

working together, always learning

the

Practical Farmer

A quarterly publication of Practical Farmers of Iowa

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**SPECIAL: Large Gift
for Beginning Farmers.
Story inside!**



On the cover



Field day attendees get to take in an uncommon sight: Fields of rye swaying in the wind on an Iowa hillside at Tim and Ethel Sieren's farm.

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

Newsletter Editor: Tamsyn Jones

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





Meet My Bosses

How well do you know those who govern this organization, the PFI board of directors? They are my bosses, and they number 12 – five are farmers from five districts of the state; five are farmers elected “at large”; and two are non-farmers. They meet roughly six times a year, and there is always something important to decide. At the meeting on June 25, the board approved a mid-year rebudget, chose new Farmland Owner Award winners (Charlotte Shivers and Martha Skillman) and approved a new three-year strategic plan (more on this on page 24).

Here is a little more about each one:

Dan Wilson has accomplished something wonderful: His children want to farm with him. The Wilsons, from Paullina, have more enterprises than you can shake a stick at, including hogs, beef cattle, dairy cattle, sheep, organic row crops and vegetables. Dan is a thoughtful and gentle leader, our Northwest Iowa representative and our current board president.

Ann Cromwell is our Southeast Iowa representative: A number of PFI members grew up in Iowa, moved away and then came back. Ann is one of them. (Raising children here is a big draw!) Ann farms corn and beans with her brother near Williamsburg. Like so many PFI members, Ann is an eager learner. She has a financial background and brings attention to detail to the board.

Melissa Dunham also brings a strong business background to the board. She and her husband, Andy, own and operate Grinnell Heritage Farm and are among the local experts on recordkeeping for vegetable operations, and a lot more. Melissa is doing a great job as our current board secretary.

Mark Peterson, our current vice-president and Southwest Iowa representative, farms corn and beans near Stanton. He does more to get the name out about Practical Farmers than practically anyone – most recently at the Carbaugh pasture walk in June and on RAGBRAI. He is always willing to share what he’s learned about cover crops and more.

Tyler Franzenburg has a business hauling one of Iowa’s most valuable resources: manure. He also farms with his father near Keystone. He brings common sense and a good head on his shoulders to our board. He



Top row (left to right): Dan Wilson, Tyler Franzenburg, Melissa Dunham, Ann Cromwell, Tim Landgraf and Gail Hickenbottom

Bottom row (left to right): Ann Franzenburg, Wendy Johnson, Jeff Klinge, Kurt Van Hulzen and Mark Peterson

(Missing): Kathy Eckhouse

also represents a growing segment of the PFI membership – young beginning farmers.

Wendy Johnson is another young beginning farmer; she farms with her dad and cousin near Charles City. Wendy just joined the board this year. She has become a bit of a media celebrity of late, which is no surprise: We are thrilled that people like her – with their talents and experience – are coming back to farm!

Jeff Klinge is our Northeast Iowa board representative. Jeff, who has cattle and organic row crops, has been a primary force in working toward more effective farm policy through the years and serves on the PFI Policy Committee. He is not afraid to challenge the board, which I appreciate.

Kurt Van Hulzen: Dan Wilson was certain Kurt would be a great addition to the board, and boy, was he right. Kurt is a veterinarian who also raises livestock. He brings business savvy and smarts to our board. He’s a good example of the old adage about asking a busy person if you want something done.

Ann Franzenburg of Van Horne (no relation to Tyler) grows, with her husband Eric, one of

the most interesting mix of crops: corn and beans coupled with fruit, medicinal herbs, cut flowers, vegetables and more. She keeps the board meetings lively and fun – who can argue with that?

Tim Landgraf, our North Central Iowa representative, is our former board president and has been my advisor for eight years now. He is thoughtful and supportive and was a leader for our strategic planning process this year. This is Tim’s last year on the board (board members can only serve nine consecutive years), but he’s agreed to serve on our Energy Committee in the future.

Gail Hickenbottom is another of my trusted advisors. He talks frequently to those with corn and bean enterprises, is a frequent field day attendee (which is where I first met him) and an avid gardener from West Des Moines. I don’t know what we would have done without him on the board the last five years! Gail is a perfect example of why it’s good that we have welcomed non-farmers on the board.

Kathy Eckhouse is our other non-farmer board representative. Together with her husband, Herb, she founded La Quercia, which works with farmers to create artisan cured meats that are now world-famous. Last year Kathy and Herb held a Ham Independence fundraising event that helped replenish our beginning farmer program coffers.

Thank you to our board members for committing their time and resources to Practical Farmers. I couldn’t ask for better bosses.

Working for you,

Looking for the Dog of the Issue? Don't fret! His name is Angus, and he's on page 9.

PFI's Updated Values:

- Welcoming everyone
- Creativity, collaboration and community
- Viable farms now and for future generations
- Stewardship and ecology

PFI's Updated Mission:

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

Cereal Rye "Rules" in Iowa

The hardy cover crop is proving itself in harsh weather and PFI farmers' fields

by Stefan Gailans

Recent Cooperators' Program research and farmer field days have proven the viability of cereal rye as a cover crop in Iowa. Cooperator research has identified rye as a survivor, and farmer field days have illustrated opportunities for rye to do double-duty as a cover crop and a seed crop.

King of Cover Crops

Last fall, cooperators Bob Hartzler and Meaghan Bryan of the Agronomy Department at Iowa State University conducted a trial to determine damage caused to cover crops in the fall by carry-over activity of herbicides applied early in the season to corn. Included in the study were four common cover crops (cereal rye, hairy vetch, lentil and tillage radish) and seven herbicides (atrazine, Balance Flexx, Callisto, Corvus, Dual II Magnum, Hornet and Laudis) applied at their recommended rates, as well as twice those rates. The doubled herbicide rate was included to simulate increased persistence and carry-over activity of the herbicide, which can result from incomplete herbicide breakdown in the soil due to environmental conditions like lack of precipitation or high soil pH.

Of all the cover crops tested, the cereal rye was the least affected by the herbicides. In fact, Bob and Meaghan observed that only the double rate of Dual II Magnum caused any damage to cereal rye, while none of the other herbicides (including atrazine) caused any damage to the rye. Both rates of Balance Flexx, Corvus and Hornet caused damage to the hairy vetch, lentil and radish. A healthy cover crop in the fall is essential for winter survival and for a farmer to receive maximum benefit from the cover crop. With that in mind, results from this trial suggest that cereal rye should be considered by farmers intending to use cover crops in their corn production systems if they are concerned about residual activity of applied herbicides.



Long a believer in cover crops, Wade Dooley (front, on left) now raises his own cereal rye seed to use on his corn and soybean acres. Here, he leads attendees at his June 24 field day on a tour of his farm.

Though this topic has not yet been widely studied, it's a good idea for farmers to consult herbicide labels and abide by crop rotational intervals when selecting cover crops to use. Specific cover crops may not be included on the herbicide labels, but closely related species can be substituted to make decisions (i.e., alfalfa for hairy vetch; canola for radish).

Cereal rye also made an impression in our latest cover crop variety trial, conducted by 10 cooperators across 12 locations in

Iowa. The cooperators hand-seeded 18 cover crop entries consisting of five grasses, seven legumes, three brassicas and three two-species mixes into small plots on their farms when soybean leaves yellowed or corn had reached physiological maturity. Fall ground cover was assessed just before a killing frost at each location, and ground cover and above-ground biomass were determined this spring just before fields were worked and planted. At nearly every location, cereal rye provided the most ground cover compared to the other entries

Attendees at Tim Sieren's field day on June 10 get a close-up look at the shoulder-high cereal rye seed crop.



tested in both corn and soybean fields. Mark Peterson, a trial participant who farms near Stanton, recorded 80 percent ground cover on Nov. 22 where he seeded rye into standing soybeans in Montgomery County; and Clarke McGrath, extension agronomist with ISU, observed 44 percent cover on Nov. 25 where he seeded rye into standing corn in Ringgold County.

The rye really began to prove itself this spring when phone and email messages from the cooperators began to roll into the Practical Farmers office with testimonials about the success of the rye over other cover crop species. "I'm only seeing rye out in my plots, anybody else running into that?" one person wrote in an email. Another commented: "I went out to the plots yesterday to clip biomass. I was only able to take samples from those with cereal rye." A third person noted that he saw "a lot of bare ground out there in my plots except for the rye."

That's right, of all the cover crop entries, only the cereal rye survived the winter of 2013-2014. It was a long, hard, cold winter in Iowa (did anyone honestly forget that?). There were multi-day stretches of sub-zero temperatures paired with no snow cover at most locations; snow acts as a blanket sheltering plant crowns from harsh winter air temperatures. The rye, it seems, withstood those cold periods despite having no snow blanket. The cooperators generally saw close to 60 percent ground cover and 600 pounds of biomass per acre from cereal rye this spring before those fields were planted back to corn or soybeans. That's enough to benefit from some of the soil-holding and nutrient-scavenging qualities of the cereal rye cover crop.

Third-Crop Opportunity

With some of this Cooperators' Program research in mind, it's little surprise what several of our row crop farmers have been highlighting at field days on their farms this summer: cereal rye, of course, – and not just as a cover crop, but as a seed crop as well. Wade Dooley explained at his field day near Albion on June 24: "We started using rye as a cover crop on our farm back in 1997. But now a lot of folks are starting to use cover crops, and the cost of the seed has gone up. A few years ago, we started

growing our own rye seed on a few acres to use as cover crop seed on our corn-soybean acres." Access to a seed cleaner to clean the rye seed after harvest has resulted in considerable success for Wade planting his own cover crop seed in the fall.

The same goes for Dick Sloan in Rowley and Tim Sieren in Keota, who both also raise cereal rye for cover crop seed. Heavy rains on June 19 prevented attendees at Dick's field day from venturing out to the field – but never was there a better teaching opportunity. Much of the conversation among the 60-some attendees in Dick's machine shed revolved around the importance of soil being covered with crop residue and having the living roots of cover crops helping to prevent soil erosion from heavy downpours. The thick, shoulder-high cereal

Of all the cover crop entries (in the variety trial), only the cereal rye survived the winter of 2013-2014.

rye growing in some of Dick's fields – which he harvested for seed and straw in July – was covering his soil and helping to dissipate the energy of falling raindrops, while its living roots were encouraging the water to infiltrate deep into the soil.

Similarly, Tim explained at his field day on June 10 that he and his wife, Ethel, had experienced several inches of rain just in one day early in the month. "I don't care how much rain will fall on that cereal rye," Tim assuredly declared to the group while we inspected his seed crop. "That soil on



Tim Sieren speaking at his field day



PFI Cooperator Meg Schmidt samples cereal rye biomass in April as part of the Cover Crop Variety Trial, 2013-2014. The rye she is sampling is the only green in the field.

that hill under the canopy won't wash away." It was hard not to believe him as we walked through near the edges of the rye patch and could feel the spongy soil beneath our boots: We certainly didn't need to worry about our boots getting muddy in that rye field!

Cereal rye has been steadily gaining attention over the past few years and for good reason. As some of our Cooperators' Research and farmer field days have shown, the benefits of rye are numerous: it's a survivor of carry-over herbicide activity and harsh winter conditions; it protects soil on sloping land (not to mention being good early-spring feed for cattle); and when grown to raise one's own cover crop seed, it is a viable opportunity for crop rotation diversity. It's no wonder cereal rye is on the collective minds of our members. And wouldn't you know it? Rye planting season is just around the corner. ■

Do you want to take part in future cover crop – or other – Cooperators' Program research? Contact Stefan at stefan@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661.

Get the full story on Wade's and Tim's field days in these blog posts:

http://bit.ly/Wade_Dooley_field_day
http://bit.ly/Tim_Sieren_field_day

Secret's Out: Merle's Super-Weapon

by Liz Kolbe

Terry Troxel farms on the land where her grandparents farmed, just outside Crescent. She started Iowana Farm – a 66-acre farm with 20 acres under cultivation (alfalfa hay and organic vegetables) – as a small operation in 2008, and has doubled her production each year. She currently runs a 60-member CSA and sells through a variety of other markets. Like most vegetable farmers, Terry is always working to improve her efficiency and profit, seeking advice from other farmers, books and seminars. But it was her location along Badger Avenue that gave her a real edge.

Merle Osborne passes Iowana Farm every day. Terry and her husband, Chuck, live between Merle's house and Henry's Diner in Crescent. Merle owns a few thousand acres in corn and soybeans, but he also gardens extensively and worked with USDA's Farm Service Agency for many years. Merle has a lot of appreciation for what Terry is doing – raising food for people to eat – and notes that the scale of her farm is about what he grew up working. Because of his bad back, he keeps a sharp hoe in all of his vehicles. But for those weeding jobs too big for the hoe, Merle wanted "a little helper that had a seat on it."

Fifteen years ago Merle took the deck off an old 30-inch John Deere mower and fabricated some adjustable (up, down and tilt) attachments for the shovels. The first super-weapon was born "and it has been a life-saver," Merle says. "I assure you, weeds will never quit coming; I just tried to make things a little more practical." He continues, "I kept telling Teresa (Terry's proper name), 'you need to come look at my little helper.'" After Terry saw it, Merle recalls, "she thought Chuck better build one for her." For the feet, Merle used John Deere cultivator sweeps that he cut down a



Terry's super-weapon (left) next to her Bolens mower.

little to allow the soil to pass through more effectively. Right now the super-weapon is set up to straddle rows of young sweet corn, but when it gets taller Merle puts on the middle shovel and cultivates between his rows, spaced at 36 inches.

Terry uses her Bolens mower to cut through weeds up to 1.5 feet tall, then goes through with her own super-weapon to cultivate – which she had Chuck build for her soon after seeing Merle's. "Unless you stay right on top the weeds every two weeks like Merle," Terry says, "you will need to mow before you cultivate with the super-weapon."

Just as Merle claimed, the super-weapon transformed Terry's workload. "When I

brought out the super-weapon for the first time, I weeded in 18 minutes an area that would have taken me five days to weed. It's just a huge burden that comes off." Terry looks around her 4 acres at weeds starting to creep above our knees. "I can have this whole area cleaned up in two days," she says, before explaining just how she would accomplish that. "I'll be do 8 miles per hour around the perimeter on the Kubota – yeah, I'm dangerous – then come in on the riding mower, use the little Bolens mower between the rows, then bring in the cultivators (an Allis Chalmers G and the super-weapon). Two or three passes with the super-weapon will clean it all out, then I do between plants by hand."

When I brought out the super-weapon for the first time, I weeded in 18 minutes an area that would have taken me five days to weed.

– TERRY TROXEL



Chuck Troxel (left, with knee up) and Terry Troxel (at right) discuss their Allis Chalmers G cultivator at Terry's June 29 field day.

After a moment's pause she adds, "But with how much rain we're getting right now, I'll probably just mow and leave the grass to hold the soil so I don't get washed out."

Terry's Allis Chalmers G has a great open deck and alignment for planting and cultivating. She cultivates tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and melons with the G. By not building mounds around her melons (known as hilling), she is able to drag the leaders along gently while she cultivates, then puts them back with a hoe.

"What I can't do with the G, I do with the super-weapon," Terry says. Iowana Farm also uses a little Kubota; a seeder that Chuck and Merle cut down to size; a 5-foot tiller; and a single seeder for sweet corn that is currently hooked up to an original Bolens. She uses an Earthway walk-behind seeder, too. Chuck Troxel is now working on the third-generation of the super-weapon, which uses a taller mower with a raised back end to straddle rows when the plants are taller. ■



Shovels on Terry's super-weapon



Merle Osborn talks about the G.



Merle's original super-weapon



Iowana Farm's Kubota tractor

Growing for Market is "A Green Field" in Western Iowa

When Terry started to farm, some people in the area welcomed her new venture. Some didn't, because they saw her as competition. But she thinks the more people who are growing for local market, the better it is for everyone because it will help create a bigger local food market as a whole.

"The more people that there are growing, the bigger the customer base and the better it is for everybody. We will all do a

lot better if we work together rather than if we see each other as the competition," Terry says. "We will bump into each other, but I don't really bump into too many people. I run into more people who are looking for local than I do people who say, 'I'm not interested because I bought from this other person.' Most people I talk to, it's a green field."

Map of My Kingdom: Tackling Issues Around Farm Transfer (for Your Family and Mine)

by Angela Winburn

“My grandparents worked like dogs to hold onto [the farm] during the Depression. . . . Then my parents both took off-farm jobs and went into contract farming during the Farm Crisis How do I best plan for my kids’ inheritance? I have my whole family – from generations back – looking over my shoulder.”

“I do want all my children to have a decent inheritance, to get ahead in the world. And I do want the farm to remain intact. I don’t want them to start fighting each other as soon as I’m in my grave. How do we start talking to each other about this? I don’t want their inheritance to mean lawyers and courts and ill will”

Practical Farmers is very excited to collaborate with playwright Mary Swander to address issues of farmland transfer! The play, “Map of My Kingdom,” premiered July 12 at Scattergood Friends School near West Branch. Six other performances are scheduled (see box).

We are on the cusp of a monumental transfer in farmland ownership. Fifty-six percent of Iowa farmland is owned by

people over the age of 65, according to a report by retired Iowa State University economist Mike Duffy, “Farmland Ownership and Tenure Report in Iowa 2012.” Thirty percent of Iowa farmland is owned by those more than 75 years old. According to Duffy’s report, 78 percent of Iowa farmland is owned free of debt, and bequeathing land to family members is the most common method of transferring land.

One day, my brothers and I will inherit our parents’ farmland. My father, the son of a farmer, is 82 years old and has been a full-time farmer his entire adult life. He is a conventional farmer, progressive in his time, always mindful of conservation practices.

My father was the only surviving child upon my grandparents’ deaths. My grandparents left their farmland in a living trust and designated my brothers and me as the beneficiaries. As trustee, my father is entitled to use the land and enjoy the profits for the duration of his life. My parents have purchased additional farmland that is owned free and clear. In their wills, my parents have prepared for the transfer of their farmland, but transferring the farm business has proven

much more difficult and remains unclear as they are blessed with three grown children wanting to live and work on the land.

My parents are also trying to address the “equal is not always fair” issue. My brother (a PFI member) has farmed with my parents all of his adult life. I agree with my parents, who believe he deserves more land because of his effort and dedication. For these reasons, my brother will inherit an additional 80 acres. I have gone back and forth wondering if this is enough. After all, his desire has always been to farm full-time; for my second brother and for me, it has not. I’ve concluded this question is not for me to ask or to resolve.

I’ve heard of those who believed equal was fair when bequeathing land to their children. But what can happen in such a case is the farming heir – assuming there is only one – is forced to give up farming because he or she is unable to purchase the land from the non-farming siblings. The non-farming siblings instead want to sell their portion of the farmland quickly

“In their wills, my parents have prepared for the transfer of their farmland, but transferring the farm business has proven much more difficult . . . as they are blessed with three grown children wanting to live and work on the land. My parents are also trying to address the “equal is not always fair” issue.”



Angela Winburn with a turkey

Dog of the Issue



◀ *Angela Winburn with Angus, her four-year-old German shepherd-Labrador retriever mix, on the family farm.*

Angela says: "He was an abandoned puppy found in our cattle lot full of black cattle one cold, snowy winter night. He has proven to be a great friend. My other dogs are Great Pyrenees, so Angus is my 'little' house dog!"

(Photo courtesy of Courtney Hempker)

and to the highest bidder so they can cash in their inheritance. It is possible to avoid this sort of situation. Getting professional guidance and communicating within the family are key factors.

Mike Duffy also reports that owner-operated farmland in Iowa has decreased from 55 percent in 1982 to 40 percent in 2012 – i.e., the number of farmers renting land has increased. Ownership of much of this rented farmland will pass to the landlords' heirs, and the farmers will be left struggling to purchase the land from the heirs or struggling to find new land to rent. This means a farmer who rents land must also communicate with his or her landlord and learn about the possible agreements or risk ending up in a precarious position upon the death of the landowner.

In "Map of My Kingdom," the character Angela Martin, a lawyer and mediator in land transition disputes, says that many farmers "don't talk much about money or anything else. . . [but] land transition takes talk – a lot of talk." Martin continues, "for most farmers I know . . . owning land means everything, owning land means triumph over generation-after-generation of poverty, struggle, servitude, even slavery . . ."

My gratitude goes to Practical Farmers for its efforts to foster those conversations. ■

Angela Winburn is a member of Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program Class of 2014, a member of PFI's Farm Transfer Committee and a beginning farmer near Grinnell.

Thank you to the following generous sponsors who helped make "Map of

My Kingdom" possible: the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Lucas County Arts Council, New Bo Books in Cedar Rapids, Principal Financial Group, Sustainable Farm Partners, LLC—and all of the supporters of Practical Farmers.

(Flip the page to read an interview with Mary Swander about writing "Map of My Kingdom") ▶

"Map of My Kingdom" – Coming to a place near you!

- **Decorah:** Sunday, September 7, 2014 – 6 p.m. potluck, 7 p.m. performance – Washington Prairie Lutheran Church
- **Chariton:** Thursday, September 25, 2014 – 6 p.m. potluck, 7 p.m. performance – Vredenburg Performing Arts Series
- **Red Oak:** Sunday, September 28, 2014 – 2 p.m. – Wilson Performing Arts Center
- **Cedar Falls:** Thursday, October 16, 2014 – 7 p.m. – Hearst Center
- **Ames:** Friday, January 23, 2015 – 6 p.m. – at the Practical Farmers annual conference (Scheman Building)
- **Orange City:** Saturday, February 21, 2015 – 7:30 p.m. – Place TBD

Discussion will follow each performance. Please contact Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or lauren@practicalfarmers.org for more information. Keep your eyes and ears open for additional performances! If you are interested in bringing the play to a location near you, contact lauren@practicalfarmers.org.

The Backstory to "Map of My Kingdom": Interview with Mary Swander

by Lauren Zastrow

Mary Swander is the co-founder of AgArts, a national organization designed to imagine and promote healthy food systems through the arts. She has published widely in all genres, with 13 books to her credit. Her plays include "Driving the Body Back," "Dear Iowa," "Farmscape" and "Vang," which have toured the country and appeared on public television. She is the descendent of Irish immigrants who homesteaded in Iowa and handled four generations of inter-generational land transition.

As part of the lead-up to the July 12 premiere of "Map of My Kingdom," we interviewed Mary to find out the back story behind the play, and what impact she hopes it will have.

1. Tell me about the history of this project.

MARY: Teresa put the idea in my head a few years ago. I thought it was a really fascinating idea. She gave me a list of people to interview and I kind of took it from there. Pretty soon, just about everywhere I went, when people asked me what I was working on and I said land transitions, everybody had their own story. So it seemed to be a topic that has wide appeal. A lot of people in this state and elsewhere have experience first-hand.

It's very interesting, because when I first started working on the play, I was actually in Ireland. They talked about how this problem was at the core of the potato famine because the farms had been cut up into smaller and smaller pieces. And, you know, the Irish have a lot of kids – so, basically, a family was trying to survive on maybe an acre or two of tillable land to support a whole family.

And then going back to the States, even people that didn't have farms had had



◀ *Mary Swander (right) answers questions from attendees at the "Map of My Kingdom" premier on July 12 at Scattergood Friends School. When she started exploring the issues related to farm transfer, she says she found they were nothing new; they "went back through literature all the way to [the play] "King Lear."*

this problem with other kinds of property, so it seems pretty universal. Then when I started writing the play I saw that it went back through literature all the way to [Shakespeare's play] "King Lear." When I was interviewing people there were lots of variations on the theme. Some people had traditional small farms, some had big farms; some people were being squeezed by urban sprawl, others were just squeezed by the get-big-or-get-out attitude. People had lots and lots of different pressures upon them.

2. What is your farm transfer story?

MARY: My mother's family homesteaded in the state of Iowa. We still had the home place that my two brothers and I inherited in the 1970s. I was the only one left in Iowa, and I wanted to hang onto it and do something unique and Practical Farmers-ish with it. My two brothers were in California, and they couldn't care less; they just wanted the money. We went

through a big ordeal with it and it was eventually sold. So it was very difficult.

Lots of people have stories that are way worse. You know, they have a sibling they haven't spoken to since, or they ended up in court for years and years, or one sibling took off with the money, or one sibling persuaded the parents they should inherit the whole thing and change the will – you know, it's just unbelievable. What I reached as a conclusion is that farm transfer needs to be really well planned with a lot of thought put into it. Even then, things can still go awry. It's a very precarious situation.

3. What do you hope people's reactions will be?

MARY: I hope that Practical Farmers is providing a real service here for people to think about this issue. One person I interviewed was a banker, and I asked him his take on why farm transfer was such a problem. He said that, at the core of it, you have to get people to face their own mortality. That's very hard for all of us. This play could be a vehicle for people to start the process – or even recognize that it's something they have to address. Large numbers of people don't even have a will, which is pretty scary. It's a huge, looming issue that so many farmers over the age of 65 need to think about. ■



Help Guide Conservation in YOUR County: Become a SWCD Commissioner

by Drake Larsen

Over 45 members of Practical Farmers of Iowa currently serve as Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) commissioners. These commissioners guide conservation programming in their counties and help to shape the way federal programs – such as the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program – happen on the ground. Commissioners help to manage funds for local watershed projects, as well as sponsor outreach and demonstration events. If conservation is your passion and you'd like to give back to your agriculture community, you might consider running for a commissioner seat in your area.

To become a Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner in Iowa is to become a guardian of our most important resources – our soils and our water – for the sake of our state and the rest of the world that depends on their continued productivity," says Clare Lindahl, executive director of Conservation Districts of Iowa (a Practical Farmers organizational member).

Commissioners are elected by the public to serve as active representatives for conservation and agriculture in Iowa. There are 100 districts in Iowa, one in each county with the exception of Pottawattamie County, which has two; each consists of a five-person board of commissioners. A SWCD commissioner is non-partisan elected position serving a four-year term. Most



Rick Juchems

counties maintain a staggered election, such that two or three seats are on the ballot for each general election. A longstanding rule dictates that no two commissioners can be from the same township.

The SWCD commissioners are a legal subdivision of state government, and Iowa code has established a tall order for them:

... to encourage the development of farm management and agricultural practices that are consistent with the capability of the land to sustain agriculture, and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist and maintain the navigability of rivers and harbors, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands and promote the health, safety and public welfare of the people of this state.

Most districts are open to having new and energetic farmers and friends of farmers join in their mission, either as commissioners or as non-elected assistant commissioners. Practical Farmers member and commissioner Rick Juchems says, "I know there are a lot of good and knowledgeable people out there that would make great commissioners, and we need them." He advises, however, that "those interested in being a commissioner shouldn't come to the table with an agenda. We work together to support all farmers, big and small, in the county."

Jack Knight, another long-time commissioner and PFI member, adds: "It's about compromise and commitment. Being a soil commissioner puts you



Jack Knight

into a position to discuss farm issues, promote sustainable farming and build understanding between the conventional, conservation and organic communities."

How to Become a Commissioner

Practical Farmers encourages members to become commissioners and will help members navigate the nomination and election process. County elections are processed through the county auditor, and getting on the ballot is easy: Just submit a nomination petition signed by 25 eligible voters in your county and an Affidavit of Candidacy.

The filing period is Aug. 4 through Aug. 27 – though you can get the paperwork started ahead of time. This year's general election is Nov. 4. The paperwork and more information can be found at:

<http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/electioninfo/General/>, under Non-Partisan Offices.

If you are interested in running or serving as an assistant but have more questions, Practical Farmers staff can help to put you in touch with commissioners in your area. We are also in the process of determining where uncontested seats may be available.

To find out more about openings in your area, contact: drake@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661. ■

See also: http://bit.ly/cdiowa_SWCD_brochure

Savings Incentive Program Receives Large Gift

Ag Connect funds will allow program to serve 24 more beginning farmers *by Teresa Opheim*

PFI beginning farmers have just received an amazing gift: The board of directors of the Iowa non-profit Ag Connect voted this summer to donate about \$60,000 to Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program. This new support will allow Practical Farmers to provide savings matches to an additional 24 beginning farmers.

"Practical Farmers of Iowa has strong leadership and a long track record. They're doing a lot of things right," reports Bill Beaman, director of Ag Connect and a long-time PFI member. "We needed to hand the funds off to someone who would do something good with it."

Ag Connect had been using the funds received from Heifer International to offer beginning farmers no-interest livestock loans. Thirteen beginning farmers in Taylor, Ringgold, Adams, Madison, Clark and Decatur counties have been recipients of the \$1,000 to \$15,000 loans over the past nine years.

"We were able to take the Heifer International grant money, loan it all out, receive repayment and re-loan almost the entire amount a second time," Bill says. "Now by passing the money off to PFI, it's our hope that this original grant can be recycled yet a third time."

"We had mainly cattle, sheep and goat loans that we would loan out for usually three to four years," Bill continues. "We never had a loan go bad, but some were stressful." One time, he recalls, a producer who borrowed funds was involved in an accident and had no health insurance. "The resulting health bills made it almost impossible to repay the funds on schedule under the loan agreement terms. We were able to change the payment schedule to smaller monthly payments and the farmer never missed one in three years."

Recounting another beginning farmer loan experience, Bill described how one recipient bought 14 bred heifers at the sale barn in January 2007 and had 15 calves out of them. "He had never raised cattle and thought that was always the way it was," Bill says. "Another guy bought 10

bred heifers, Red Angus, and had 10 calves. Someone told him he could get \$1,800 out of the pairs, so he sold them right away. So that was a pretty short deal. I talked to him the other day and he now has 50 cows."

Not all loans from the Heifer International grant money went toward larger livestock, Bill adds. "We made a honeybee loan toward the end. I didn't know if the board would go for that, but they did. All but one of the loan recipients is still farming."

Beginning Farmers a Focus from the Start

Ag Connect started in 2000 with an original goal to "have a match-making with beginning farmers who didn't have an opportunity with the ever-aging population," Bill says. "We spent three to four years in an intense effort to do

that mission, with offices statewide. We had hundreds of young people and only 10 or 12 opportunities. We eventually came around to the idea that it was better to have the young people find their own place and develop their own opportunities."

Ag Connect then switched gears and began working with projects involving grass-based dairies and community gardens in Osceola, Storm Lake, Red Oak, Lenox and other places. "We then came across Heifer International. I always liked that group," Bill says. After some work and negotiations, Ag Connect entered the livestock loan business, with \$66,200 in money to loan out.

Bill came to Ag Connect with a passion for beginning farmers, for southern Iowa and farming. He and his wife, Mary, know how hard it is to farm profitably and keep community in rural Iowa. They purchased their farm in 1982, after crop-share and livestock-share farming near Winterset. "That was a lesson in humility; we were hanging on by our fingernails for seven to eight years."

Through a variety of jobs, including Bill's work for Ag Connect, they made the row crop, cow-calf, sheep and sometimes hog and chicken operation work while they

What is the Savings Incentive Program?

Practical Farmers' Savings Incentive Program helps beginners be successful with their farm start-ups. Those enrolled:

- attend events to learn about farming and create a network of farmer supporters
- work with mentors one-on-one
- check in with staff to make sure they are on track; and
- create business plans that are reviewed by financial experts.

Throughout the program, the participants save money, which PFI matches after two years. To date, 74 beginning farmers have been or are currently enrolled in the program. More than 120 will have completed the program by 2017. **The application window for the next class is Aug. 8 to Oct. 3, 2014. Applications are available on our website or by calling the office.**



▼ Mary and Bill Beaman attempt to get three dogs to sit. “We don’t even own a dog,” Mary reports. Turbo (middle) belongs to a daughter but is a permanent visitor to the farm; the other two, Chewy and Riley, are owned by their son and visit daily.



▲ Bill Beaman (left) with his son Jeff, who lives with wife, Leigh, 3 miles north of Bill and Mary, near Lenox. Bill reports he and Jeff have complementary skills: Bill breaks things and Jeff fixes them. “You know you have this image of the son tearing up a piece of equipment and bringing it in for Dad to fix? It’s the opposite here. Jeff was born with a welder in his hand.”

raised their five children. “We had great neighbors, a wonderful neighborhood,” Mary reports. “We have since lost them all. We rent the land across the road, but used to have a wonderful old couple there. We had neighbors all up and down the road.”

“It’s the same old story,” Bill says. “Farmers have to decide if they want to bring in another young farmer or add four more rows to their planter. Too many have chosen the planter.”

A few years ago, the Ag Connect board started to feel that the livestock loan program had run its course. “It was getting harder to find those to give the loans to. Interest rates have dived and the Farm Service Agency has become a lot more progressive. We were proud to hang our hat on this, but I don’t want to keep doing this forever. We had a dream board. They kept coming and were enthusiastic. I hate to see Ag Connect end.”

Practical Farmers will now carry on the Ag Connect tradition of helping beginning farmers.

THANK YOU to the board of directors of Ag Connect for its vote of confidence in Iowa’s beginning farmers and in Practical Farmers of Iowa: Bill Beaman, Bedford; Paul Jones, Clarinda; Harold Swanson, Glenwood; David Henry, Bedford; Leland

ShIPLEY, Nodaway; Ken Cheers, Afton; Warren Angus, Mt. Ayr; Don Reasoner, Osceola; Betsy Keenan, Maloy; and Jason Smith, Diagonal. ■

Farmer, Director, Author

Bill Beaman is not only a farmer and director of Ag Connect; he is the author of three mysteries as well: “The Iowa Farmer’s Wife,” “Second Chances” and “Three Little Pigs.” Here’s a quote from the character Jamie in one of the books, “The Iowa Farmer’s Wife”:

“To live on a farm... to be part of its everyday operation, puts farmers in a position where they must deal directly with Mother Nature, usually on her terms. Nothing is black and white. It’s a live and let live situation with the farmer always having to do a juggling act...”

“Most farmers have to make daily decisions in their operations to help balance their business of food production with the stewardship of the land. Windbreaks, erosion control, water quality, wildlife habitat and other things. These have to be balanced with farm debt, cost of living expenses, government regulations...”

If you love farming and rural Iowa – and also a good murder mystery – check out Bill’s books. I devoured all three and hope Bill will be writing more. To order any of Bill’s books in print or e-format, visit www.amazon.com.



A Horse (or Cow, or Pig or Chicken) of a Different Color

by Margaret Dunn

The type of animals selected for a farm varies on many factors. First, in choosing the species you might ask: What sort of farm do we want to have? What do we want to raise and produce? Then once the species is (or are!) selected, comes the question of breeds: Which breed(s) are most adapted to our climate or would work best in our situation? Which are the most productive, or most efficient, or most tasty? Heck, which do we like the look of most? You might choose based on what's available nearby or what you can find studs for. All these questions – and more – go into the decision-making process that determines what animals end up on a farm.

Ron Dunphy of Creston says, quite correctly, "Everyone has favorites but each of us needs to examine how we choose the favorite."

I asked Practical Farmers members to answer those questions for me, and tell me what breeds they raised and loved (or didn't), and why. While certainly not a comprehensive list, the information I got back was pretty neat. Check out what breeds these folks raved about!

Cattle

Highland – Jay Franzen of Indianola has been raising these shaggy cattle for nearly 20 years. His reasons range from emotional (his wife studied in Scotland and fell in love; and they like the heritage idea) to practical (ability to finish on grass and the marketability of that) to personal preference ("We truly believe it



Janice and Ryan Marquardt

is the best beef we have ever had.") He has consistently sold his cattle by direct-marketing only, by packaging the meat as bundles more than halves or quarters, and getting a custom label for products like bologna, sausage and dried beef.

Belted Galloways – Janice Marquardt and her husband Ryan, of Wild Rose Pastures in Reasnor, got the "Oreo cookie cows" to have a slightly more heritage breed that would survive on an all-grass diet. They found the "belties" a nice size compromise, fitting their needs of safety and profitability. For all their production merits, though, "the real reason we love the Belted Galloways is that they look unique – the belts are surprisingly easy to see in the dark!"

(Comment from Margaret– Some folks have heard me tell of a fellow I knew who wanted belties for their grass-finishing abilities, but makes more money selling them as pets or curiosities!)

Senepol – Erik Cleveland of Hilo, Hawaii, crossed some of his cows with Senepol semen, and wishes he could use those bulls again. Their slick coat makes them much

more heat-tolerant than other members of the *Bos taurus* family, and they are very docile. "The Senepol crossbred calves had a lot of vigor, and they performed very well." Those calves kept in the herd as broodcows also earned high regards, as did crossbred bulls he sold.

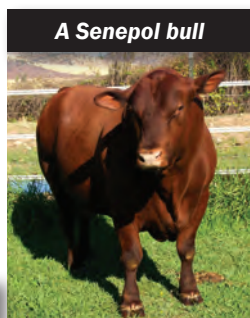
Dexter – Bill and Cathy Pardee of Decorah raise these small-statured cattle completely on grass. On a smaller acreage, "smaller cattle mean more mouths and hoofs per acre – you can't do mob grazing with two cows." Bill practices management-intensive grazing, but likes that the gentle Dexter cows don't require calving assistance, and can survive outside during the harsh Iowa winters. The breed makes marketing sense too. Steaks can be cut thicker without being too large for a practical meal, and a quarter beef is much more manageable for most customers in terms of poundage and dollars spent.

American Lowline – Another more compact breed, the lowlines have fit well in Vic and Cindy Madsen's operation, Madsen Stock Farm in Audubon. "They are a black Angus breed, they have a smaller carcass size and they fit more people's freezers and pocketbooks," Cindy says. Meanwhile the farmers appreciate how easy they are to handle.

Brown Swiss – The "most loving and lovable bovine" come with high praise from John Gilbert, who manages Gibraltar Farms Ltd in Iowa Falls with his wife Beverly and other family members. These dairy cows have wonderful dispositions – a great benefit for farmer safety and ease of management – but retain the high-quality milk and heat tolerance of their forebears



Red Dexter cattle (left) at Bill Pardee's farm.



A Senepol bull



American lowlines at the Madsen farm



Cindy Madsen



Large black hogs in Angela Johnson's pasture.



Philip Kramer

One of Chad Ingels' Berkshire hogs



Close-up of a black hog



in the Alps. "Having animals you know, who know you, and who have personalities and uniqueness is one of the real perks of dairying," John adds.

Hogs

Hereford – An American breed that works well on pasture or in confinement, Hereford hogs feature "great temperament," "awesome meat quality" and they are "easy to work with," according to Philip Kramer of Algona. "And they look cool," he adds, referring to the red-and-white patterning similar to that of Hereford cattle. While they are good mothers, they don't milk too heavily, and growth rate is slow.

Large Black – Angela Johnson of Lucky George Farm in Derby loves her purebred hogs. "They are the most docile pig – gentle, loving, smart, and they taste fabulous!" she says. Temperament was a big deal for her and husband Jason, with children on the farm. So was an animal that could look after itself on pasture, and she says the black skin means they're less susceptible to sunburn. Angela reports yields of 85 percent from the butcher, which sounds like icing on the cake!

Berkshire – The preferred breed of Niman Ranch, these hogs have great meat quality and can deal with outdoor management. "I chose Berks after having a commercial crossbred herd," says Chad Ingels of Randalia, who has been raising them for 14 years. "People just rave about the Berkshire pork."

Sheep

Katahdins – Janice and Ryan Marquardt have a mostly Katahdin herd, with some Dorper influence. A hair sheep breed, Katahdins will shed out in the spring rather than requiring shearing. Janice says,

though, that at least on their farm, they don't finish out very large and "some of them are a little squirrely."

St. Croix – Another hair sheep breed, these animals are parasite-resistant and hardy in the high-humidity environments Erik Cleveland deals with. "Our St. Croix sheep had an excellent disposition," he says. "These rams never tried to head-butt anyone." He also said the ewes are excellent mothers, lambing out on pasture, and they don't need much supplemental feed.

Poultry

Cornish Cross – "People expect a big chicken with big breasts and this gives that," says Janice Marquardt. They also finish out quickly: she estimates eight to nine weeks. A discussion among several farmers at the December 2013 Cooperator's Meeting yielded some of the same ideas: While not the most unique, perhaps, the Cornish Cross birds grow and yield and are very consistent, making for easy sales and satisfied customers.

(Margaret's personal experience, verified in conversation: Make sure you don't overestimate their intelligence! Don't let them bake themselves in a poorly-ventilated building; they don't know to go outside!)



St. Croix sheep at Erik Cleveland's farm

Buff Orpingtons – Janice says these light-colored birds are "a little feistier when it comes to predation, but they get super broody and molty in the summer."

Red Stars – Janice also raises these, and reports "they are a decent compromise between temperament, forage ability and laying consistency."

White Giants – Janice and Ryan have tried other more niche turkeys, but seem to always come back to these for their more affordable price as poults and reduced time to finish. "Our customers say they don't care – there wasn't a difference in taste attributable to the breed," Janice says.

What ultimately makes the best breed is the one that fits your situation. Your marketing or management may dictate certain breeds that fit better – some are just more adjusted to certain climates or systems. But as Ron Dunphy cautioned, "every breed has available good, better, best stock." Make sure any animals you buy are good animals because of the nutrition and care they received, and the quality and rigor of selection, as well as the breed. ■

For information on heritage breeds, visit the Livestock Conservancy website (www.livestockconservancy.org). Oklahoma State has a huge directory of breeds as well: www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds

Filling a Need for Local, Niche Meat Processing

Story City Locker offers farmers and customers local food options

by Tomoko Ogawa

Story City Locker, owned and operated by PFI members Ty and Bobbie Gustafson, has been an exciting new addition to the local food scene in Story County. The locker officially opened in Story City in mid-October 2013, and customer demand has been strong – and growing – since the very start. The positive response shows just how valuable the Gustafsons' business has been to the central Iowa community, both for local producers and residents who simply value quality local food options. But the locker, which has filled a critical gap for local livestock producers in particular, almost didn't happen.



Bobbie (left) and Ty Gustafson at their retail space in Story City. While custom and third-party processing are the main focus of Story City Locker's business, the Gustafsons also have a retail space with deli counter and freezer space where customers can purchase local meats and value-added products.

The idea of running a locker started when Ty and Bobbie's mentors, Dale and Shirley Hauptert – former owner-operators of Atlantic Locker in Atlantic, Iowa – strongly encouraged Ty to consider the small meat processing business during a time when he wanted to make a career change. Dale and Shirley were thinking of retiring, but at the time their three sons weren't interested in the business. Ty – a close friend of the Haupterts' oldest son, Tim – and Bobbie started researching the industry and were interested. Around the same time, however, the Haupterts' youngest son, Curt, changed his mind and decided to buy and operate the business. Since Ty and Bobbie had already done the background work and were excited about the idea of starting a business, they decided to examine the feasibility of opening a locker in Story City instead – where they consider home.

While working on their business plan, Ty and Bobbie received support from various organizations, including the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Meat Processors Association and Iowa State University's Meat Laboratory. Bobbie says the Leopold Center was "a huge resource," as it had already done feasibility studies for small-scale meat processing. "The studies done by the Small Meat

Processors Working Group and Pork Niche Market Working Group (at the Leopold Center) were invaluable," she says. "The whole process would have taken years longer if this previous work had not been done. It was easier for us to make a career change decision, because this kind of investigative work doesn't pay the bill and we wouldn't have had the time to do the investigation at such depth."

Focus on Niche Meat

Based on these studies, the Gustafsons decided to focus on niche meat, which refers broadly to many styles of market differentiation, such as grass-fed, humanely raised, antibiotic-free, locally raised and others. "The industry told us that if we were going to be a small processor with a retail space, it was wisest to focus on niche meat," Bobbie says, "because as a small processor our products will be more expensive due to the lack of efficiency a large industrial plant has. It's more practical to offer products that are less available."

Story City Locker's business depends primarily on custom and third-party processing. While the locker's retail space features a deli counter and freezers where customers can purchase items à la carte, as well as a range of value-added products

(such as box lunches), the retail side of the business isn't the main focus. Ty and Bobbie describe their investment in the retail space as "a marketing center for farmers and a hospitality center for their business" where people can purchase Chef Brian Malone's value-added products. They want to showcase local products, but say if they were to depend on sales at the retail space, they wouldn't be able to stay open.

The processing side of the business, the financial heart of the operation, can be challenging to balance, Bobbie says, because of the official inspection requirement for third-party processing (there is no such requirement for custom processing). The inspectors' schedules get full quickly, and how often inspections are needed is based on volume. With the growth of the locker's third-party processing, Ty and Bobbie need more frequent inspections to meet the regulations. "We started with having an

Ty and Bobbie describe their investment in the retail space as "a marketing center for farmers and a hospitality center for their business" . . .

(Continued on next page) 



Savoring the Summer

With plenty of season left for summer grilling, Bobbie recommends shoulder cuts in beef – cuts that have traditionally been part of the roast – such as Denver or flat iron, which are smaller cuts out of the shoulder area. “They are marbled and are usually smaller than premium steak cuts, and more value-priced,” she says.

For those who don’t want to grill, or who want to try something a bit different, Bobbie wholeheartedly recommends “any of Chef Brian’s delicious cured meats!” Bobbie says his salamis are her favorite. “They’re a lot like the fresh sausages: the variety of options is endless, and he enjoys trying new flavor combinations all the time.”



Irish breakfast sausages

inspector one day a week,” Bobbie says. “But our third-party customers are growing much faster than our custom processing customers, so we now need three to four days of inspection per week.”

Strong Local Farmer Focus

Since opening, Story City Locker has worked with up to 100 different farmers. At the Gustafsons’ newly built 4,500-square-foot locker, they process meat daily. The locker’s maximum capacity is 20 cows per week or 40 hogs per week – designations the inspectors use to describe a locker’s capacity – but their business plan lets them sustain the business on less than that quantity. They aim to operate at about half-capacity every week; the other half is in their growth plan. With eight employees currently, the locker handles beef, pork, poultry, goat, lamb, deer and fish.

Finding farmers was one of the biggest tasks, which required many farm visits and phone calls. In this process, they say

Practical Farmers was the biggest help. “We started to make connections with local farmers through PFI. And farmers directed me to other farmers,” Bobbie says.

Amber and Kendal Miller, participants in Practical Farmers’ Saving Incentives Program, farm about 4 miles south of the locker. When they heard about the locker opening so close, they were very excited. They started to take their hogs and poultry shortly after the locker opened, and hope to take some beef this year as well. “We have been really happy with the communication with the locker and with their product,” Amber says. “We have gotten great feedback from our customers regarding the locker. The locker has also been flexible to work with us when we needed to get pork in on short notice or had to rearrange appointments. I like that it feels like you’re talking to a person and not just a business.” Amber also appreciates all the new things the locker has been trying, including the lunch box specials. “They have gone out of their way

to ask for and listen to customer feedback and ideas for new and different things to try. They are a great partnership for local farmers.”

The meat Amber and Kendal take to Story City Locker is mostly for custom processing for direct sales, but the Gustafsons have also purchased meat from the Millers to sell at their retail space. You can purchase Amber and Kendal’s product at the locker when available, or directly from their farm.

Steve and Michelle Cassbaum in Nevada also started to take their animals to Story City Locker shortly after it opened. Steve first heard about the locker by word of mouth. He then started to follow it on Twitter and set up an appointment for a farm visit. He chose the locker because it’s close, but most importantly because of its natural processing and seasoning methods, and products that he describes as “outstanding.” In addition, he enjoys working with the locker because of the service and friendliness of the owners and staff. “We also enjoy the fact that they are supporting local producers by connecting people with farms through the products at the store,” he adds. So far, Steve has only been taking their pork, but he and Michelle will most likely take their beef, lamb and possibly broilers for processing as well. You can purchase Steven and Michelle’s products at the locker when available, directly from their farm or at the Ames Main Street Farmers Market.

Do you want your animals processed at Story City Locker? Contact the locker anytime at info@storycitylocker.com or (515) 733-6328. Or if you’d like to learn about sausage-making or butchering, Story City Locker occasionally offers classes. A link to class schedules and descriptions will be added to the website soon. ■



Dave Nixt, the butcher, processes a side of beef.

Don't Miss the Story City Locker Field Day!

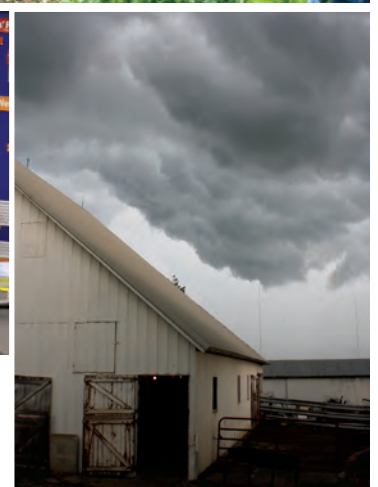
On **Sunday, Sept. 21**, Ty and Bobbie – along with Kathy and Herb Eckhouse of La Quercia, and Tom and Irene Frantzen of Frantzen Family Farm – will host a PFI field day at the locker, which you won’t want to miss! Details are available at practicalfarmers.org.

Make sure to sign up soon; the event is limited to the first 30 people. RSVP to Lauren Zastrow by **Thursday, Sept. 18**.

Field Day Photos



▲ **Above:** Mike Salama (left, pointing) discusses hydroponic tomato production at his May 18 field day. ▶ **Top Right:** Ralph Tate speaks to participants in the May 31 Biological Monitoring with Holistic Management course. ▶ **Right:** Attendees, and Ginger the dog, gather around a chicken tractor at the Grimm family field day on June 14. ▼ **Below:** Tim Sieren (center, gray shirt) chats with attendees at his June 10 field day.



▲ **Above:** Budding PFI members take interest in Practical Farmers literature at the Griffieon family field day on June 19.

▶ **Right:** Unique, ominous storm clouds didn't deter guests from attending the Griffieon field day.

◀ **Left:** Dan Wilson (left) converses with Sean Skeeahan at Sean and Jill Beebout's June 22 field day.



◀ **Left:** Corn emerges nicely from rye residue left over from Tim and Ethel Sieren's 2013 rye seed crop.



▲ **Above Left:** David Carbaugh (crouching, in hat with blue PFI logo) identifies forage species with field day attendees. ▲ **Above Center:** Attendees at the Global Greens field day on July 15 got to try roselle, a species of Hibiscus native to West Africa. PFI staffer Liz Kolbe says it's usually cooked, but tastes good raw too, "kind of tangy." ► **Above Right:** Diana and Dick Sloan pose for the camera at their June 19 field day. ◀ **Left:** Rebel, one of Terry Troxel's cats, fills in for staff and uses his cuteness to try to help sell PFI merchandise at Terry's June 29 field day.



▲ **Above:** Two attendees at Wade Dooley's June 24 field day smile for the camera.

◀ **Left:** Mukiza Gahetano (left), with his wife Jacqueline Ndabazaniye, shows two field day attendees a traditional plant called lenga lenga (known here as amaranth) that is commonly eaten in his native Burundi. Mukiza was one of the refugee farmers who presented at the July 15 event, held at Lutheran Services in Iowa's Global Greens Farm. He is also a participant in PFI's Savings Incentive Program.

See other upcoming PFI field days in the "2014 Field Day Guide," online at: www.practicalfarmers.org

Selling Milk Hyperlocally Preserves Quality, Saves CO₂ and Lowers Costs

by Liz Kolbe

“People have told me they moved to Fairfield for the milk,” says Francis Thicke, who owns and operates Radiance Dairy with his wife, Susan. After a pause he continues, “or they missed the milk when they moved away – which I’m more willing to believe.” Francis and Susan’s pastured Jersey cows provide their signature high- butterfat and protein milk, processed on the farm by Francis and his staff. It’s an idyllic, pastoral image primed for high-priced markets in urban areas. But you won’t find Radiance Dairy milk in Des Moines or Cedar Rapids – nor even in Ottumwa, only 25 miles away. All of the milk, cheese and yogurt from Radiance Dairy’s 80-cow herd is sold within 5 miles of the farm.

It didn’t start out that way. When Francis and Susan purchased the dairy in 1992, they milked just 20 cows. “At that time we were selling predominantly locally, but we sent milk up to Iowa City on someone else’s truck,” Francis says. “The truck had some issues with refrigeration that led to problems with quality. We knew there were dairies between Fairfield and Iowa City, so we decided to let those dairies service Iowa City while we focused on Fairfield.”

The previous owners of Radiance Dairy had already established a local market and added a small processing plant on the farm. “The previous owners started the dairy in 1980 with two cows, but when we bought the dairy with 20 cows in 1992 we realized very quickly there wasn’t enough processing space,” Francis says. Four years later, he and Susan moved the dairy to a new location with more land for the cows, and they built a larger processing plant. The total cost for the processing plant, including equipment (mostly used): “Around \$100,000,” Francis says. “Today, I would estimate a cost of at least \$250,000 to get started in on-farm dairy processing.”

Current Production and Distribution

Since those early days, Radiance Dairy has grown to 80 cows. Products include whole, 2 percent and skim milk, whipping cream, yogurt and a few cheeses. “Our local market has grown incrementally over the years,” Francis explains. “Diversifying our products allowed us to increase our sales without selling outside of our local community.” Radiance Dairy products are

in high demand. Francis: “Every new store that comes to Fairfield will invite us to sell. We have a loyal customer base, so stores want us on their shelves. The new Super Walmart in Fairfield has asked us twice, but we have decided we would rather support locally owned businesses.”

“We’ve had requests over the years to deliver to different cities, but have resisted,” says Thicke, noting that Wild Oats in St. Louis once called. “Delivering to different cities would add another leg of complexity, require a new truck, and we would need to expand production greatly.” Currently, Radiance Dairy sells to 15 Fairfield-area restaurants, local organic grocery Everybody’s Whole Foods, Hy-Vee and Maharishi University of Management.

Deliveries happen four days per week, and all the fluid milk – several thousand gallons per week – reaches shelves within one day of processing.

To make deliveries, Radiance Dairy uses an older Isuzu 14-foot refrigerated box truck. Each year adds about 5,000 miles to the odometer. “Our style of delivery can keep an older machine running for a long time,” Francis says. “If we were doing 40,000 miles a year, we’d need something different.”

For comparison, if Radiance Dairy expanded its current deliveries to include twice-weekly trips to West Des Moines and Iowa City, mileage would exceed 37,000 miles each year. Add Ames to the loop and the distance would approach 42,000 miles per year. Francis hasn’t measured the mileage on his truck, but he estimates the Isuzu gets about 20 mpg – which he says is pretty efficient for an older truck.

Calculating the Energy ‘What Ifs’

Francis is well-known in the state (and beyond) for his commitment to energy conservation and renewable energy. Though his decision to sell locally is as much about business pragmatism as environmental concern, let’s crunch the numbers:

Francis and Susan Thicke with a few of their grass-based dairy cows.



Current Deliveries, 4 x per week with 14-foot Isuzu truck, Local Only:

$5,000 \text{ miles} \times (\text{gallon diesel}) / (20 \text{ miles}) \times (22.38 \text{ lbs CO}_2) / (\text{gallon diesel}) = 5,595 \text{ lbs carbon dioxide equivalent (CO}_2)$

Hypothetical delivery loop (Des Moines, Ames, Iowa City) 2 x per week with a larger, heavier truck + current deliveries:

$42,000 \text{ miles} \times (\text{gallon diesel}) / (15 \text{ miles}) \times (22.38 \text{ lbs CO}_2) / (\text{gallon diesel}) = 62,664 \text{ lbs CO}_2$

This back-of-the-envelope calculation tells us only that Radiance Dairy would incur much more cost and carbon emissions if it increased its delivery range. What's not factored in, however, is the emissions from existing deliveries of milk in most stores. A 2011 article in *Food Policy* found most milk travels 320 miles from the cow to consumer. Even for Organic Valley, milk from Iowa cows must be shipped out of state for processing before being distributed in Iowa for consumption. Compared to most milk on the shelves, if Radiance Dairy delivered to Des Moines, Ames and Iowa City, it would still have a lower carbon footprint for delivery (at most 125 miles) – not to mention the added energy savings of rotational grazing and on-farm processing powered by renewable energy.

Assuming the Thickets could increase production and delivery while maintaining their on-farm sustainability goals, would the environment benefit from more Radiance Dairy milk? Absolutely. Does it make sense for Radiance Dairy to do this? Not to Francis. "Our goal is to provide for our local community – if we expanded production, we might lose that connection to the community and the farm, and we would tie up a lot of resources and time in distribution."

An obvious solution is to have more dairies like Thicket's. The obvious, however, isn't easy – especially in today's farm economy. "The best thing that happened to us was something that never happened," Francis says. "We never had to make a large capital investment; we grew incrementally. To start a dairy with on-farm processing today, you would have to get new equipment and build it large enough to grow into. There isn't a way to start small with processing and marketing fluid milk in Iowa." Francis



Francis and Susan's old Isuzu refrigerated truck, which Francis estimates gets around 20 mpg.



Radiance Dairy products line the shelves at Everybody's Whole Foods.

adds that on-farm processing isn't for everyone. "You can't just do it on a whim. It requires a whole other skill set and a nearby, developed market."

The Future of Local Dairy

But Francis is hopeful about the future of local, organic dairying. "Fifteen years ago we were the only dairy in the state that processed on-farm; now there are a handful of us," he says. "Especially if you're near a population that supports local food, it's possible. The key is to have a good, unique product that sells itself." Francis also sees a growing movement of mid-sized regional processors that will benefit farmers who can't afford the "quantum leap" into processing infrastructure. "Until now, there's mostly been two organic dairy buyers: Horizon and Organic Valley. If one organic milk buyer has 40 percent of the market, it can really control prices. But there are a few regional processors popping up. If we spread out into regional markets, that would be better for the farmer and provide more stable milk prices."

In Fairfield, Francis will continue working to meet the local demand by diversifying Radiance Dairy's products. "Our goal is to service our local community. We want to produce what they would like to have. Right now, we're thinking about starting a fresh mozzarella. A cheese aging room might be a good investment too." He's also making plans for more on-farm

sustainability and renewable energy production. One goal along these lines would be to start using glass bottles – though Francis says this might not make sense economically. "The bottle washer requires a separate room and it might cost \$100,000 to get switched over."

Francis also says he's "coveting some solar PV panels." On an annual basis, he says his wind turbine can cover the farm's electrical use, but solar photovoltaic would be a nice compliment during the summer months when wind production is lower. "If we had extra electrical capacity, I'd like to convert a four-wheeler or small tractor to electric, or power an electric car" Francis says. "The next step would be an energy storage system so we could store our wind and solar power. I think that will be the next breakthrough for renewable energy technology."

To read more about energy efficiency and renewable energy at Radiance Dairy, visit <http://mosesorganic.org/> and search for Thicket's article: "Toward On-farm Energy and Self-Sufficiency."

And if you want some Radiance Dairy milk? You'll have to move to Fairfield. ■

Read an article by Francis in the "Organic Broadcaster," a publication by MOSES:
mosesorganic.org/farming/farming-topics/miscellaneous/farm-used-buckshot-to-meet-energy-needs/

Good Data Collection Is the Key to Answering On-farm Questions

by Drake Larsen

As we approach the one-year anniversary of Dick Thompson's death, it's an especially fitting time to reflect on the tremendous legacy he left – and the lasting impact he continues to have. Dick knew that good data is the key to making good decisions about managing the farm. Robust notes were so critical to this philosophy that in the Thompson Alternatives in Agriculture – published annually by Dick and Sharon – simple, secure data was covered on page one:

"Liberty bib overalls with zipper pocket to keep data book."

Dick and Sharon started farming in 1958 and within a decade they were beginning the transition to "alternative and sustainable practices." From the beginning the need for good data was apparent. In *Thompson Alternatives in Agriculture* they wrote:

When we started to modify our farming practices in 1967, we found ourselves outside of the establishment. We were given the impression that our observations were not valid since they had not been scientifically and statistically examined. . . . Therefore, we needed to really put the ideas to the test and find out what works best.

Finding out what works best became a lifelong pursuit for Dick and Sharon as they sought answers to agriculture's continually evolving challenges. The Thompsons continue:

By conducting research right on our own farm, we found that the door to the establishment has been reopened. Research conducted on the farm . . . allows us to do all farm operations, including harvest, with our existing equipment . . . randomization and replicated provides additional accuracy.

Farmer-led, on-farm research remains at the core of Practical Farmers today. This season the Cooperators' Program includes

56 research projects being conducted on 91 farms across Iowa. In reflecting on the Thompsons' legacy, we would like to highlight four current projects that exemplify the power of good data collection.

Fruit and Vegetable Data Collection:

With the goal of creating Iowa-specific production histories, 13 farms are participating in a fruit and vegetable production recordkeeping project. The farmers will collect data on production methods, labor and inputs, and marketable yield. In 2013, these producers meticulously tracked 23 crops; this variety is expanded for 2014. The data will help to provide future producers with baseline comparisons, and will be used to develop crop insurance options for fruit and vegetable production. Over time, tracking fruit and vegetable production will make lenders better able to support fruit and vegetable production enterprises.

Pasture Monitoring: Improving pasture is one of the best ways a grazer can increase productivity on a fixed land base. Four PFI farmers are monitoring pasture management for cow-calf or goat production. These farmers are taking notes daily on grazing rotations, plant stand improvements and animal health to track forage production, carrying capacity and weight gain.

Worm Castings for Vegetable Production:

Horticulture farmers are interested in the impact of soil amendments on plant health and yield. This trial uses a randomized, replicated setup to measure the yield of fall cabbage treated with vermicompost application at seeding, transplant or via foliar spray against a control (no vermicompost applied).

Cover Crop Variety Trial:

Cover crops are taking off in Iowa with nearly 400,000 acres of cover over winter 2013 – 2014. Last fall, nine PFI farmers across 12 locations in Iowa participated in a variety trial to find out which cover crops work best for



their farms. The trial compared 20 popular winter small grains, legumes and species mixes in a variety of production systems and application types. (**Fun Fact:** Dick Thompson conducted his first cover crop trial in 1981.)

The Thompsons said:

Farmers who conduct research on their own farms get a deep understanding of the interactions that are occurring on the farm. With this understanding, the farm can wear three hats: as a farmer, as a researcher, as an educator.

Education is the third hat, and this happens through information-sharing and demonstration. The Thompsons published their research results annually in the hopes that they would be shared widely. Their aim? "We would like you to consider adapting these ideas to your situation," they wrote, "rather than outright adopting them."

Research reports on the data collection projects mentioned here can be found – along with more than 250 other research reports – on our website at: practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge. ■

One Year On: Remembering Dick Thompson

As we mark one year since the loss of Dick, we might all pause to revisit the outpouring of memories and affection expressed by those who knew him. Here are some of those tributes:

- practicalfarmers.org/blog/2013/12/06/maria-rosmann-a-tribute-to-dick-thompson/
- practicalfarmers.org/blog/2013/12/12/farming-with-the-source-thompsons-alternatives-in-agriculture/
- practicalfarmers.org/blog/2013/08/22/a-man-outstanding/
- practicalfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The-Practical-Farmer-28.4-Fall-2013.pdf



Board Approves “Marching Orders” for the Next Three Years

by Teresa Opheim

“Thanks for keeping this organization member-driven and farmer-led.”

– Member comment on the PFI member survey

On June 25, the PFI board of directors approved a Strategic Plan for July 2014 – June 2017. The phrase “strategic plan” may seem a little dry, but it actually is an exciting process that is our primary way of keeping Practical Farmers member-driven and farmer-led.

The Practical Farmers Strategic Plan includes the major feedback you gave us in your member surveys:

- **More networking!** The annual conference, field days and farminars are very important to you – and you want more. Also: More than half of you are new members; we want to keep you. We responded in the Strategic Plan with a commitment to hold socials in 15 mini-regions annually. We already are getting a start with “Map of My Kingdom” performances and socials this fall (see dates on page 9).
- **Your farm goals are extremely varied, but many of your primary goals center around profitability.** Our strategies include more sharing of financial and production information, including actual case studies of enterprise and whole-farm profitability.
- **27 percent of PFI members have been farming 10 years or less.** We plan to continue our major focus on beginning farmers, including expanding mentoring and networking opportunities.
- **48 percent of you non-farmers say you’d like to purchase more locally;** 24 percent want to invest in farmers. We plan to offer more opportunities for you to help.
- **We won’t change what works well!** We will continue strong with on-farm research and demonstration, our popular annual conference, and more.

Melissa Dunham, of Grinnell Heritage Farm and Kurt Van, Hulzen, both PFI board members, participate in the February strategic planning meeting.



Here are some of the bold measurements we want to reach by 2017:

1. GOAL 1: Practical Farmers builds community in Iowa and beyond

- 80 percent of you will report you have formed friendships, businesses or other relationships through PFI
- 90 percent of you will have participated in PFI programs
- PFI membership tops 5,000; 75 percent of members renew each year

2. GOAL 2: Farmers are stewards of our natural resources

- 50 percent of you increase your use of cover crops
- 70 percent of you report that participation in PFI has helped you improve stewardship
- 40 percent of you increase your renewable energy or conservation

3. GOAL 3: Farmers, farms and food systems are viable

- 65 percent of you and all graduates of our Savings Incentive Program improve profitability/efficiency
- 75 percent of you make progress on your desired percentage of farm income
- 40 percent of you report your association with PFI has helped you begin transition planning

More measurement goals and the strategies that will help us get there are in the full strategic plan, which is on our website at practicalfarmers.org/about/accountability.

Thank you to the following who served with me on the Strategic Directions Committee over the past six months: Sarah Carlson, Kate Edwards, Tom Frantzen, Helen Gunderson, Gail Hickenbottom, Cheryl Hopkins, Drake Larsen, Tim Landgraf, Dan Wilson and Sally Worley – and to the full board and staff, who guided the development of the plan. ■

To Till or Spray: Is There a Right Way to Kill a Cover Crop?

Compiled by Erica Andorf

In June, Francis Thicke of Fairfield emailed the PFI Policy discussion list to inquire what other members thought about using glyphosate versus tillage to terminate cover crops. While Francis applauded using more state cost-share money going to support planting cover crops, he expressed concern about the amount of glyphosate being used to later kill the cover crop – but he pointed out a quandary: One alternative, tillage, is "in general . . . considered politically incorrect." Here's what other policy list members had to say.

Wendy Johnson of Charles City thought Francis had asked "a great question," and commented that she too has wondered about the possible overuse of glyphosate. "My main concern is the plant's adaptability to the chemical, much like we are seeing in giant ragweed and pigweed species." She expressed concern that overuse could lead glyphosate to become a "non-viable product," and added that she's "curious about other ways to kill the cover or utilize it without the use of chemicals."

Larry Stone of Elkader said that on his farm, they tried oats as a cover crop last year so they wouldn't have to terminate. "Success was marginal, partly due to the dry fall," he wrote. He added that a friend has terminated rye by "chopping it in May to feed his dairy cows. But you have to be willing to plant the spring crop later than normal."

Keith Kuper of Ackley questioned whether a cover crop would lead to more glyphosate use. "A no-tiller (such as myself) would probably spray glypho to kill weeds before planting, cover crop or not," he wrote. "So a cover crop doesn't necessarily mean more glypho applied."

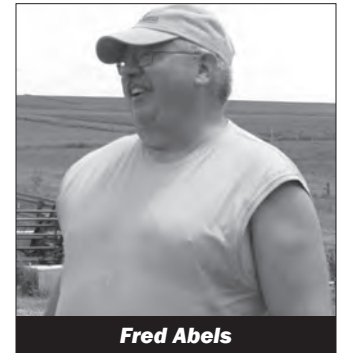
Ron Dunphy of Creston weighed in on the effects of tillage on erosion, saying that "tillage exposes soil to erosion any way you cut it."



Jerry Depew



Wendy Johnson



Fred Abels

Fred Abels of Holland gave examples of other ways to kill the cover crop, such as "Paraquat for herbicides, large crop rollers that kink the winter rye when it's mature and mowing by batwing or for forage." Andy Johnson of Decorah agreed. He added that roller-crimpers not only terminate the cover crop but provide heavy mulch and weed control for subsequent crops.

Jack Knight of Luana suggested that organic matter is built up despite the tillage, and chemical termination builds organic matter despite the herbicide.

Jeff Klinge of Farmersburg said that at a Natural Resources Conservation Service meeting, Ray Archuleta "talked about the importance of mycorrhizal fungi, calling it the glue that holds soil particles together and makes soil more drought- and disease-resistant." He recounted that Ray was asked if tillage kills mycorrhizal fungi, and that Ray said tillage would probably not kill it but would set it back.

"When asked about the possibility of glyphosate killing mycorrhizal fungi," Jeff continued, "he said it was definitely a concern and would rather see farmers using a roller to terminate cover crops."

Ron Brunk of Eldora said he uses the same amount of Roundup for burn-down as he does before planting cover crops. He is looking for alternative herbicides to use for burn-down.

"Surely it matters when the cover was planted and what kind of weather follows," mused Jerry Depew of Laurens. "Winter rye planted in early September and babied by a long spring can be pretty big, even up north, by the time it's dry enough to plant

corn. My agronomist . . . advised a quart of Roundup on that big rye, so I've been doing it that way ever since. That's probably double what I would use otherwise for a burn-down in no-till here."

Andy Riniker of Masonville planted winter rye after chopping off some late-planted corn in early October and said it came out later than usual in the spring. "Since I am organic and my big tractor was in the shop, I wound up using my 70 (horsepower) loader tractor to pull an old Brady field cultivator through it. It was knee-high to waist-high." After that he disked twice with "an old BW John Deere disc," and planted with a John Deere 7000 four-row planter with "Yetter trash cleaners and a heavy chain loop behind the press wheels." The result?

"That rye strip is the cleanest second-year corn on the place with no herbicides used," he wrote. "Rye makes the soil mellow and the roots penetrate the compaction zone." Even so, he added despite his farm being no-tilled for over 10 years, it still has a compaction zone "down about 13 to 16 inches. That is why we have all this run-off into creeks and rivers."

Fred responded: "Andy, I will disagree with you til the cows come home that you have a compaction layer from no-till. We've done a lot of tiling on our farm, and when the tile plow was on our farm operating he never had to hook a dozer in front of it to pull. Our no-till soils are mellow." ■

Do you want to participate in policy-related discussions like this? Contact Erica at erica@practicalfarmers.org to join this forum – or any of our six other email discussion lists.

"The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food"

by Donna Prizgintas

This is the first and only book written by chef Dan Barber. I bought it electronically in the first few hours after it was released and read it entirely, all 452 pages, within two days. Well, since I am a chef maybe this is no surprise. Thank goodness Dan didn't put any recipes in the book, because I want to recommend this read heartily to PFI members.

Dan has written – very thoughtfully from his deep concerns about food – a book actually about farmers. His point of view is that we should cook and eat what farmers grow. Yes, yes, but he specifically writes about farmers who feed their soils, not necessarily the eater or the market. His ethic pushes us to consider orienting our food and culinary choices not toward the conventional appetite, but to the necessities of preserving ecosystems. "We should not be cutting off the branch upon which we are seated," Dan writes, an adage obvious to farmers who are trying to conserve and replenish their soils and farming environments. To continue to eat well, or even to eat at all, any civilization has to maintain soil health by understanding and rewarding farmers in this effort.

Dan challenges the chef – and by extension our foodie culture – to think beyond the already popular notion of farm-to-plate, where the privileged chef and eater have a multiple-choice menu offered by the providing farmer. Dan would like the farmer to choose what to plant based on the needs of the soil, rather than the needs or fads of the food-friendly market. Further, he expects chefs and eaters to then find a way to eat what these farmers have grown. This is Dan's "third plate," a plate filled by the necessities of deeply sustainable farming. He then goes on to illustrate this possibility with stories of the foods grown by farmers that he knows are seeking agricultural answers in the secrets of the soil and seeds.

Donna Prizgintas poses with her copy of Dan Barber's book, The Third Plate.



Here is why this book will be widely read and discussed in food and policy circles: Dan has won every possible accolade a chef could merit. He is, in my mind, the best American chef – and probably the most sensible.

Dan Barber is the executive chef at Blue Hill in New York City and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, located within the non-profit Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture farm. (Our own Fred Kirschenmann is the president of the center's board of directors, and I am sure an inspiration for Dan.)

While food writing over the past decade has been dominated by the likes of journalists such as Michael Pollan, *The Third Plate* is written from the pragmatic experience of a professional chef. It's a refreshing change. What we find in this book is a deeper level of involvement. Food and where it comes from are this

chef's life. Daily immersion in perishable goods is a perspective a farmer can appreciate. These are not just interesting adventures captured by inquisitive journalists. Dan has food on his hands, and probably even in his dreams. I don't know how he found the time to make a book. But he is a wonderfully evocative writer – and what interesting stories he has to tell! This is what PFI farmers will enjoy.

Several parts of the book describe farming systems in Europe and the ecosystems that have been possible there, but the most interesting parts for Iowans are his writings about grain farmers, seed selection and processing. It is in these sections that I see usefulness for our community. Our prairie land is richly constituted for grain and we all want to make this beautiful Iowa earth happy and continually bountiful. Here is a book with some good farming stories that do apply to what we are already striving toward through Practical Farmers of Iowa. I am sure Fred would be happy to help further any conversations we could have stemming from reading Dan's book. ■

Donna Prizgintas is a chef based in Ames who cooks and writes in support of a tradition of family meals prepared with seasonal, fresh and locally grown ingredients. Before moving to Iowa in 2006, Donna was a private chef to many Hollywood personalities.

EXTRA: Hear More on the DonnaLonna Kitchen Show

Curious to learn more about *The Third Plate*? Tune into the DonnaLonna Kitchen show at noon on **Tuesday, Sept. 2 on KHOI (FM radio 89.1) in Ames.** Donna and co-host Lonna Nachtigal will have a conversation with Fred Kirschenmann about the book.

Can't make it at noon? The show will be re-broadcast that evening at 7 p.m. Learn more about the show or download podcasts of past shows at:

khoifm.org/donnalonna-kitchen

Going – But Not Gone!

Just over two years after attending my first field day, answering my first phone call about raising niche pork and writing my first research report, I find I'm counting down on the same activities. My last field day was at the end of June and my last newsletter article is in this issue. I am looking forward to the adventures that await in married life and Kansas City, but certainly am sad to leave the PFI office.

This has been an unbeatable opportunity and experience for me. I only hope I've helped members learn half as much as I myself have learned! Not many people are paid to learn, and I feel that's what I've gotten to do. I've learned about many different facets of farming, I've observed cooperation and collaboration within and among very different groups of people, and I've been humbled by the generosity

of members who share their time, talent and resources so freely. What more could anyone want to be a part of? Facilitating these connections has been a true pleasure. Thank you all for letting me be a part of this.

The best part is, I don't really have to leave it. I will remain a PFI member and will still attend what field days I can, and there's no way I would miss the annual conference. And for a time at least, I'll still be doing work on the livestock research side of things working as consultant for Practical Farmers. With some luck, my fiancé and I will be settling down on enough acres to have a hobby farm – I'm sure I'll be emailing the discussion lists for my own sake! I still have a lot more to learn, but I know that this group is where to learn it. And, to all my research cooperators: You're



free to bully me into keeping the same sort of pasture records I bug you about!

Thanks again to everyone for two of the greatest years I could ask for. ■

— Margaret Dunn

Biological Monitoring Class Teaches How to Track Changes in Land and Environment

by Margaret Dunn

The final Holistic Management workshop, Biological Monitoring, was held in late May at the Norman Borlaug and Natvig farms near Cresco. Nearly 25 participants – some returning HM enthusiasts, some first-time attendees – learned from instructor Ralph Tate how to track changes in land and environment over time. Across seasons, this information can be used to determine if management is helping or hindering progress towards the Holistic Goal of the farmer.

The main technique is similar to what cooperators in PFI's pasture monitoring projects employ. Permanent transects (lines about 100 feet long) are established at various points of interest in pastures. The ends are marked with stakes or fenceposts. At a few points along those lines – 10, 30, 50, 70 and 90 feet – a square frame of PVC tubing or some other material is laid on the ground adjacent to the line. The species of plants and animals or insects, degree of bare ground, soil appearance, and other information is recorded, and a photo is taken looking down at the square. The process is repeated at about the same time of year annually. Over time, these



Some of the participants in the class pose at the end of the day. From left to right: Tim Knutson, Larry Knutson, Laura Jackson, David Rosmann, Meg Schmidt, Dave Schmidt, Mike Natvig, Kristy Torchia, Bill Klauer, Caroline van Schaik, Margaret Dunn, Phil Specht and Mary Damm. (Photo courtesy of Caroline van Schaik)

images and records show whether diversity or plant health is increasing or decreasing, whether the soil is becoming more productive and the pasture more vibrant, or losing its vigor.

Many thanks to all those who attended over the past few months, and to Land Stewardship Project (particularly Caroline

van Schaik) for co-organizing the series. The two organizations are hoping to hold an HM get-together this fall or early winter, as an opportunity to refresh knowledge, check in on what work has been done, and discuss future challenges, changes, and opportunities. Keep an eye out for more information! ■

Send Us Your Farm Photos for the 2015 Annual Conference!

Back in May, long-time member Vic Madsen made a fantastic suggestion for our next annual conference: A photo display featuring images, as he described, of PFI members' "crops, animals, machinery, pets, kids, food, gardens, fence and most anything else that suits (your) fancy." We all loved this idea, because what better way to showcase the diversity of our members and their farms – and stimulate some interesting conversations! – than with a wall of images hand-selected by you?

Vic thinks – and we all agreed – that a display such as this would also "fit the idea of putting the emphasis on members and what they are doing."

With this in mind, we would like to invite you to email us photos of farm activities, buildings, inhabitants (people and animals), tools, harvest – or anything else you'd like to submit. We welcome photos from all PFI members, whether you farm full-time, manage a few acres part-time, tend a backyard garden or simply enjoy the food that PFI farmers produce. With harvest looming and fall field (and family) activities just around the corner, this is a perfect time to capture some of the unique experiences on YOUR farm or acreage.

Send us as many as you'd like, and we'll print them to display in a special area at the 2015 Annual Conference. Vic suggested that we could sort the images into sections like "home



Vic Madsen

gardens, CSA fields, grazing, sheep, orchards, home energy projects, cover crops, ridge till, hog production on straw, chickens, kids, with a special section for babies, and so on."

You can snap images with your cell phones, or use a standalone camera – whatever is easiest for you – and send them to Tamsyn Jones at tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org. Just keep in mind that higher-resolution images will look better when printed larger.

Questions? Contact Tamsyn by email or phone at (515) 232-5661. Happy shooting! ■

Member Spotlight Suggestions?

In April, we unveiled a new feature in *Practical News*, our weekly email newsletter: a "Member Spotlight" section to highlight the diversity of people in our membership. It's been a fun project so far, as we've gotten to connect with many interesting people who form part of the core of this organization, but perhaps aren't as well-known – and it's amazing to hear all the varied stories about how people found PFI and what led them to join!

So far, we've highlighted:

- **Jennifer and Chuck Steffen**, lifetime members from Birmingham, Iowa
- **Martin and Barb Kramer**, members from Algona, Iowa, since 2001

- **Dennis McLaughlin**, from Cumming, Iowa, who's been a member since 1990
- **Matt and Kelli Miller**, from Osage, who have been members since 2004
- **Joel and Jan Wormley**, members from Newton since 1998
- **Jennie Erwin** of Le Mars, Iowa, who joined PFI this year
- **Kent and Kathy Morris**, of Atlantic, who joined PFI in 2010
- **Carl Glanzman and Doris Bane**, of Oakland, Iowa, who've been members since 2012.

Is there someone you think we should feature? We'd love to know! Contact Erica Andorf at erica@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661 with your suggestions.

Don't Miss Upcoming PFI Field Days

We might be past the peak of summer, but there are still plenty of summer and fall PFI field days left to attend. If you haven't had a chance to make it to one yet, take a look at this list; there's probably one near you:

- **Aug. 17** – "Planning, Research & Intercropping on a CSA Farm" – Tripoli, IA – Genuine Faux Farm
- **Aug. 18-22** – "Jim Gerrish Series: Pasture Walks, Talks & Tours" – Various times and locations:
 - ♦ Chariton, IA
 - ♦ Powersville, MO
 - ♦ Grand River, IA
 - ♦ Osceola, IA
 - ♦ Maxwell, IA
 - ♦ Norway, IA
 - ♦ Monticello, IA
 - ♦ Donnellson, IA
- **Aug. 26** – "Soil Stewardship with Cover Crops, Rotations & Grazing" – Hastings, IA – Maple Edge Farm
- **Aug. 26-28** – PFI Booth at Farm Progress Show – Boone, IA
- **Aug. 27** – Campfire Social During Farm Progress Show – Prairie Flower Recreation Area, Saylorville Lake – Hosted by Mark Peterson
- **Sept. 3** – "Energy Conservation at Home on the Range" – Fredericksburg, IA – Hawkeye Buffalo
- **Sept. 5** – "Organic Dairying and Cattle Care" – Bloomfield, IA – Maibach Dairy
- **Sept. 9** – "Community-Based Farm Start-Up" – Tama, IA – Red Earth Gardens
- **Sept. 13** – "Compost Heat Capture for High Tunnel Season Extension" – Nevada, IA – TableTop Farm
- **Sept. 21** – "Makin' Bacon: Pork Processing, Curing and Tasting" – Story City, IA – Story City Locker
- **Sept. 26** – "Stewardship at Seven W Farm" – Paullina, IA – Seven W Farm
- **Oct. 13** – "The Dairy Beginning: Basics of Goat Dairy Management" – Knoxville, IA – Reichert's Dairy Air
- **Nov. 15** – "Milling Small Grains and Aquaponics Production" – Panora, IA – Early Morning Harvest

Air joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in 2010.

He farms 11 acres near Milo that he is improving with hopes of farming full-time and one day passing the land to his daughter. He's also a Savings Incentive Program participant.

"I enjoy farming so much. Farming gives me the chance to learn, research, put myself with nature, attend new events and meet new people."

"I am so busy with farm projects and keep forgetting to renew my membership every year, so I decided to become a lifetime member."

Become a lifetime member today!

For more information, contact
Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or
lauren@practicalfarmers.org.

PRACTICAL farmers
of Iowa
working together, always learning

Air Philavank
MILO, IA

Lifetime Members Tally is Growing!

Since introducing the lifetime membership option two years ago, we've seen steady growth and interest from members. We've been humbled and honored by the response, and the many reasons members have decided to make this commitment to Practical Farmers. The current tally stands at 23 lifetime memberships – one of the most recent just in the latter part of July. Check out this list of lifetime members, and see photos of a few of these people on the next page.

- Nathan and Sarah Anderson
- Jay Brown
- Herb and Kathy Eckhouse
- Jess Frantzen
- Tom and Irene Frantzen
- Gary A. T. and Nancy J. T. Guthrie
- Paul Hertz
- Gail Hickenbottom
- Jack Knight
- Timothy Landgraf and Jan Libbey
- Lipes Family Farm
- Amy Miller
- Byron Olson
- Jeff and Gayle Olson
- Phrakhounmany ("Air") Philavank
- Teresa Opheim and Rich Schuler
- Dick Schwab
- Dan Specht (given by James K. West)
- Jennifer and Chuck Steffen
- John and Angela Tedesco
- Mark and Connie Tjelmeland
- Kurt and Teresa Van Hulzen
- Donald Whittaker

THANK YOU to all these members for your commitment to PFI!

Lifetime membership is a one-time fee of \$1,000 and will cover your membership in PFI for life. That means you won't receive any more membership renewal notices, and you'll never have to worry about your membership lapsing.

If you have questions or are interested in lifetime membership, contact Lauren Zastrow at (515) 232-5661 or by email at lauren@practicalfarmers.org. ■

Leave A Legacy



"I believe in PFI's values and mission. I want to see it continue into the future."

— RICH PIROG

There are ways to provide for your loved ones AND leave a legacy for Practical Farmers of Iowa. You can do both, and it's easy.

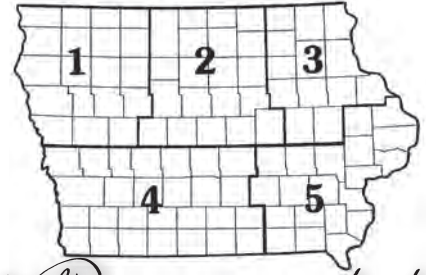
- Designation of your retirement plan for PFI
- Leave a life insurance policy
- Make a gift through your will
- Make a gift now and receive income for life with a charitable gift annuity.

Many such gifts can help you and your family today as well as help our mission years into the future. You can put some in place today without affecting your cash flow during your lifetime.

Want to learn more? Contact Teresa Opheim, executive director, at (515) 232-5661 or teresa@practicalfarmers.org.

** Important: Consult with your own legal and financial advisors before making any planned gift. **

Meet Some of Our Lifetime Members



Welcome, new members!



Connie and Mark Tjelmeland



Chuck and Jennifer Steffen



Jess Frantzen (left). She is show here at the July 12 "Map of My Kingdom" premier with (left to right) Kate Edwards, Dan Wilson and Tom Frantzen (also a lifetime member)



Angela Tedesco



Amy Miller (right)



Nathan and Sarah Anderson

District 1—Northwest

- Tyler Hagan, Carroll
- Spencer Kies, Lake View
- Myron and Dorothy Olerich, Westside

District 2—North Central

- Colby Fangman, Ames
- Corey Hillebo, Madrid
- Sue Long, Toledo
- Paul Scott, Ames

District 3—Northeast

- Rachel and Craig Boeke, Dubuque
- Karen Davison, Decorah
- Mike Elwick, Vinton
- Bernard Schmitz, Jesup
- John Vontalge, Epworth
- Ethan Vorhes, Nashua

District 4—Southwest

- Whitney Brewer, Des Moines
- Dennis Carbaugh, Red Oak
- Randall Halbur, Guthrie Center
- William Horner, Red Oak
- Neal Scanlon, Winterset

District 5—Southeast

- Kris Fox, Wellman
- Kathy Jaffey, Fairfield
- Jared and Laura Jones, Wilton
- Carol Olicker, Fairfield
- Riggan Ag, Matthew Riggan, Oxford
- Larry and Mary Sobaski, Packwood
- Travis Voss, Solon
- Kevin Zihlman, Brighton

District 6—Out of State

- Michael Cross, Walker, MI
- Del Ficke, Pleasant Dale, NE
- Rebecca Fischer, Quincy, IL
- Jess Frantzen, Owatonna, MN
- David Horn, West Richland, WA
- Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, Kerry Hoffschneider, Lincoln, NE
- Ruth Rabinowitz, Santa Cruz, CA
- Steve Sopko, Dilworth, MN

UPCOMING EVENTS – AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER

Aug. 15 – In Her Boots Workshop: Produce, Syrup and Livestock + Pizza! | Athens, WI | Stony Acres Farm | 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. | \$50

Farmer Kat Becker welcomes you to her family's certified organic operation, showcasing a third-generation family farm committed to local community, environmental sustainability and providing a beautiful and constructive setting to raise a family. Come experience a highly diversified farm operation, including vegetables; fruit; maple syrup; grass-fed beef, pastured pork and eggs; organic; and most recently: farm to table pizza. For more, visit: <http://mosesorganic.org/projects/rural-womens-project/events/boots-august>

Aug. 19 – Iowa Learning Farms Field Day: Strip Tillage | Klemme, IA | 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Strip-tillage brings the best qualities of no-till and conventional tillage together into one practice. This works well with soils within the Des Moines Lobe, which take longer to dry and warm in the spring. Visit with Dean Stromer and soil quality experts to hear the benefits of strip-tillage and using cover crops. Also, hear updates from Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey. Includes a complimentary meal. Contact: (515) 294-5429 or ilf@iastate.edu

Aug. 23 – Introduction to Seed Saving | Caledonia, IL | Angelic Organics | 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Take your garden to the next level by learning to save seeds from your best fruits, vegetables and flowers. At this workshop, you'll learn the basics about saving your own seed from a variety of crops and get hands-on experience saving tomato seeds for next season. For more details and to register, visit: www.learn-grow-connect.org/event/introduction-seed-saving

Aug. 25 – Introduction to Cut Flowers | Kansas City, MO | University of Missouri Extension | 4-7 p.m. | \$15 | Register by Aug. 22

Looking for a way to complement your market offerings throughout the season? Cut flowers could be one way to diversify and increase profitability. This workshop will cover the basics of growing and marketing cut flowers, and is part of a series offered by Growing Growers of Kansas City. The Growing Growers program offers workshops and classes throughout the year that are open to the public and address skills required to run a local farm. For more, visit www.growinggrowers.org/workshops.html or contact Lala Kumar at kumarl@missouri.edu or (816) 252-5051.

Aug. 29-31 – North American Permaculture Convergence | Clarks Grove, MN | Harmony Park

Meet up to 1,000 permaculture movers and shakers from across North America to share successes and strategize how to create a permaculture future. Permaculture pioneers, authors, teachers, organizers, consultants, visionaries and farmers get together to share

stories and build symbiotic relationships. For more information and to register, visit: <http://northamericanpermaculture.org>

Sept. 5-7 – Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival | Jefferson, WI | Jefferson Fair Park

This is THE festival in the Midwest for all things sheep- and wool-related. Over 600 sheep were on the fairgrounds last year, more than 100 dogs running in the stock dog trials and more than 130 vendors with gifts, yarn, cheese and more. In addition to sheep, there are herding dog trials; classes for shepherds (from novice through advanced); classes for fiber artists; baskets, looms and spinning wheels on display; shearing demonstrations; and more. For more details, visit: www.wisconsinssheepandwoolfestival.com

Sept. 13 – Fourth Annual Farm Cruise in Polk and Story Counties

Enjoy a free, fun-filled and educational adventure touring some diverse local farms in the central Iowa area. Several farms are having open houses and you are invited to spend a beautiful fall day cruising to each one of them. Come look around, talk with local farmers and learn about where and how your food is produced. Get a punch card at any farm and visit all four farms to be entered into a drawing for prizes! For more information, visit: www.farmcruise.com

Sept. 18-20 – Aquaponics Master Class | Montello, WI

A comprehensive course covering all aspects of aquaponics and controlled environment agriculture. The topics covered include aquaponic methods and applications, crop choices and recommendations, water quality, daily operation and growing techniques, greenhouses and environmental control, fish biology and feeds, plant care and health, system start up and business considerations. For more, visit: <http://aquaponics.com/index.php>

Sept. 19 – Trees Forever NW Iowa Agroforestry Workshop | Emmetsburg, IA | Iowa Lakes Community College | 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

To educate landowners, natural resource professionals, farmers, and the general public, Trees Forever and partners are providing agroforestry outreach through workshops, field days, press releases and on-farm learning through 2016. They have several opportunities to get engaged and learn more in the coming weeks and months. For more, visit www.treesforever.org/Agroforestry or contact Jeff Jensen with Trees Forever at (515) 320-6756.

Sept. 19-21 – Seed Savers Exchange Three-Day Seed Saving School | Decorah, IA

Join experienced staff for their most comprehensive seed-saving workshop available. Practice plant isolation, hand-pollination, seed harvesting and seed cleaning while discussing

the importance of saving seeds and preserving crop diversity in your own backyard. Registration is required. For more information, visit: www.seedsavers.org/Education/Events

Sept. 21 – Homebrewing 101 | Caledonia, IL | Angelic Organics | 1-4:30 p.m.

Beginners will learn the basic steps of homebrewing with Nate Peterson of Wishful Acres Farm. We'll demonstrate primary and secondary fermentation, and everyone will try their hand at bottling their own. You'll learn what equipment you'll need to do this at home, plus where to find the best ingredients, including how to grow, harvest and prepare your own hops. For more, visit: www.learn-grow-connect.org/event/homebrewing-101

Oct. 4 – Pollinator Habitat Conservation Workshop | Dixon, IL | Trees Forever | Ruth Edwards Nature Center | 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Join us for a pollinator workshop focusing on creating and preserving pollinator habitat. We will look at what's happening with pollinators, how to establish habitat – prairie and trees – and plant ID in the prairie. We will also talk about what you can do as a homeowner to create habitat in your backyard. There is no cost for attending, but space is limited, so register early to reserve your spot! For more, or to register, visit: www.treesforever.org/PollinatorWorkshop

Oct. 5 – Farm Crawl 2014 | Knoxville and Lacona

Seven independent family farms, in a small pocket of south-central Iowa, welcome you to tour their farms. Enjoy the Iowa countryside as you drive yourself from farm to farm in any order. Meet the farmers, see their operations, visit the animals, sample the goodies, listen to live music, learn something new about agriculture and enjoy delicious food. For more details, contact: Jill Beebout and Sean Skeehan at (641) 203-0758 or info@farmcrawl.com

Oct. 25 – Fruit Trees 101 | Caledonia, IL | Angelic Organics | 2-6 p.m.

Interested in growing your own backyard fruit without chemicals? Learn about variety selection, siting, planting methods, sustainable care, accommodating "pests" and disease, and proper pruning techniques to maximize longevity and yields. Get hands-on experience as we plant a tree in our orchard. For more information, visit: www.learn-grow-connect.org/event/fruit-trees-101

For more events, visit www.practicalfarmers.org



Grow your farm with Practical Farmers. Join today!

This annual membership is a:

- New membership
- Renewal

I am joining at the level of:

- Student—\$20
- Individual—\$40
- Farm or Household—\$50
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups)—\$100
- Lifetime Member—\$1,000

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

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

How did you hear about Practical Farmers of Iowa?

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

Sustain PFI

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

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

JOIN OUR GIFT OF THE MONTH CLUB

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

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

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

Thank you!

Individual, Farm or Organization Name*: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Street: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Primary Phone (with area code): _____

Alternate Phone (with area code): _____

Email: _____

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

Payment:

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

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

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

Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



Diverse Farms

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



Healthy Food

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



Vibrant Communities

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

