Farmer-owned whole grains and stoneground flour
Our Mission

We are farmers committed to cultivating a regenerative ecosystem by growing real food, improving the health and resilience of our soils, protecting the safety of our water, and investing in the vitality of our rural community.
The Driftless
Our own stone ground mill

NOW:
- USDA (VAPG and CIG) funded toll milling
- Drying, storage, cleaning, and dehulling infrastructure
- Energized customers and allies in Madison, Milwaukee, Chicago

NEXT:
- Seeking investment partners for pilot mill
- Looking for miller/partner to join operation
PAUL’S STORY
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Paul’s Story - Summary

- Home farm was in inevitable development path
- Had access to capital from his father on new farmland
- Siblings inherited home farm in Prairie du Sac
- Son Levi works on the farm
- Adaptable, not change-averse
- Started thinking about his transition out at the same age his father did
- Farm is highly leveraged, required creative thinking
HALEE AND JOHN’S STORY
Halee and John’s Story - Summary

- John: Lancaster/Milwaukee to NYC and back to the Driftless
- Halee: AZ/TX to NYC and to the Driftless
- Previous careers as chefs/bakers
- Have no access to capital (other than through beginning farmer loans at FSA)
- Willing to invest sweat equity, work for a mentor
- John’s family farm was not an option
- Committed to raising grain and grazing cattle
I am seeking a forward-thinking individual or couple to join my 950 acre organic farming operation to assist in all facets of growing feed crops and to assist in marketing of corn, soybeans, small grains and hay.

A general background in organic practices is preferred and an ability to grasp a systems approach to management is needed. You should be knowledgeable in soil building and weed management, and general crop growing skills. Organic production requires many pieces of equipment and a mechanical aptitude is necessary. Unique marketing ideas are welcome.

Ethics and trust are a cornerstone of organic farming and are important to my operation. I want to share my 40 years of farm experience with someone who is willing to work to improve my farm. This position could evolve into a partnership or other long range business association.

Housing is available with a barn that could be used for horses or other animals. Compensation and other details will be mutually negotiated with the successful applicant. Send resume, work history, and personal message why you want to belong to the organic community.
Transition Framework

- Leverage FSA beginning resources to achieve independent equity for Halee and John (cattle, and home farm)
- Earn/gift/purchase stock in corporation over time
- Farm business will provide pension for rest of Paul’s life, funded through stock purchase/transfer, proceeds from land contract.
- Inherit remainder of stock through Paul’s estate.
- Provisions will be made to protect farm in event of long term care needs, etc.
- Effectively, Halee and John become Paul’s heirs: benefits and responsibilities
Leverage

82 Acres with house and barn

Rented land

Land owned by Bickford Farms Inc
Building equity

- FSA beginning farmer real estate loan (in process)
  - 5% down, 45% loan from FSA, 50% land contract with Paul.
  - Approx $625,000 transaction: FSA loan and land contract will be paid based on crop sales from these 82 acres, as well as income from beef enterprise
  - That property will be in John and Halee’s name
- FSA beginning farmer microloan to purchase cattle and equipment ($50,000)
- Cattle eat primarily unsaleable hay (dirty side, etc.), no/low cost, and use “free” pastures
Accessing capital

• Like Paul did with his father, John and Halee have been able to access credit through Bickford Farms Inc.

• Bickford Farms borrowed $275,000 to expand drying and storage infrastructure, and to construct grain cleaning and dehulling facility on farm.
Transition Values

Mentorship

Trust

Commitment

Shared Vision
Mentorship

- Older experienced farmers are a scarce resource, and in this particular moment, the last link to embodied knowledge of pre-chemical farming
- Paul: a lifetime of farming experience, dairy, grazing, machine skills, welding, etc.
- John and Halee: long term commitment to farming, basic machine operating skills and some animal husbandry; no welding, and no experience troubleshooting mechanical problems
Trust & Commitment

- We started as employees, though quickly with management responsibilities
  - Rotation, crop planning, soils program
  - Bookkeeping in 2018
  - Grants administration: VAPG and CIG
- Compensation is creative (pasture, hay, housing), based on living expenses.
Trust & Commitment

• Paul borrowed substantially to rehab a vacant farmhouse where Halee and John now live
  – Aside from concrete, roof, electrical, all labor was performed by Wepking’s family members, to limit costs
• Halee and John will repay construction loan with 82 acre purchase
• Paul’s son Levi will be lifetime employee
Shared Vision

- Shifting the practices of the farm to focus on value added food grade grains, and long diverse rotations
- Building livestock herd back to the scale appropriate for the farm.
- Open eyes to complimentary enterprises: grazing, tree crops, honey/maple/sorghum, vegetables, etc.
- Creating a flexible, adaptable, resilient farm
Using what we’ve learned

- Helping an existing business evolve/improve is much more cost-effective than starting from scratch
- Be flexible about location/community
- Not enough farm kids to fill roles; non-farm kids lack some skills, but bring new perspectives
- Advocating for formal apprenticeship programs
- Not all mentorship relationships will result in farm succession
- Help create transition plans that limit debt for younger generation