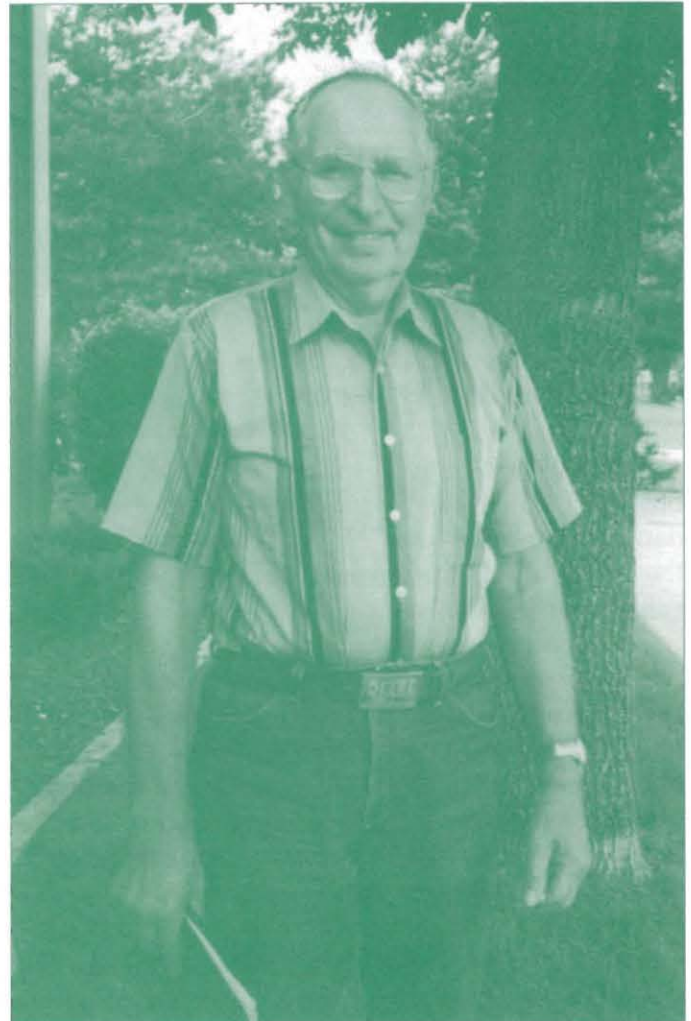
We live on a one hundred-sixty acre farm that has been in my family for one hundred-forty five years. This is one of the reasons I have always felt an obligation to leave the land better than I found it.

I have worked off the farm most of my farming career. Among other things I spent about twenty years helping make John Deere tractors in Waterloo.

***I'm glad to serve on the board because I believe deeply in the work PFI is doing.***

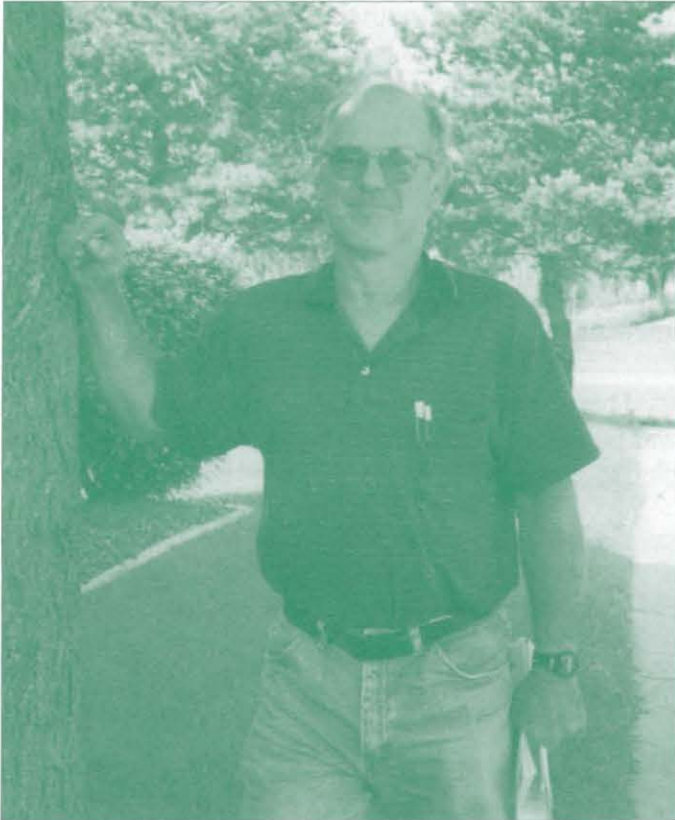
Currently I spend time and energy working at the grass roots level with one of the political parties. At this time I am also working with and enthusiastic about a small grains project with the Michael Fields Institute. The goal of the project is to bring the growing of grains back to the Upper Midwest. We are trying to demonstrate that a rotation with small grains is more profitable than a corn-soybean rotation. After harvest our efforts are directed at helping families find the best market for their small grains. Something different about our farming is that sheep are our livestock enterprise. I have found this enterprise profitable and interesting.

I have been a PFI member since 1985, when it was being organized. I was on the board in 1994. I'm glad to serve on the board because I believe deeply in



the work PFI is doing, and I feel this service is a way that I can give something back. As for the future, I see PFI continuing to lead in practices and ideas that help family farms survive and thrive.

As I close this writing I feel compelled to say that of all the things I've gained from PFI, the greatest, by far, is the privilege of knowing the people of PFI.



### **Ron Brunk, District 2, North Central Director**

"I'm no Iowa native," smiles Ron Brunk. He's only lived here the last four decades. Ron has two daughters and one son. "My son and his family live on the farm also. He's taken over the farming enterprise, called Lean Pork Lane."

The farm consists of 320 acres of corn and soybeans with an additional 140 acres rented. "We farrow 170 sows and sell F1 York-Hamp gilts as well as butcher hogs." Currently the Brunks are investigating spring and summer nitrogen applications. Iowa State University has also conducted some corn borer research on the farm.

Ron's semi-retirement after thirty-seven years of farming gives him more time to enjoy his six grand-

***Ron hopes that PFI can "help develop mechanisms needed for the family farm to survive."***

sons, all under the age of five. He's also very busy with church activities. He travels abroad for work camps and agriculture projects. "Our church is involved quite extensively with a refugee resettlement village in Guatemala."

Ron's been a member of PFI for over six years and began his service on the board this year. He's committed to support for family farms and hopes that PFI can "help develop mechanisms needed for the family farm to survive."

### **Steve Williams, District 4, Southwest Director**

One can only hope that PFI members, especially those in District 4, will have opportunities to get to know Steve Williams and his family better. You may discover that you share a common interest or two. How about sharing a summer barbecue, slow cooked with lots of sauce? That's the way Steve likes to do it.



**Steve would like to see more members and offer more benefits to members.**

Steve's been a member of PFI for five of his eight years in farming. He has an ISU degree in information systems management, but farming is his current career choice. He runs a swine farrow finish operation, a beef cow calf herd, and raises organic beans and corn. These days Steve is trying to do more direct marketing of naturally raised pork and beef.

Steve also keeps busy as deacon of the Villisca Presbyterian Church and a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. Steve's a board member of Precision Beef Alliance as well. His wife, Wendi, has organized a play group for other stay-at-home moms and their kids. Steve and Wendi have two children, Rachel, 4, and Jackson, 2, plus three cats and one Golden Retriever. Doubt that there are very few dull moments around that household! Rachel has a cow named "Lucy". Her middle name is Lucille. This spring Lucy had her first calf and Rachel named it "Unloose."

Steve was elected to the PFI board this January. He's wants to "promote Iowa farmers and learn from others." He would like to see the organization gain more members and offer more benefits to members. PFI can become "the best producer network in the world for producing high quality safe food products."

### **Mike Natvig, District 3, Northeast Director**

My farm is located in Howard County, west of Protivin. The farm is 160 acres, of which 120 are tillable, and 40 acres are forests, ponds, and prairie pastures. The farm has been in the Natvig family since the 1880's. I also rent 80 acres from my uncle and 150 acres that is owned by the Natural Heritage Foundation. That land is the boyhood home of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Norman Borlaug.

I farm with my parents who also have a house nearby. Crops and livestock raised are corn, soybeans, oats, succotash, hay, pasture, prairie, hazelnuts, garden, timber, 42 beef cows and calves, 25 sows and their organic offspring, 3 draft horses, and a



flock of chickens. About half of the crop acres and all of the hogs are certified organic.

The area of Iowa in which I live is in the transition zone between the Eastern hardwood forests and the tall grass prairie. My farm was an oak savanna before settlement. One project I have been working on for the last few years, with the help of Dr. Laura Jackson from UNI, has been restoring an oak savanna remnant on my farm for pasture and wildlife habitat. Other works in progress are monitoring the effects of grazing on stream areas and herbal preparations for use as parasite control in organic livestock.

In the past few years I have become very interested in sustainable forestry and low impact logging methods such as horse logging. This interest began after seeing forests in the county destroyed by industrial logging methods. I knew there had to be a better way to manage timber.

After talking to a few people, I tracked down a full time horse logger in Minnesota who was willing to



teach me the basics. He was a very inspirational teacher and the whole thing led me to buy my first team of draft horses in the spring of 1998. Logging on my own will start in the fall of 1999.

My horse logger friend is also the vice-president of the North American Horse and Mule Loggers Association. Their motto is "Teaming up to promote equine eco-logging." The people I have met from that group have been very helpful to a beginner and are very conservation-minded in much the same way PFI is in agriculture. Groups such as this are so very important to agriculture and forestry; they put the decision making power and the responsibility for environmental health into the hands of local people and communities.

In my spare time, I help on the Northeast Iowa Organics Association outreach committee, meet with my local holistic farm management group, serve on the board of my county's Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and whenever possible canoe and camp on the rivers and lakes of the Upper Midwest. 🐾

**(PFI Women continued from p. 2.)**



Most of the women (54) have bachelor's or graduate degrees; twelve have some college, nursing,) or trade school; four have high school diplomas.

A spouse or partner was indicated by 69; five are single. Sixty mentioned children, grandchildren, and/or elders in the home.

PFI women work hard. Family and household activities (includes child and elder care) topped the list of what occupies women on a daily basis (108). Off-farm work came next (49) followed by on-farm and volunteer work (39 each). A total of 52 indicated involvement with arts/recreation, social activities, or continuing education and 9 wrote in church activities.

Generally, there is a long and continuing relationship to agriculture. Only nine indicated no, or minimal, past connection to agriculture. Today, 63 are closely related to some farming, horticultural, or livestock enterprise; 8 support agriculture through business or as activists; 2 have family members who farm, 1 is a landlord, and 1 is a consumer.

Material and financial concerns topped the list of immediate needs (36, or 47% of respondents). **Is this large number directly related to the current farm crisis or is it an ongoing problem?** This is a matter for serious attention. The second need expressed was for technical information (25), and education (19). **Does an element of hope for addressing the crisis lie in meeting these needs? What is being said about unfulfilled potential?**

Long-term concerns fell into two categories: personal and broader community. Personal concerns paralleled immediate needs as 18 indicated making ends meet while 11 mentioned their children's future and spending time with them. Broader community concerns were overwhelmingly related to sustainability: preserving the family farm and rural culture (15), environment/conservation (6), social viability (5), food security (2), and genetic engineering (1).

Women's desires for personal fulfillment were directed toward learning, growth, self-expression, and making contributions; they reflected everything mentioned above plus music, research, physical fitness, social service and change.

Most women (57, or 74%) feel strongly or moderately connected to their communities and are involved with a variety of organizations and activities there.

Those who feel minimally connected indicated they were new and getting acquainted, had time and personal limitations, or felt too different to fit in. For example, one reported, "[It's] not easy for a single



**Most women (57, or 74%) feel strongly or moderately connected to their communities and are involved with a variety of organizations and activities there.**

woman in a small rural area without relatives nearby to 'connect.' It takes time!"

One indicated general discouragement, "As regards agriculture, it is disheartening to realize the lack of community understanding, even in a small Iowa town dependent on agriculture for its survival, of the depth of that dependency. Misinformation abounds despite all attempts to dispel it." Others indicated they would like to leave their communities. For example, "I would easily relocate...to an area with more hills and trees and not a hog confinement in sight." Or, "I yearn for a connection to rural folk."

### **My PFI Involvement**

Although 51 (72% of those who answered the question) indicated a low level of participation in PFI, 49% said PFI has impacted their lives and 61% said it was meeting their expectations. When those who said PFI somewhat impacted their lives and those who said it met their expectations are added, the percentages rise to 91% and 98%, respectively. **Does this mean that women have low expectations of PFI or that PFI is only peripheral to their lives? Should more be expected from PFI?** Although some women indicated low expectations, time restraints, or a growing involvement, these questions must be considered as we move forward.

The primary value of PFI for women appears to be networking through programs, meetings, and publications as well as information received and the support systems and feeling of community engendered. Several stated their participation gave them inspiration and hope; others said to "keep on keeping on." The feeling of the responses is suggested in such statements as, "I know of no other organization with the potential...for making Iowa food and water unadulterated," or "I can't imagine sustainable ag in Iowa without PFI" or "PFI has the most positive outlook of any organization I know."

One woman wrote with longing, "I would like to see more women who live it [sustainable farming] with families. I'd like to learn more about combining family life with farm life for those of us who have to work off the farm."

Suggestions for helping PFI better serve respondents included: having a stronger, more political PFI voice; more focus on small and alternative operations; more public advocacy of alternatives, diversity, and non-chemical farming; getting more members in their geographical area; providing conferences and family events; locating alternative money-makers; and continuing to share information and experience. Three people took personal responsibility in saying they would be better served if they became more involved.

### **My Interest in PFI Women's Activities**

Of the 67 women who indicated whether they would like to get together with other PFI women, 78% said yes, 15% said no, and 7% said maybe. Their reasons for gathering parallel that of their relationship to PFI in general. They want to get acquainted and network with other rural women, give mutual support, and share information, experience, ideas, and concerns. Socializing and recreation also rated high. Two suggested sharing work — "shell a sack of beans, separate seeds from flowers, make something together and see what evolves in conversation as we work". More emphatic was, "[We should] set action goals to do something."

A number of women indicated that their desire to participate was limited by family needs and time constraints. Ten were not interested in women's meetings. One felt quite strongly, "I really don't mean to sound harsh, but getting together with only PFI women sounds sexist to me. I like hearing about problems, ideas, and solutions from both men and women."

**The primary value of PFI for women appears to be networking... information... the support systems and feeling of community engendered.**

**One person circled food quality, conservation, prices, and marketing locally. "If these four things were in order, a lot of the other things wouldn't be a problem."**

### What I Think

This section listed 28 ag-related issues to be rated from "not important" to "very important." Even the woman who said, "I hate these scales!" filled out this section. All issues received far more ratings of "important" than of "not important."

Issues receiving the highest ratings (60-69) were quality of food, prices paid to producers, marketing locally, soil conservation and health, food safety, "family" versus "factory" farms (with one comment, "I tire of the polarized terminology,"), and organic production. Areas given the largest number of low ratings (10-20) were urban gardening, marketing globally, and field trials and scientific testing of production. One person circled quality of food, soil conservation and health, prices paid to producers, and marketing locally. She wrote, "If these four things were in order, a lot of the other things wouldn't be a problem."

### Where Do We Go From Here?

"Getting to Know You" is just one step in a continuing process of trying to better address women's needs and discover ways for women to participate and contribute within the PFI framework. That process now includes discussions at the 1999 Annual Meeting and Women's Winter Gathering as well as several meetings of the "seven sisters". The question now before us is, where do we go from here?

A starting place is discussion of information presented in and questions raised by this report. Women have voiced strong feeling throughout the process that they want to be recognized and participate more fully within PFI structures; they do not want a separate organization. So far, two general action areas have emerged: **(1) enhance networking by expanding the directory to be more extensive**

**and inclusive and (2) support and build on the businesses already established by women.**

Specifically, people have suggested such ideas as open houses, on-farm experiences, work projects, selling products at meetings, establishing a "scholarship" fund for women, creating a skill bank, establishing a central information clearinghouse or "hot line," and using the newsletter for exchanges (people's stories, equipment for sale, trading or giving away produce, host families for rural/urban exchanges, question and answer column). **What can you add or underline?**

A big thanks goes to everyone who has participated in the process to date. Your input is needed. If you have not returned a questionnaire, you may still add to our database by doing so. Lost your survey? New member? The PFI office can (re)supply you with the paperwork. You may also request the full 10-page tabulation of questionnaire results from the PFI office and it will be sent to you free of charge.

Please let us know your reactions to this report. What ideas has it stimulated? Talk with your neighbors and fellow members. Tell us your ideas and suggestions for future activities.

**We can send you the full 10-page tabulation of the questionnaire results at no charge. Call Nan at 515-294-8512.**



### Would you like to play a leadership or organizing role?

The "seven sisters" (Donna Bauer, Nan Bonfils, Deb Cooper, Mary Holmes, Sue Jarnagin, Connie Lawrance, Virginia

Wadsley) will add your grist to the mill and work with members, board, and staff to facilitate the next steps. For now, let's channel communications regarding these matters to "Nan at the office." That's Nan Bonfils, PFI, 2104 Agronomy Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011 (nanb@iastate.edu; phone: 515-294-8512; fax: 515-294-9985).

# PFI 1998 ON-FARM TRIAL RESULTS - III

(Editors' note: Results of PFI 1998 on-farm research will appear in *The Practical Farmer* over the course of this year. Since it's sweet corn season, you've probably been thinking about critters that get to the ear before you do. So have Gary and Nancy Guthrie. Ron and Maria Rosmann were thinking about untreated corn seed, and the folks at the Neely-Kinyon Farm were thinking corn row spacing. Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell have put together a production budget comparing organic and conventionally grown corn. Finally, PFI farmers continue working with ISU scientists to develop biological controls for several common crop pests.

## IPM and Planting Trials

Gary and Nancy Guthrie, Nevada, joined the ranks of PFI cooperators in 1998, carrying out a trial that relates to sweet corn production. The corn earworm typically plagues growers, especially those who do not use insecticides. It crawls into the growing ear where the silks emerge and helps itself to a portion of the kernels before being discovered by the person husking the ear for dinner. Gary writes, "If a grower could reduce the infestation of corn earworms significantly, she or he would be able to set a higher price for their corn and establish a reputation for having clean ears."

Gary had heard that the old technique of treating the silks with oil could be made more effective by adding the bacterial insecticide Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, Kurstaki). He tested the effectiveness of the method on two varieties, one a 75-day variety and the

**By treating silks with the oil-Bt mixture two days after "full brush," Gary reduced the percentage of ears damaged from 48 to 15 percent.**

## Reading Numbers, Knowing Terms

When you see the outcome of a PFI trial, you also see a statistical indication of the strength of the difference observed. The following information should help you to understand the reports of the trials contained in this report. The symbol "\*" shows that there was a "statistically significant" difference between treatments; that is, one that likely did not occur just by chance. We require ourselves to be 95% sure before we declare a significant difference. If instead of a "\*" there is a "N.S.," you know the difference was "not significant" at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Comparing Two Practices** Many on-farm trials are of a straightforward "A versus B" type. These trials, which are easy to design and analyze, correspond to the typical experimental question "Is alternative 'B' better than, worse than, or the same as my customary practice 'A'?" This approach can be used to evaluate individual practices or whole systems of practices.

There is a handy "yardstick" called the "LSD," or "least significant difference," that can be used in a trial with only two practices or treatments. If the difference between the two treatments is greater

than the LSD, then the difference is significant. You will see in the tables that when the difference between two practices is, for example, 5 bushels (or minus 5 bushels, depending on the arithmetic), and the LSD is only, say, 3 bushels, then there is a "\*" indicating a significant difference.

**Multiple Treatment Trials** The LSD doesn't work well in trials with more than two treatments. In those cases, letters are added to show whether treatments are statistically different from each other. (We usually use a statistical test called a Duncan multiple range grouping.) The highest yield or weed count in a trial will have a letter "a" beside it. A number with a "b" next to it is significantly different from one with an "a," but neither is statistically different from a result bearing an "ab." A third treatment might produce a number with a "c" (or it might not), and so on.

**Economics** Average 1998 statewide prices for inputs were assumed in calculating the economics of these trials. Average fixed and variable costs and time requirements were also used. These can vary greatly from farm to farm, of course. The calculations use 1998 prices of \$2.00 per bushel for corn, \$5.20 for soybeans, and \$1.10 for oats. Labor was charged at \$9.00 per hour.

**Table 1. "A/B" IPM and Planting Trials**

COOPERATOR	CROP	TREATMENT "A"			TREATMENT "B"
		DESCRIPTION	YIELD (bu.)	TREATMENT COST	DESCRIPTION
GUTHRIE	BODACEOUS 75 DAY SWEET CORN	OIL-Bt ON SILKS	15% DAMAGE	\$798.84	NO TREATMENT
				MATL. & LABOR	
				\$2,601	
				PARTIAL NET	
		1.9 CM FEEDING			
GUTHRIE	INCREDIBLE 85 DAY SWEETCORN	OIL-Bt		\$798.84	NO TREATMENT
			2% DAMAGE		
			1.1 CM FEEDING		
NEELEY KINYON	CORN	30" ROWS	154.0	\$41.60	15" ROWS
ROSMANN	CORN	TREATED SEED	135.9	\$32.18	UNTREATED SEED

other an 85-day variety, both planted April 28, 1998. Results on the 75-day corn were impressive. By treating silks with the oil-Bt mixture two days after "full brush," Gary reduced the percentage of ears damaged from 48 to 15 percent, with a nonsignificant reduction in the length of tunneling (shown in centimeters in Table 1).

The other surprise came with the 85-day corn. Based on his experience with the variety, Gary expected considerable damage from earworm. However, the winds and the rain cooperated to reduce earworm pressure to almost nothing for that planting (Table 1). The extra cost of treatment was for nothing, but in Guthrie's experience this was an unusual occurrence.

The major cost of the treatment is labor. Gary planned to reduce labor in 1999 by planting sweet corn at 16,000 plants per acre. The 26,000 population his neighbor planted for him in 1998 meant more ears to treat, and many of those did not set seed anyway. At the lower planting population and with a similar 33 percent reduction in damage, the practice would be worth an estimated \$1,000+ per acre.

Gary and Nancy do not ordinarily sell their sweet corn on the open market, but as part of the subscription to the CSA (community-supported agriculture) project they manage. They feel the value of satisfied CSA customers goes beyond even the considerable increase in the market value of the crop.

The Neely-Kinyon Farm, near Greenfield, repeated a comparison between 15-inch rows and 30-



**Gary Guthrie looks at carrots with members of the Growing Harmony Farm CSA.**

"A/B" IPM and Planting Trials						
TRT "B"		DIFFERENCE				COMMENT
YIELD (bu.)	TREATMENT COST	YIELD DIFF.	YLD LSD (bu.)	YLD SIG.	\$ BENEFIT OF TRT "A"	
48% DAMAGE	\$0.00	-33%	16%	*		\$1,035 HYPOTHETICAL NET AT 16,000 PLANTS/ACRE POPULATION. EARS CAN BE SOLD AT \$3 PER SOZEN
	MATL. & LABOR					
	\$2,100 PARTIAL NET				\$501	
2.6 CM FEEDING		-0.7 CM	1.9 CM	NS		
	\$0.00	-3%	4%	NS	-\$798.84	UNUSUALLY LIGHT CORN EARWORM PRESSURE
5% DAMAGE						
1.7 CM FEEDING		-0.6 CM	2.1 CM	NS		
153.1	\$48.20	0.9	12.8	NS	\$6.60	COST DIFFERENCE IS DUE TO EXTRA PASS WITH PLANTER FOR 15" ROWS
93.2	\$30.90	42.7	9.5	*	\$86.75	STAND (24,250 VS 16,670) AND VIGOR DIFFERENCES APPEARED AFTER MAY 21 HAILSTORM

inch rows for corn. In 1997, overall yields were low due to drought, but corn in 15-inch rows significantly outyielded the 30-inch-row corn. In 1998, corn yields were more than double the '97 yields, but there was no difference in yield between treatments. The cost differential shown in Table 1 stems from the second planter pass used to create 15-inch rows with a 30-inch planter. Some Iowa producers are customizing planters for narrow rows. The topic of narrow-row corn remains controversial.

Ron and Maria Rosmann and sons, Harlan, farm organically. Ron has served on a committee of the Organic Crop Improvement Association that considers questions of practices approved as consistent with organic production. One of the issues that arises is the use of treated seed. Most corn in the U.S. comes from seed treated with a synthetic fungicide to discourage seed rot and seedling diseases, but the practice is controversial among organic producers, and many synthetic fungicides are capable of causing cancer. Ron obtained Captan-treated and untreated corn seed (same hybrid, same price) and planted them in side-by-side strips on May 9, 1998.

Eight days after the devastating hailstorm of May 21, it was evident that there were differences in the stands of the two experimental treatments. The corn from untreated seed was about 16,670 plants per acre, while the corn from treated seed stood at around 24,250 plants per acre. The treated seed ended up yielding more than 40 bushels per acre more than the corn from untreated seed (Table 1). Ron was surprised at the outcome. He has spoken with a number of other organic farmers who report little difference between treated and untreated seed. The hailstorm may have hit the crop at a vulnerable moment, a stage in which the fungicide suppressed the rots and wilts the crop was vulnerable to because of mechanical damage from the hail.

**Eight days after the devastating hailstorm of May 21, it was evident that there were differences in the stands of the two experimental treatments.**

## STRIP-HARVESTING TO MANAGE POTATO LEAFHOPPER IN ALFALFA

Laura Weiser, ISU Entomology

The potato leafhopper, *Empoasca fabae*, is a key insect pest of alfalfa grown in the Midwest. Adult leafhopper migrate to Iowa from the southern United States in late April but do not cause economic damage to alfalfa stands until the second harvest (June/July). Previous studies demonstrated that narrow uncut strips of alfalfa could be used to reduce densities of both the alfalfa weevil and the potato leafhopper in the alfalfa regrowth by concentrating them in the uncut strips. Our current study focuses on the effects of uncut alfalfa strips (3 meters, or 120 inches wide) on the number

(Leafhopper continued on page 24.)



At the New Melleray Abbey field day, Laura Weiser showed the sticky traps she uses to monitor leafhopper numbers in alfalfa fields and uncut strips.

## ORGANIC AND CONVENTIONAL CORN

Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell, Farmersburg

**1997 Recap** 1997 was my first year to grow certified organic corn. We compared the organic corn with conventionally grown corn, developing production budgets for each.

The conventional corn was planted April 28<sup>th</sup> on second-year corn ground following alfalfa with manure nitrogen credit of 30 lbs and alfalfa nitrogen credit of 50 lbs. The organic corn was planted May 20<sup>th</sup> on first-year ground following alfalfa (no manure applied). Weed control was good in both fields. Stalk rot was a problem in both fields.

I do not think fertility was limiting on the organic field. Corn following alfalfa sod without fertilizer or manure has been my best corn (higher yielding) for years. I believe the later planting date plus lack of heat units in northeast Iowa were a factor in 1997. Organic corn is normally planted later to aid in weed control.

**1997 was my first year to grow certified organic corn. We compared the organic corn with conventionally grown corn, developing production budgets for each.**

Changes for 1998: Ceiba 3475 (108-110-day corn) has responded well on sod ground in the past, but it is too late for May 20<sup>th</sup> planting in northeast Iowa.

**1998 Crop** In 1998 we compared organic corn to conventionally grown corn for the second time (Table 2). The organic corn was planted May 12, on first-year ground following alfalfa with a manure nitrogen credit of 30 lbs. Half the 62-acre field was seeded with rye (2 bushels per acre) on September 8, 1997. Weeds were a problem, mainly ragweed and pigweed. Weed pressure was somewhat less where the rye was planted. I plan to continue this practice. Mycogen 2395, a 95-day variety, was used.

I was not happy with the weed control in the conventional corn. Foxtail was the worst, with some ragweed. Both came in late, after cultivation. Spring manure application may have had something to do with it. A 50 lb manure nitrogen credit was taken. Corn (Mycogen 2673, a 108-day variety) was planted April 30.

Changes for 1999: No more conventional crops. It really feels good to be able to farm without chemicals. My five-year rotation is barley, alfalfa, corn, beans, corn. I need to find a way to make small grains work better (more profitable). I will avoid spreading fresh manure in the spring. It seems to cause weed problems. I plan to compost most of the manure. 🍷

**Table 2. Corn production budgets, organic and conventional, Klinge farm.**

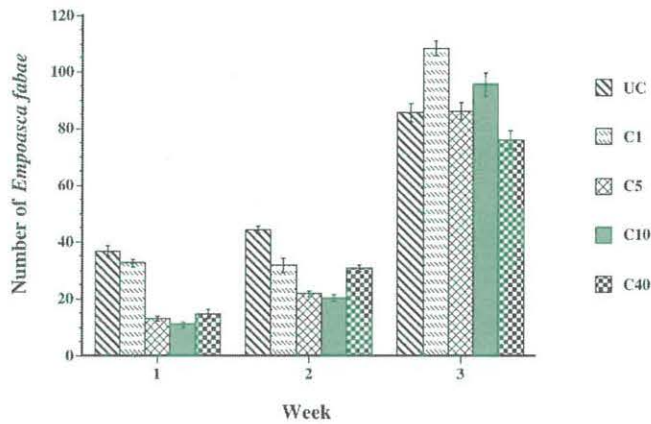
Item		Organic	Conventional
Pre-Harvest Machinery		\$30.50 †	\$20.25 ‡
Seed			
Rye	2 bu at \$6.50/bu, on half of organic field	\$6.50	
Corn (Ceiba 3475)	29,000 plants/acre	\$30.00	\$30.00
Nitrogen (no P or K)	40 lbs	\$0.00	\$9.00
Herbicide	21 oz Axium + 1 qt Atrazine		\$20.53
	Custom spray		\$4.00
Insecticide		\$0.00	\$0.00
Crop Insurance		\$5.00	\$5.00
Interest	Pre-harvest expense, 9.0% for 8 months	\$3.90	\$5.25
Pre-Harvest Total		\$75.90	\$94.03
Harvest Machinery	Combine	\$25.00	\$25.00
	Haul grain from field	\$4.00	\$4.00
	Dry Grain (\$0.15/bu)	\$21.45	\$23.10
Harvest Total		\$50.45	\$52.10
Labor	\$8.00/hr (organic 7 hrs, conventional 4.5 hrs)	\$56.00	\$36.00
Land	cash rent equivalent	\$160.00	\$160.00
	Certification & user fees (\$0.06/bu)	\$8.58	
Total Cost per Acre		\$350.93	\$342.13
Crop Yield (bu/acre)		143	151
Cost per Bushel		\$2.45	\$2.27
Sale Price (per bu)	(Harvest of 25-ft field border necessary for certification: 142 x \$3.90 = \$553.80 + 1 x \$2.30 = \$2.30)		\$2.30
Gross Income/Acre		\$556.10	\$347.30
Trucking to Market		pd. by buyer	\$18.12
Net Profit/Acre		\$205.17	-\$12.95
1997 Net Profit/Acre		\$261.61	\$21.60

† Organic: tandem disk, shisel, seed rye, tandem disk, field cultivate, harrow, plant, how (2x), cultivate (3x).

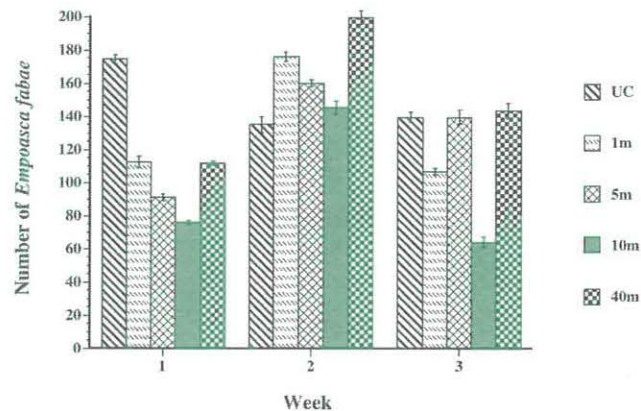
‡ Conventional: tandem disk, field cultivate, harrow, plant, hoe (1x), cultivate (2x).

(Leafhopper, continued from page 22.)

Number of adult *Empoasca fabae* present in alfalfa fields at 1m, 5m, 10m and 40m away from an uncut strip of alfalfa(UC) in Farmersburg, Iowa over 3 weeks



Number of adult *Empoasca fabae* present in alfalfa fields at 1m, 5m, 10m and 40m away from an uncut strip of alfalfa(UC) in Pella (2), Iowa over 3 weeks



Unharvested alfalfa strip (left) and field showing markers for taking leafhopper counts.

away (5 m), 33 feet away (10m), and 131 feet (40 m) away from the strip. This was done at three locations in the field. Sticky traps were replaced weekly until the second harvest, and the number of potato leafhoppers was recorded from each trap. Each field was also monitored by taking 8, 20-sweep samples along the transect of each distance.

The results of this study show that for at least 1-2 weeks after harvesting, the number of potato leafhoppers in the uncut strip was significantly more than in the regrowth. By the third and fourth weeks, there

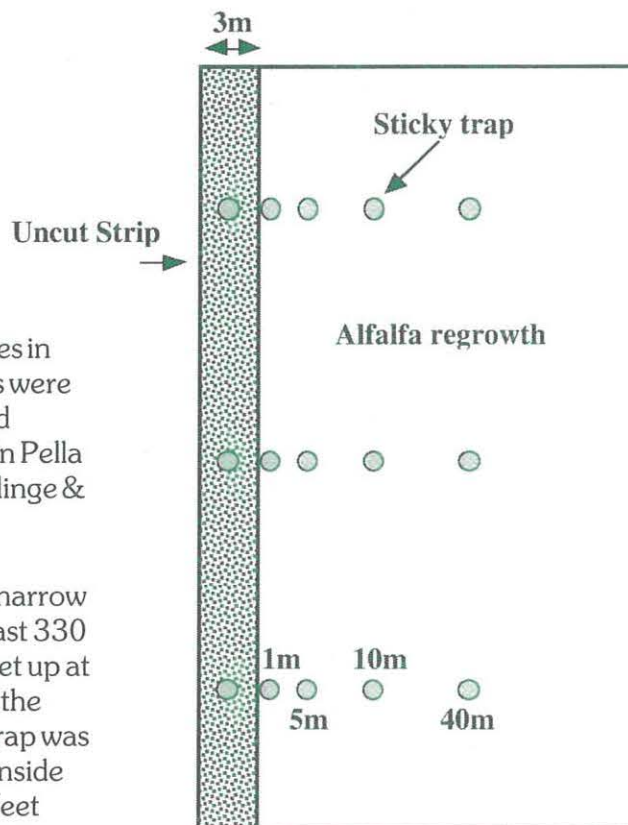
were no longer more leafhoppers in the uncut alfalfa strip than in the regrowth. However, the critical 1-2-week period can give the next cutting of alfalfa a headstart on leafhoppers.

Strip-harvesting allows the grower a few management options from which to choose. If the number of potato leafhop-

and distribution of *E. fabae* and insect predators alfalfa fields.

This study was conducted in four alfalfa fields at three locations representing differences in southern and northern Iowa. The alfalfa fields were located in Chariton (McNay research farm) and Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) farms located in Pella (Mark & Julie Roose) and Farmersburg (Jeff Klinge & Deb Tidwell).

At the time of first harvest, we left uncut a narrow strip of alfalfa, about 120 inches wide by at least 330 feet long. A series of yellow sticky traps was set up at various distances to monitor the movement of the leafhopper back into the alfalfa regrowth. A trap was placed horizontally at the level of the canopy inside the uncut strip, 40 inches away (1 meter), 16 feet





pers increases to outbreak numbers, the farmer can harvest just the strip of alfalfa in the field, which would kill any leafhopper eggs and nymphs present, or an insecticide can be selectively sprayed just on the uncut strip. This would save the farmer time and money and also reduce the amount of insecticide that is put into the soil.

In addition to the uncut strip serving as a trap crop for potato leafhoppers, it could also serve as a refuge for natural enemies and retain them in the field. This uncut strip would also provide a suitable microhabitat for the growth of a fungus, *Zoophthora radicans*, which is known to cause disease outbreaks in leafhopper populations. Infected leafhoppers in the uncut

**... for at least 1-2 weeks after harvesting, the number of potato leafhoppers in the uncut strip was significantly more than in the regrowth.**

strip will have the potential to transmit this fungus to those in the alfalfa regrowth, thereby reducing the pest population. 🐛

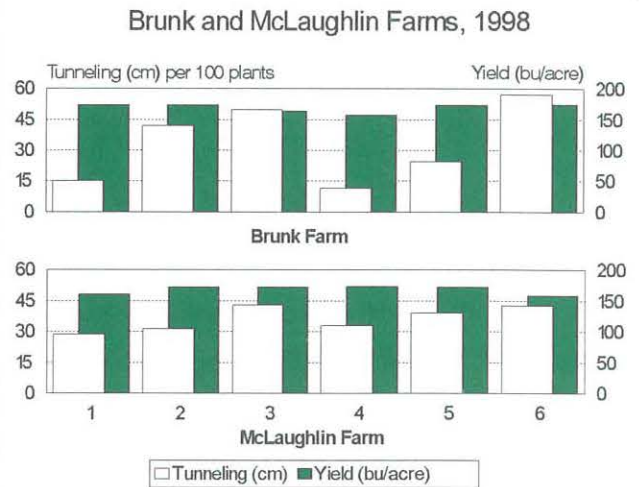
### FUNGAL CONTROL OF CORN BORER - 1998 RESULTS

USDA/ARS entomologists working at ISU have carried out on-farm research with PFI for three years, testing a biological control for the European corn borer. This potential control is a fungus, *Beauveria bassiana*, that is already present in Iowa cornfields and that can actually coexist with the corn, in between the cells of the plant. By enhancing levels of the fungus, the research team has been able to reduce tunneling by the borer and sometimes to increase corn yields. PFI cooperators participating were: Doug Alert and Margaret Smith, Hampton; Ron and LaDonna Brunk, Eldora; and Dennis and Kate McLaughlin, Cumming.

In 1998, the scientists wanted to apply the fungal treatments on a "farming scale." A complication developed as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) cautioned that the corn-based carrier material with which the fungus was applied might inadvertently infect the field with aflatoxin, which spreads through infected grain. So in 1998, the researchers tried a number of alternative carriers for the *Beauveria*. These were: **1)** Corn Kernel Carrier (the same grain-based material they had been using); **2)** Corn Cob Grit Carrier; **3)** Clay Carrier; **4)** Media Substrate @ 14/20 Mesh (the same media that the fungus is grown in); **5)** Media Substrate @ 20/40 Mesh; and **6)** Control (no application).

Overall corn borer pressure was light in 1998. Some of the *Beauveria* fungus treatments were more effective than others. Treatments number 1 and 4 generally reduced stalk damage more than the

### Beauveria Effects on Yield and Tunneling



**Figure 1. Corn borer tunneling and corn yields by treatment number on the Brunk and McLaughlin farms.**

others. On the Brunk farm, the treatments had a statistically significant effect on tunneling but not on corn yields (Fig. 1). At the McLaughlin farm, the treatments affected yield significantly, but tunneling was not statistically different among treatments.

Without much corn borer pressure in 1998, researchers were unable to find consistent differences between *Beauveria* treatments and untreated controls. The treatments are currently being evaluated for aflatoxin. The study will be repeated with the PFI cooperators in 1999 to find an alternative to the corn kernel carrier with which the EPA is more comfortable. The researchers hope to develop a combination that will provide a reliable alternative to synthetic insecticides. 🐛

## The Role of Hope and Social Support in Difficult Times

Paul Lasley, Department of Sociology, ISU

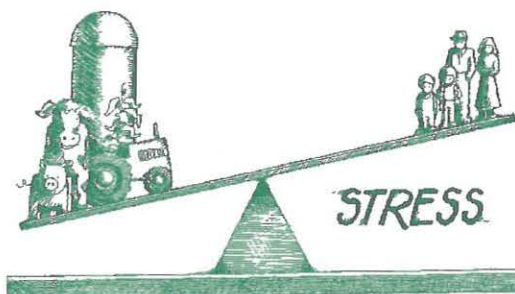
**Editor's note:** This is an abridged version of a longer article. For a printout of the longer version, contact Nan at the PFI office. You can reach Dr. Lasley by phone at 515-294-0937.

In the main, farm people are persons of faith. Expressions of faith are evident throughout rural culture. Planting a crop in uncertain times is an expression of faith. Putting in a fence, helping a neighbor with chores, visiting a shut-in, volunteering in a service club, or offering a word of encouragement are all acts of faith. Producing food for the human family is an expression of faith.

Hope is central to our very existence. When our world is turned upside down, when we hurt, it is a signal to re-examine our values. Sometimes losses cause us to appreciate what we have, or nudge us to get our priorities in order. During times of adversity we should focus on what is truly important in our lives. Many of us know people who have struggled to save the family farm, only to discover that in saving the farm they lost the family. Sometimes we take actions to fix one problem, only to discover that in doing so we have created a new problem.

It seems to me that hope is central to human existence. I marvel at the resiliency of people I have known who, after being dealt a severe blow, are seemingly able to pick up the pieces, get their lives together and move forward. For some reason they seem to be better able or equipped to deal with adversity. Maybe it's hope or "grit." Maybe they don't view themselves as victims, or maybe it's because they understand there that no one is to blame.

An equally plausible explanation for their ability to put things back in order is the role of social support. Feelings that others care and perceptions that there are others that you can talk to about the problem may be quite important in accepting the loss. Research has



*The crisis gripping much of Iowa today challenges each of us to be more neighborly.*

shown that adequate social emotional support is a critical component of the grief cycle. Perhaps we need to recognize the pork crisis as a loss for many who are grieving and develop ways to provide social, and emotional, as well as financial support to the victims.

There is not a single solution to the current problems that grip agriculture. However, through a process of self-discovery and seeking outside counsel and advice, producers are seeking solutions that best fit their operations. For some it will be tightening their belts, for others it will be switching enterprises, and for others it may be looking for alternative markets, or new ways to reduce production costs. Some may temporarily halt pork production until the market situation improves, and for others it may result in quitting farming altogether. However, we need to encourage all parties to show forbearance as producers make these difficult decisions. This is the time for the state to pull together and display the kind of caring that characterizes rural culture.

Hope is an expectation about the future. We need to explore ways to pull together in these days of economic hardship. How can we be supportive of those experiencing financial stress, how can we build upon the historic strength of rural culture. One way is to act as neighbors. Neighbor should be considered both a verb as well as a noun. We need to support each other. The crisis gripping much of Iowa today challenges each of us to be more neighborly, to seek out ways to support each other, to work together, and seek ways to strengthen community.

Even though people respond differently to losses, an important part of accepting and handling adversity is the feeling that others care. All of us need to know that others are concerned and share in our losses. All people need and deserve respect and social support. Being a friend in difficult times is the best way to show your concern. We also need to be mindful that the stress reaches well beyond the farm gate and includes owners and operators of main street businesses, feed stores, coops, banks, church leaders, and others in the food system. The financial hardship extends beyond farmers and includes all of rural Iowa.

## FOOTPRINTS OF A GRASS FARMER

### Quackgrass and Organic Row Crops

Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

I have decided to write this article even though some will call me a hypocrite for calling myself a grass farmer while I relay a story about “weed” control. The weed here is quackgrass, and even though it makes good pasture, I need to live with it in the years of organic row crops.

If you have the paradigm (deep seated belief) that weeds will overrun your farm if you quit using chemicals, you need to see a field that I have rented since 1988. The landlord had this 22-acre piece in hay and we plowed it for corn in 1989. Ridges were built in the corn and the rotation was just corn and beans until 1996. That year Dr. Laura Jackson and I began a SARE research project on the north 11 acres of this 22 acre field. No chemicals were used to control the weeds in this portion of the field. In fact I began to transition this 11 acres to certified organic that year. The balance of the field remained in corn-soybean ridge till with my usual practice of chemical use. Quackgrass was sprayed in the late spring with Roundup just prior to bean planting. A postemerge grass herbicide was used as needed – Accent for grass in the corn and Fusion for grass in the beans.

You would think that all of this spraying over all of those years would really wipe out the quackgrass! This spring I found plenty of quack to spray on the 11 acre portion of this field that remains in the traditional corn-bean rotation. I would say that this quackgrass has learned to tolerate whatever chemicals that I apply to it. I may not be losing the battle here, but I surely am not delivering a knockout victory either.

What about the quackgrass in the organic side of this field? Dr. Laura Jackson carefully evaluated the presence and density of this grass in these 11 acres. Both 11-acre tracts had the same quack pressure. The last herbicide used on the organic side was applied in the spring of 1995. If herbicides were controlling quack, then four years without them would produce quack-a-plenty, right? There is very little if any quack on the organic side of this field! I would like to have someone from the chemical industry come and look. How can this be?

Let's examine the cultural practices used on the organic field. In 1996 the crop was soybeans. We

***If herbicides were controlling quack, then four years without them would produce quack-a-plenty, right?***

had a wet spring and I had to plant real late – June 13<sup>th</sup>. It was cool and dry during the summer. Two cultivations stayed in front of the quack. The grass went dormant.

In 1997 we put in the SARE plots. A complete description of the practices are found in the spring 1999 issue of the PFI newsletter. In short, different cover crops were planted and a period of fallow followed during that summer. Dr. Jackson carefully evaluated the effectiveness of the cover crop and fallow practices on suppression of quack.

I moldboard plowed the entire field in the spring of 1998 to prepare the ground for corn. May was hot and dry. The quack again went dormant. The corn was cultivated twice with good weed control. It was rotary hoed once. The corn yielded from 125 to 145 bushels.

This spring I took full advantage of the excellent March weather to disc the ground and spread 3 bushels of oats in as an early cover crop. April rains produced great oat growth. I disked the oats in on the third week of May. Wet weather followed. I field cultivated twice in mid June and planted organic beans. One harrowing, one rotary hoe pass and two cultivations have the crop well ahead of the weeds. I see little, if any, quack.

If there is a lesson in this history of tillage and chemicals for me, it is this. Given the choice of an array of chemicals or an array of cultural, non-chemical practices, I am going with the cultural no chemical approach. The effectiveness looks to be better and the opportunities to market organic crops makes this approach an appealing one.

This may not sound much like a footprint for a grass farmer, but I wonder if my original mistake was in thinking that herbicides would kill out a pesty weed. I can live with quack and hopefully continue to farm by selling some products organically. 🌱



## BITS OF SUSTENANCE

The Bits of Sustenance pages are a place where PFI women can share their writing – stories, poems, letters, book reviews, experiences. Hopefully, Bits of Sustenance will give every reader something to ponder.

**Editor's note:** The collection of lovely, small poems came to the PFI office directed to "Bits of Sustenance", but the author prefers to remain anonymous.

## Chickadees

Faster, faster

Flying in the wing-race.

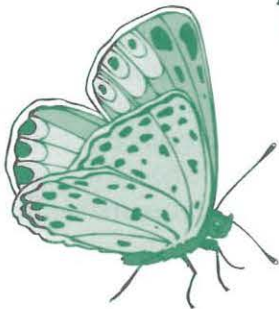
Map-cap Chickadees

Racing for the seeded prize.

One more time...

All day long...

Ready, set, go!



## Flutterbies in the Garden

Like sailboats gliding  
on invisible blue oceans,

Thrown merciless in  
the breeze.

Back and forth,  
up and down,

Working their way toward blooming shores.

## Prairie Caesarean

Prairie grassroots reaching eight-foot down.

The scalpel-bladed moldboard plow peels back  
the earthen skin

In Caesarian procedure.

Tightness tears loose on first incision.

All across the rolling bellyscape.

New blackness roiling from below.

A seed lies silently,

Waiting on the warmth  
of yellow cornflower sunlight

Cloudbursts coax it from the fold,

Tease it, demand it,

Will this seed to grow.



## Mobile Phonery

Digital, cellular mullien,

Sprouting up throughout the countryside.

Digitech ditch weed, rigid constitution,

Carrying messages across the airwaves.

Overgrown, hightech, towering crop,

The newly dominant species,

Crowding out the past,

Dialing up the future.

Editor's note: I wrote this piece over a decade ago on my first "hotcha" summer in Iowa. At the time I lived in equatorial Asia, so the climate change was mild compared to the culture shock.

### Heat Wave

Nan Bonfils, Madrid

"Hot enough for ya?" It's 98 degrees, ditto humidity percentage and no breeze stirring. "Why this is every bit as bad as '36. Yup. Every bit." A litany for July.

The heat is my outstanding impression of Iowa in '87. Beans curling in protest; cows stalking the shade of timber; Cleo panting incessantly and excavating beneath the porch; and every farmer worrying. Worry about the soy. Worry about the corn. Worry about the livestock. Worry about the water table.

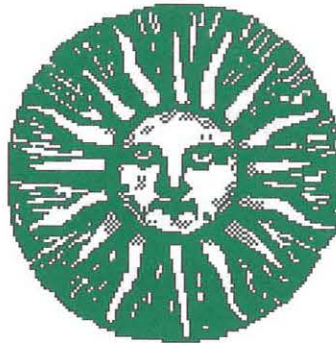
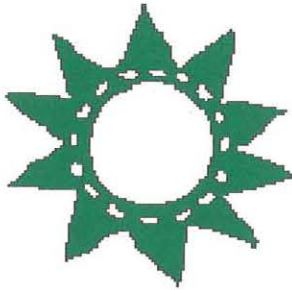
There's Harold, my new father-in-law, with one ear on the radio weather forecast as he drags out

another three blade fan. Even Malaysia had not displayed for me such an array of electric fans. Window fans, ceiling fans, floor fans, table fans-vintage models and archaic designs all in impotent whirr.

In the church, the congregation silently pleaded the morning programs, and wafted then steadfastly but helplessly against the sodden warmth. Later at the hospitality table, I turned a few heads, downing my Dixie cup of juice faster than you can say "Methodist."

Back in her own kitchen, my mother-in-law hiked her skirts, immodestly. But I was too shy to risk a sarong at the breakfast table.

In shops, at parties, along the fields, on the road, a seemingly endless stream of friends, neighbors, and relatives grasped my sticky hand. They beamed and asked the same nonquestion every time - "Well, you must be used to weather like this." ☘



### PFI Membership Application and Renewal Form

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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: \$20 for one year, \$50 for three years.

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

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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): Ken Wise, 2820 Wadsley Ave., Sac City, IA 50583-7637. (712) 662-7716.

Colin Wilson, PFI Vice President, 5482 450<sup>th</sup> St., Paullina, 51046. (712) 448-2708. c.c.wilson@juno.com

District 2 (North Central): Ron Brunk, 12789 240th St., Eldora, IA 50627-7518. (515) 858-3239.

Steve Weis, 2191 440<sup>th</sup> St., Osage, IA 50461-8211. (515) 737-2566, sweis1@juno.com

District 3 (Northeast): Michael Natvig, 20074 Timber Ave., Cresco, IA 52136. (319) 569-8358.

Walt Ebert, 1273 120th St., Plainfield, IA 50666-9647. (319) 276-4444.

District 4 (Southwest): Steve Williams, 2937 102nd St., Villisca, IA 50864-8525. (712) 826-2107. valview@netins.net

Donna Bauer, 1667 Hwy. 71, Audubon, IA 50025. (712) 563-4084 phone and fax, tdbbauer@juno.com

District 5 (Southeast): David Lubben, PFI President, 24539 Hwy 38, Monticello, IA 52310. (319) 465-4717. dave\_lubben@jemm.com

Susan Zacharakis-Jutz, 5025 120<sup>th</sup> St. NE, Solon, IA 52333. (319) 644-3052. zjfarm@ia.net

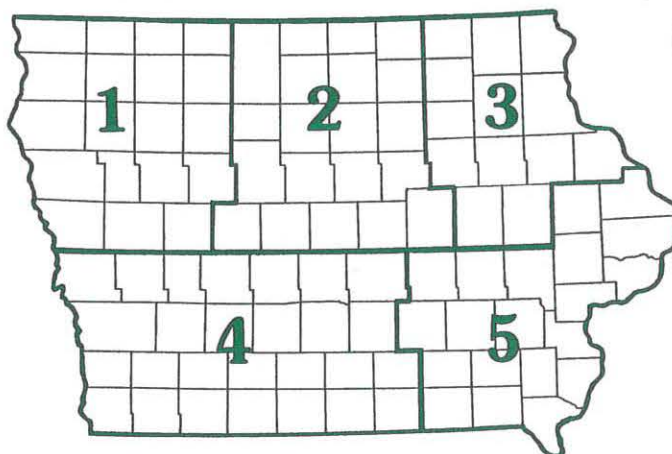
PFI Executive Vice President & Treasurer: Dick Thompson, 2035 190<sup>th</sup> St., Boone, 50036. (515) 432-1560.

Coordinators: Nan Bonfils, (515) 294-8512, nanb@iastate.edu, Rick Exner, (515) 294-5486, dnexner@iastate.edu, Room 2104, Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa, 50011.

Gary Huber, (515) 232-5649, ftf@isunet.net, Robert Karp, robertftf@isunet.net, Field to Family, 300 Main St., Suite 1, Ames 50010.

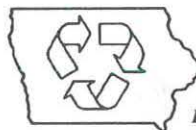


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