

the PRACTICAL FARMER



WINTER 2020/2021

IN THIS ISSUE:

Expanding Our Community

Building Community and
High Tunnels After the
Derecho

Coming Together Since
1985







PFI members and supporters gather at the evening potluck during our 2020 annual conference. While we'll be gathering virtually at this year's PFI conference, our strong community continues to bind us together

FEATURES

- 6 HABITAT**
Finding Opportunities for Habitat
Chris Henning uses precision ag, and close collaboration with her tenant, to take marginal acres out of production.
- 8 EXPANDING OUR COMMUNITY**
Coming Together to Welcome Everyone
PFI is working to be more inclusive by creating relationships and building trust with Latino Iowans who farm or aspire to farm.
- 10 COOPERATORS' PROGRAM**
Cooperative Research Builds Community
Five farmers share how they first connected with the Cooperators' Program, how it has benefitted them and why they remain so committed to on-farm research.
- 14 STRATEGIC PLAN**
Staying Focused on Community in Our Strategic Planning
As we developed our new strategic plan, strengthening and expanding PFI's community was a top priority.
- 16 HORTICULTURE**
Building Community and High Tunnels After the Derecho
In the aftermath of the storm, the PFI community rallied at three high tunnel builds in October to help members who lost these critical farm structures.
- 20 INTEGRATED CROPS & LIVESTOCK**
Crop-Livestock Integration: Three Ideas
Read about three tiers of integration, each delivering a suite of benefits to the farms and farmers.
- 24 EARLY PFI MEMBERS**
Coming Together Since 1985
PFI co-founders Dick and Sharon Thompson helped model PFI's core values.
- 26 BEGINNING FARMERS**
Hatching Farms and Community
Nettle Valley Farm's incubator farm program offers a lower-risk way for beginning farmers to start farming.

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTE**
- 29 MEMBER BOOK REVIEW**
"Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth"
- Maya Black
- 30 PFI NEWS**
- 32 NEW MEMBERS**
- 33 CALENDAR**
- 34 JOIN PFI**
- 35 THE FINAL WORD**



ON THE COVER:

Workshop attendees construct the endwall of a high tunnel at Laura Krouse's farm during the high tunnel build at her Mount Vernon, Iowa, farm on Oct. 11, 2020.



WHAT WE DO

Practical Farmers of Iowa was founded in 1985 as an organization for farmers. We use farmer-led investigation and information sharing to help farmers practice an agriculture that benefits both the land and people.

OUR MISSION

Practical Farmers of Iowa's mission is equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.

OUR VISION

An Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

OUR VALUES

Welcoming everyone

Farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge

Curiosity, creativity, collaboration and community

Resilient farms now and for future generations

Stewardship of land and resources

THE PRACTICAL FARMER

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership to help 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.

Magazine 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.



BOARD MEMBERS & STAFF

We love to hear from you! Please feel free to contact your board members or staff.

General info and staff connections: (515) 232-5661. Staff email addresses: @practicalfarmers.org.

DISTRICT 1 (NORTHWEST)

Nathan Anderson - Secretary

400 Locust St., P.O. Box 14
Aurelia, IA 51005
(515) 708-5199
n8andy@gmail.com

DISTRICT 2 (NORTH CENTRAL)

Wendy Johnson - President

2038 March Ave
Charles City, IA 50616
(562) 852-7044
207wendy@gmail.com

DISTRICT 3 (NORTHEAST)

Ann Franzenburg - Vice-President

6925 19th Ave.
Van Horne, IA 52346
(319) 640-0262
eafnan@netins.net

DISTRICT 4 (SOUTHWEST)

Mark Peterson

2311 N Ave.
Stanton, IA 51573
(712) 370-4004
markpete@myfntc.com

DISTRICT 5 (SOUTHEAST)

Gayle Olson

2272 140th St.
Winfield, IA 52659
(319) 931-1351
olsongayle@gmail.com

AT-LARGE FARMERS

Carmen Black

5025 120th St. NE
Solon, IA 52333
(319) 331-3957
localharvestcsa@gmail.com

Jack Boyer

1031 Hwy T55
Reinbeck, IA 50669
(319) 345-2265
jboyerfarms@gmail.com

Vic Madsen

2186 Goldfinch Ave.
Audubon, IA 50025
(712) 254-3057
vcmadsen@iowatelecom.net

Mark Quee

1951 Delta Ave.
West Branch, IA 52358
(319) 530-3782
farm@scattergood.org

David Rosmann

1809 N Willow St.
Avoca, IA 51521
(612) 219-7396
davidrosmann@hotmail.com

AT-LARGE FRIENDS OF FARMERS

Kristine Lang

1042 Western Ave.
Brookings, SD 57006
(515) 825-7525
kmlang2017@gmail.com

Lisa Schulte Moore - Treasurer

728 Brookridge Ave.
Ames, IA 50010
(515) 294-7339
lschulte@iastate.edu

PFI STAFF

Debra Boekholder

Membership & Events
Assistant (debra@)

Michael Borucke

Data Analyst (michael@)

Alisha Bower

Operations Director
(alisha@)

Sarah Carlson

Strategic Initiatives
Director (sarah@)

Steve Carlson

Membership Manager
(steve@)

Celize Christy

Next Generation
Coordinator (celize@)

Rebecca Clay

Strategic Initiatives
Assistant (rebecca@)

Lydia English

Strategic Initiatives
Coordinator (lydia@)

Meghan Filbert

Livestock Program Manager
(meghan@)

Rachel Findling

Office Assistant (rachel@)

Stefan Gailans

Research & Field Crops
Director (stefan@)

Suzi Howk

Finance & Benefits Director
(suzi@)

Tamsyn Jones

Editor & Outreach
Coordinator (tamsyn@)

Liz Kolbe

Education & Engagement
Director (liz@)

Sarah Krumm

Graphic Design &
Photography Coordinator
(sarah_k@)

Maddie Mueller

Digital Media Assistant
(maddie@)

Hayley Nelson

Research Assistant
(hayley@)

Maggie Norton

Farmer Outreach
Coordinator (maggie_n@)

Nick Ohde

Communications &
Marketing Director (nick@)

Greg Padgett

Next Generation Director
(greg@)

Jorgen Rose

Habitat & Farm Transfer
Coordinator (jorgen@)

Chastity Schonhorst

Bookkeeper (chastity@)

Jason Tetrick

Digital Media Coordinator
(jason@)

Sally Worley

Executive Director (sally@)

AMERICORPS MEMBERS

Emma Liddle

AmeriCorps Member
(emma@)

Megan Sweeney

AmeriCorps Member
(megan_s@)

CO-FOUNDERS

Larry Kallem

1417 Indiana Ave.
Ames, IA 50014
(515) 337-1272

Sharon Thompson

Boone, IA

The late Dick Thompson

Boone, IA

CONTACT US

Practical Farmers of Iowa

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101
Ames, IA 50010
(515) 232-5661

practicalfarmers.org
facebook.com/practicalfarmers
twitter.com/practicalfarmer
youtube.com/pfivideos
linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa

Count Blessings

Many people, myself included, have referred to 2020 with a good-riddance demeanor. From destructive weather and divisive politics to a pandemic, protests and other challenges, it feels as if 2020 has lurched from one upheaval to another. The myriad challenges have left many of us with plentiful reasons to host our own personal pity parties. My therapist told me that sometimes it's actually good to do this, to acknowledge the things that are causing us pain and stress. But it's important that we don't dwell in that sorrow. Allowing ourselves to feel our emotions can permit us to reflect on them, and then move on to more inspiring thoughts and actions.

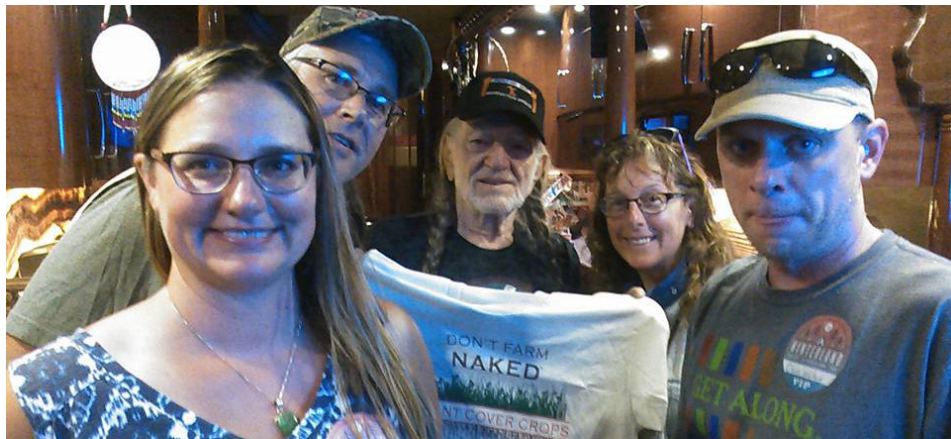
After I bring out my fall and winter holiday décor, I am greeted each day with this quote from Willie Nelson: "When I started to count my blessings, my whole life turned around." As we close up 2020, I am trying to follow Willie's wisdom. As I do so, Practical Farmers of Iowa continues to be a constant source of inspiration. This magazine is filled with stories of people coming together – bountiful examples of an enduring PFI ethos: "Working together, always learning." When barraged with challenge after challenge this year, Practical Farmers members continued to adapt. Here are a few of the many blessings I counted within Practical Farmers' community this year:

Spring

- Members collaborated to get food to their communities quickly and safely when pandemic-induced disruptions to the nation's large-scale supply chains depleted grocery store shelves. This revealed the vulnerability of our current centralized food system – but also the agility and resilience of a more localized system, and the potential benefits a decentralized food system would bring to our farms and communities.

Summer

- PFI members continued our tradition of on-farm learning by hosting field days virtually, even welcoming people who can't typically travel to in-person events due to distance and schedules. While we missed getting to see one another in person, PFI staff and members quickly learned new skills to make our virtual events practical, engaging



From left to right: Sally Worley, PFI board member Mark Peterson, Willie Nelson, Melanie Peterson and Chris Worley pose together after presenting Willie with a PFI "Don't Farm Naked" T-shirt in 2014.

and high-quality. We will continue to use these valuable virtual skills even when we resume face-to-face events, so we can continue to make our farmer-to-farmer learning accessible to a broader audience.

- When many lost power and had substantial derecho storm damage, other members reached out and offered storage and physical help to clean-up.
- Our musically talented members took their tunes online so people could listen to live music when they weren't able to go to in-person shows. One such member and supporter is the talented Susan Werner, who debuted Susie on Sundays this year.

Autumn

- We completed high tunnel builds, COVID-safe style, to help three farms rebuild from the derecho, and to help others learn how to construct high tunnels. We held some fall socials, and started up a community connections committee to supplant the one-on-one interactions we usually get to experience at our events.
- We welcomed more than 80 people to celebrate with sisters Carol Bouska, Peg Bouska, Sally McCoy and Ann Novak as they received the 2020 Farmland Owner Legacy Award. It was nice to see such support for these sisters and their dedication to the future of their farmland, and to be genuinely inspired by their work. Holding this event

virtually was indeed a blessing – it was a genuine celebration, and people from across the country were able to participate.

Looking Ahead

As we settle into winter, we are looking forward to January 2021 and a top-notch conference, Coming Home, which everyone will be able to enjoy from the comfort of their homes. No driving in a blizzard this year! See page xx for more details.

Practical Farmers remains strong because of its network of committed and caring members. While 2020 hasn't been easy, Practical Farmers staff, board and members aren't in this fight because it's easy. We are up to solving challenges, and 2020 has been no different.

That is because there is a strong commitment to our vision: An Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

Despite how 'special' this year has been, Practical Farmers continues to grow its membership and efforts to reach its vision. I want to thank all of you for your support and involvement in our efforts.

I am excited and hopeful for Practical Farmers' – and Iowa's – future.

Sally Worley

Finding Opportunities for Habitat

Chris Henning uses precision ag, and close collaboration with her tenant, to take marginal acres out of production

In the 1970s, the U.S. secretary of agriculture at the time, Earl Butz, famously exhorted famers to plant “fencerow to fencerow.” The sentiment at the time, and for decades afterwards, was that more planted acres equals more yield, and thus more profits.

Increasing numbers of farmers are now finding out what PFI farmers have long known – that planting fencerow to fencerow without regard for actual return on investment is not necessarily the best course of action. As new precision agriculture technology and equipment become available, more farmers and landowners are using it to improve decision-making and identify marginal acres.

What they are finding is that small sections of a field, perhaps only an acre or two in size, can be responsible for depressing yield averages across the entire field. Instead of continuing to plant high-value crops in these perennially underperforming areas, many of these farmers and landowners are opting to convert those spots to wildlife habitat. The idea is that by not throwing time, inputs and money at these areas in an often futile effort to make them productive (but never truly profitable), these areas then become excellent opportunities for establishing native habitat and perennial vegetation, providing a whole host of environmental benefits along the way.

Chris Henning is a landowner and PFI member who has embraced the use of precision agriculture on her farms. Her story is a familiar one for many Iowa landowners. A fourth-generation farm kid from Greene County, and the eldest of six daughters, Chris moved away after high school. After nearly 30 years, 17 of which she spent with Meredith Corporation, she moved back home from Des Moines. In 1992, she and her new husband, Max, purchased a farm near Jefferson – just in time for the infamous 1993 floods.

“The flood of 1993 changed my life,” Chris says. “In Jefferson, we had 8 inches of rain in one July afternoon. All of that water from the land upstream came to my farm down the creeks.”

The water roaring through the farm ripped new gullies deep enough to lose tractors over the span of just a few days. She says this was the moment when she got interested in what was happening in the watershed, rather than just what was happening on her farm. “It might have taken me a lot longer to see the connection to the watershed and the impacts downstream if the flood hadn’t happened – if the Des Moines Water Works hadn’t been swamped and my home in Des Moines flooded,” Chris says. “It was affecting my neighbors and my friends – my life [in Des Moines] – where I had just come from.”

“Even taking out 10 acres of the farm that didn’t grow anything has made a huge difference. There’s more wildlife, more diversity, better water quality and the farm’s yield numbers are up.”

- CHRIS HENNING

“My tenant at the time understood why I became interested in conservation, but he didn’t have the same kind of reaction because he didn’t have the ties downstream that I had,” Chris adds. “He was worried about getting the crop in, and I was worried about my farm going downstream. I was worried about what my friends were drinking downstream, and he was worried about his yields.”

Finding Conservation Opportunities With Precision Ag

In 2008, Chris’ father died and she began managing the farm she had grown up on, as well as the farmland she and Max had purchased in the early ‘90s. In 2010, Chris took ownership of her share of her parents’ farm. “There were pieces of that big field

where the soil was the color of cement,” Chris says. “At that point, I had no agronomy and no soil sampling history on that farm, but I would have told you that the soil was dead.”

Over the first few years Chris owned the farm, she noticed that certain areas were consistently unproductive because of water ponding. “It didn’t matter how much we put in,” Chris says. “The crops were still drowning out.” Working with USDA’s Farm Service Agency, she was able to enroll these areas into the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP). A subprogram of the Conservation Reserve Program, the FWP is specifically designed to help farmers and landowners like Chris restore wetlands in farm fields. Wetlands restored as part of this program reduce erosion, improve water quality and provide critical habitat for wildlife like pollinators and migratory birds. Furthermore, when they’re installed on marginal cropland acres that would otherwise require extensive tile drainage or inputs (fertilizer, pesticides or herbicides), such restorations can actually improve the return on investment for an entire field.

Chris’ experiences on her farm back this up. She says the combination of improved soil health from implementing field-wide practices like no-till and cover crops, and from removing the newly restored wetlands from production, bumped the average yield numbers up considerably. In turn, the improved return on investment resulted in crop insurance numbers that were much more attractive. “Even taking out 10 acres of the farm that didn’t grow anything has made a huge difference,” Chris says. “There’s more wildlife, more diversity, better water quality and the farm’s yield numbers are up.”

Working With Tenants

Integral to Chris’ mission to implement more conservation on her farm is her collaborative approach to working with her farm tenant. Chris says she is much more involved in farming decisions than many other landowners because she doesn’t cash-rent, but rather has crop share leases on her farms. Like most crop share arrangements,



Chris Henning stands by an area of her Greene County, Iowa, farm that she has enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. Working closely with her farm tenant, Chris has implemented a range of conservation practices and improved her farm's yield averages by taking marginal acres out of production.

which are increasingly uncommon in Iowa, she's directly responsible for half of the cost of inputs going into the farm. This shared financial responsibility encourages her to be more directly involved with the farm – when possible, Chris says she tries to ride along at planting, and she is always in the combine come harvest.

"I get first-hand experience with not only what the monitors and data are showing, but also what the soil and crops look like and what the farm operator thinks of it all," Chris says.

She is also quick to point out that being more engaged with the farm and her farm operator doesn't mean the process has been completely seamless, especially as the conservation practices she wanted to implement became more complex. "It is critical that my tenant is open to dialogue and understands and appreciates my dedication to environmental stewardship," Chris explains. "My farm operator really tries to listen to what I want and need, and I try and listen to what he wants and needs. It's a two-way street."

Chris acknowledges that her priorities are driven by her environmental concerns and may always differ slightly from those of her

farm operator, who has to make a living from the production of crops. While the health of her soil – as well as knowing the wetland is not being farmed and the farm is not putting chemicals into the water – matter far more to Chris than the return on investment or average yield per acre, she also recognizes the validity of her tenant's point of view. These different perspectives help both Chris and her farm operator to think more deeply about each other's needs.

"I have to look at numbers in a way that I don't usually," Chris says, "and my tenant has to look at the environmental impacts. In the end, the changes we make, like the wetlands, usually benefit both of us, even though our priorities are always a little different going in."

Where to Start

Chris recommends that farmers and landowners interested in learning more about wetland restoration or precision agriculture on farms, or just conservation in general, get in touch with their local USDA service center as soon as possible. In particular, Chris recommends getting in touch with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency.

"When it came time for the wetland restoration, the local county NRCS and FSA folks were very helpful," Chris says. "It's paperwork-intensive, but if you have good people in those offices who can help and a good tech who knows what's what, then it's relatively painless. They can help way more than you'd expect."

Chris says there's almost always a program that replaces marginal cropland acres with something that's diverse and has multiple environmental benefits. She encourages farmers and landowners to look for such opportunities on their own farms.

"If we all just took the 10% of our least valuable acres and put them into some sort of conservation effort, we could mitigate so many of the problems we face," Chris says. "We could benefit wildlife, birds, pollinators, insects. We could mitigate climate change and put carbon back in the soil. We could make our soils better and healthier. We wouldn't have to give up farming – in fact, we'd even make it more profitable." ■

Coming Together to Welcome Everyone

PFI is working to be more inclusive by creating relationships and building trust with Latino Iowans who farm or aspire to farm

PFI welcomes everyone. This includes people of all farming enterprises and philosophies, political affiliations, gender identities, races and ethnicities, and more.

Iowa's population is 10% non-white, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics. Farmer racial backgrounds are less diverse: Only 0.5% of primary operators on Iowa's farms identify as either Black, Indigenous, Asian or multiracial, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the most recent data available.

Over the past few years, PFI members have increasingly requested that Practical Farmers focus on racial equity and increasing inclusivity among our membership. In early 2019, the board of directors voted to use board-designated funds to embark on welcoming Latino Iowans into our membership, and we began work on a project to reach aspiring Latino farmers in Iowa. We started by reaching out to 14 Latino-led organizations that provide services to Latino communities across Iowa. Staff at these organizations told us that many Latino Iowans are unaware of the opportunities to farm beyond a farmworker or laborer position, and that they have limited knowledge about resources and programs that can help aspiring farmers.

"Working with youth and their families, Latino communities are looking for quick and stable opportunities to generate income," said Dawn Martinez Oropeza of *Al Éxito*, a program that works to assist high school students pursuing a higher education. "The difficulty lies around land and home ownership. If people have difficulty purchasing homes, how will they even be able to purchase land to farm?" Lena Avila Robinson, of *Latinos Unidos of Iowa*, said: "It would be beneficial to have resources and educational materials agricultural organizations shared that cater to the Latino community and their needs."

Our ability to connect with Latino farmers has been slow and limited due to difficulty

identifying individuals who are farming. Thus far, we have been able to connect with six Latino farmers across Iowa. Latino farmers from neighboring states have also started participating in our work. Through our conversations with service providers at Latino-led organizations and other partners, we have met several people who are knowledgeable of Latino farmworkers, but not farmers – though some groups argue that farmworkers deserve to be referred to as farmers. Along with the few Latinos who are farming, they are not growing on a large scale. Most are producing on a small scale for their families and communities.

"One of the things I have learned throughout the years of working with Latino farmers is being consistent – actually telling people this is what I am going to do and then following up."

– LUCIA SCHULTZ

Santos Lopez, a beginning farmer in Iowa City, is just at the start of his farm journey. Santos has been farming on 2 acres of land for the past three years, raising chilies, tomatoes and other vegetables, on Sustainable Iowa Land Trust's Phoenix Farm in Morse, about 9 miles northeast of Iowa City. A native Salvadoran, farming in rural Iowa reminds him of his homeland. "I always liked the country," Santos says, speaking in Spanish. "When I am on the farm cultivating, during that time I am occupying my mind on the land, the plants and myself."

Santos also maintains an off-farm job. He has been able to produce a decent yield from his crops, donating produce to people in his community or selling to other local farmers to include in their CSA shares. He would like to scale up his production in the next few seasons, but says doing so has been a challenge without a strong and consistent market stream, and with limited knowledge of how to extend his growing season into the winter.

What We Have Learned So Far

While we are just at the beginning of our efforts to connect with Latino farmers in Iowa, those we have connected with so far have helped us identify barriers and limitations where PFI can work to fill in the gaps. While all beginning and aspiring farmers face barriers to getting started, we have heard from those we've connected with that farmers of color experience unique barriers, including distrust resulting from discrimination, lack of accessible resources, disproportionate difficulty accessing capital and more.

Land access is often the first major barrier to starting a farm. The majority of the Latino farmers we have connected with are farming on rented ground or in their own backyards on a small scale. Those who have some access to land still experience challenges accessing the necessary farm machinery and equipment. These farmers also noted that a lack of knowledge about production practices and potential markets inhibited their success. Knowing the barriers these aspiring farmers face is an important first step in our work, but we must also create meaningful relationships. Building trust and confidence among these communities will come through continued conversation and action as we work to support these aspiring farmers.

Though the barriers are steep, the Latino communities we have connected with have a deep interest in growing food for their families and communities. Several of these farmers had some sort of background in agriculture in their countries of origin, from farmworker jobs or from gardening experience. Interest in farming is strong, but the pathways to begin are unclear. "I think the Latino community has the interest to farm, but they don't have the time," Santos says. "I plant my plants, I go to work and sometimes at night I go to check on my crops. I say to myself, I don't have time, but I push myself to visit them and see what they need. Nobody has taught me how to farm like this. My family planted but only produced enough for the home, not at the level of marketing products."

“I would love to learn more about vegetable production. I never had access to people who could educate me on farming. I know there are people or other farmers who are more educated than me when it comes to crop production. I would want to connect and learn from them.”

- SANTOS LOPEZ



Beginning farmer Santos Lopez releases some baby chickens with his daughter. Santos has been farming Sustainable Iowa Land Trust's Phoenix Farm in Morse, about 9 miles north of Iowa City, for the past three years raising chiles, tomatoes and other vegetables. *Photo courtesy of SILT.*

For the past several years, PFI has also been working with Lutheran Services in Iowa's Global Greens program to build relationships with farmers who came to Iowa as refugees. Through ongoing efforts to strengthen those relationships, we have successfully welcomed some of these farmers into PFI as learners, teachers and peers. We plan to continue building our credibility and trust among Black, Latino, Indigenous and other people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds by listening to their needs, collaborating with existing service providers and developing meaningful programming that addresses the needs of these farmers.

Cultivating Connections Through Trust

We realize there is more to learn and new connections to be made in Iowa's Latino and underrepresented communities. Since we started this work in 2019, we have learned that simply translating documents and inviting Latino Iowans to our network isn't enough to successfully welcome them into PFI. Rather, we need to create ongoing relationships based on trust.

As staff for the Center of Rural Affairs, both Lucia Schulz and Eunice Ramirez spend their time reaching out to Latino farmers encouraging them to network, educate and

lead. Lucia's experience as a migrant worker has helped her connect with Latino farmers in Nebraska. "One of the things I have noticed throughout the years of working with Latino farmers is being consistent – actually telling people this is what I am going to do and then following up," Lucia says. "Say what you mean and mean what you say. There is so much distrust in Latino communities with service providers. Even now, the farmers I met three or four years ago, I still keep in contact with them. They will contact me saying, 'hey Lucia, I need help translating this document,' or 'can you help me set an appointment with an FSA [Farm Services Agency] agent because they sent me a letter.' Consistency for me has been an essential way for breaking down the barrier to accessibility."

"We have to prove ourselves," Eunice adds. "We have to reach out and be consistent, as Lucia mentioned. As English speakers, we have access to resources and understand what is out there. But someone who is Latino and Spanish-speaking, their priority is not being on the computer and researching. They come home, eat dinner, pay bills and prioritize spending time with their families."

Lucia and Eunice both make a point of emphasizing that their own success is based on the success of those they work with. "I let Latino farmers know we're still going to be

here to provide additional opportunities, now and in the future," Lucia says.

Working with SILT, along with the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa in Iowa City, Santos has been able to gain support accessing land. He has also become more aware of his need to build his skills and seek production and marketing guidance so he can expand his farm. PFI will work to connect Santos and other underrepresented farmers like him with experienced farmers in our network.

"My daughter, since she was little, had a strong passion for the rural countryside," Santos says. "Some of this I do for her so that she has access to the land and the countryside. I would love to learn more about vegetable production. I never had access to people who could educate me on farming. I know there are people or other farmers who are more educated than me when it comes to crop production. I would want to connect and learn from them."

Our Latino outreach work is just a start – we are eager to build relationships with beginning and aspiring farmers of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and increase their involvement with PFI as learners and leaders, as we work toward a resilient Iowa. ■

Cooperative Research

Builds *Community*

Practical Farmers' Cooperators' Program involves a community of curious and creative farmers taking a scientific approach to improving their farms. Since 1987, when the program began, farmers have been conducting timely and relevant on-farm research to answer their most challenging farming questions. Knowledge generated from these trials has been shared widely and continues to inform farmers on ways they can be more profitable, better environmental stewards and, ultimately, make their farms more resilient.

Those who participate in on-farm research will tell you it involves a high level of dedication and commitment. This perseverance pays off, however, when participants get to see the results of their research – and when they have a chance to network with others. Each year, cooperators gather in December to share results and observations from their trials, and to make plans for future projects. Often, high-quality conversation emerges. This sharing of ideas and perspectives is one of the main reasons why farmers so highly value the annual Cooperators' Meeting.

Learning from others at the Cooperators' Meeting is a primary motivation to participate

The Cooperators' Meeting is a farmers' meeting – each farmer is expected to stand up and describe what they did, why they did it and what they found. In this sense, farmers truly own their trials. During this meeting, cooperators generate new ideas and design timely and relevant trials to address their most pressing farming questions. Many consider the meeting a reward for the hard work put into research efforts during the year. Here are just a few of the responses we've received from evaluations of recent meetings:

I conduct on-farm trials because it gets me to the Cooperators' Meeting and the opportunity to intimately connect with other farmers – both farmers who farm like me and those who have totally different operations than I do.

My biggest motivation for attending the Cooperators' Meeting every year is knowing that there will be an opportunity to connect with other farmers who have a similar method to approaching questions and challenges on their farms. More than just learning from other farmers and sharing research with other farmers, I feel like my reason for attending is about the discussion and connection.

I really like the opportunity to catch up with farmers in other parts of the state, and not just those in my region who I have the opportunity to see more often.

Projects are often collaborative efforts among several farmers influencing one another and committing to an experiment

together. Projects are also inspired by what we've begun calling "cross-pollination," which occurs when field crop, livestock and horticulture farmers interact and mingle together. When farmers integrate this way, new perspectives emerge and the whole farming landscape is considered, along with different ways of farming. In recent years, participants have heralded these cross-pollination sessions as among their favorite activities at the Cooperators' Meeting, because the resulting sense of fellowship and community inspires confidence to try new things. And trying new things by conducting on-farm research is precisely why PFI's Cooperators' Program exists.

Discussion and good conversation are important elements of the Cooperators' Program. But are the attendees making the jump to actually running trials? Are cooperators finding answers that can help them be more profitable? Are the trials moving the needle on sustainable agricultural production among PFI farmers? Among farmers outside PFI? These are some of the questions cooperators think are important when considering the future of farming and agriculture in Iowa. With each trial cooperators plan and conduct, these questions are never far from mind – and it's these aims they hope to impress on other farmers and potential cooperators.

We spoke to a few dedicated farmer-cooperators to find out how they first connected with the Cooperators' Program, how it has benefitted them and why they remain so committed to on-farm research.

DAVE SCHMIDT

Dave and Meg Schmidt raise cattle, pigs, sheep, chicken and honeybees on their farm, Troublesome Creek Cattle Company, near Exira, Iowa. They have been a part of the Cooperators' Program since 2011 and have completed 22 trials. Their research interests include grazing cover crops and cover crop varieties, and monitoring cattle pasture activity, fly control strategies, and winter feed management and the fatty acid composition of 100% grass-fed beef.

Can you describe what it was like attending your first Cooperators' Meeting?

I think my first Cooperators' Meeting was in February of 2011, but I can't say I really remember that one. The earliest one I do remember was in February of 2012. I presented on the results of the 2011 pasture monitoring project and the winter feed monitoring project. At that time, I was only a few years removed from my time collecting and analyzing wildfire data in the Sierra Nevada, so I was really excited to be applying similar methods to my own data.

[During the 2013 meeting,] Meg and I had trouble with our Jeep in the parking lot. [Former PFI staff member] Luke Gran drove up with [PFI co-founder] Dick Thompson and gave us a ride to the meeting place. Meg remembers sitting near Lorna Wilson – whom she didn't know at the time – who was knitting furiously and said she was expecting a new grandchild at any moment. Since that time, we've gotten to be good friends with the whole Wilson clan.

How has the Cooperators' Program influenced you, your farm or relationships with other PFI members?

For several years after I started raising cattle, it was really hard not to feel like I needed to be monitoring everything. I was probably a little naive and over-enthusiastic, but the Cooperators' Program helped me focus that energy more usefully. I think I have finally given up on expecting black-and-white results from biological trials, at least with livestock. However, no matter the results, I think the process of monitoring – plus collecting and analyzing – data can't help but make the participant a better farmer.

I think the research and results are important, but what really matters is the people and those connections. Meg and I really enjoy going to the livestock sessions of the Cooperators' Meeting because it's a smaller group of people we know well and with whom we look forward to comparing notes. There are almost always a few new people that we like getting to know too. The enthusiasm of other cooperators, such as Jon Bakehouse, is infectious and I've enjoyed discussing various questions with him for quite a few years now.

Being a cooperator is a commitment. What makes it worthwhile?

To me, at least, the Cooperators' Program is the heart of PFI. When you participate as a cooperator, you have the opportunity to not only improve yourself and your farm management, but maybe also pass on some invaluable knowledge to someone who might have had the same questions as you. Some of the early trials we did gave us a solid baseline for understanding our management options so that now we don't have to question as much every single decision we make.



Top: Dave and Meg Schmidt and family

What would you say to someone who might be interested in becoming a cooperator?

Do it! Don't be intimidated – you don't need to be a scientist and you don't need to be able to analyze the data. Several years ago, I remember Stefan Gailans and Sarah Carlson asking me when I was going to try a cover crops trial. I didn't really know anything about cover crops and was horrified at the idea of participating as an inexperienced outsider. Meg and I ended up jumping in; we learned a lot and were able to contribute to an interesting study in the process.

PFI will help you design the methods, analyze the data and summarize the results. At best, you will contribute to the knowledge of many others who read the research results and also improve your own farm management. At worst, you will learn how to do a better job systematically collecting and recording data for the next project. And maybe you'll get to make some new friends along the way.

(Continued on page 12 →)

EMILY FAGAN

Emily Fagan raises organic vegetables at Humble Hands Harvest in Decorah, Iowa, with her cousin, Hannah Breckbill. They sell produce to local restaurants, at farmers markets and through a CSA. Emily has been part of the Cooperators' Program since 2019, and has completed five trials. Emily's first trials were a cabbage variety trial and sweet potato enterprise budget. In 2020, Emily and Hannah continued the cabbage variety trial, added a spinach variety trial and compared potting soils for transplant suitability.

Can you describe what it was like attending your first Cooperators' Meeting?

My first meeting was really fun. I went in without any clear research question, mostly just wanted to see what it was like and see what everyone else was interested in, how trials were organized, etc. I expected to be a little intimidated, but turned out not to be – a room full of curious vegetable farmers is always a good room to be in!

How has the Cooperators' Program influenced you, your farm or relationships with other PFI members?

I do see a difference in myself. I'm more inclined to follow through with questions or new ideas I have, and be organized about testing them out. I'm always thinking, "it would be interesting to see if this new method might be better. I wonder if I could do a trial for it?" The Cooperators' Program gives me an outlet for my nerdy, data-loving self, which I really enjoy.

It has also given me a deeper sense of connection with the other veggie farmers in PFI, and that team kind of feeling is really motivating for me. The feeling of being trusted to collect good data and have interesting ideas is empowering. Though we don't see each other during the season, usually, I still feel connected to the folks I'm doing a trial with. It's comforting to know that there are other folks out there doing the same work as I am, with the same passion.

Being a cooperator is a commitment. What makes it worthwhile?

It's worth it to me because I know that the work I put in will be useful to other farmers. There isn't as much information about growing vegetables out there as there could be, and I like to think that the work of this program can help ease the way for other folks.

What would you say to someone who might be interested in becoming a cooperator?

I would say come to a meeting and try it out! Even if you don't have a trial in mind, the curiosity in the room is contagious and it's really fun to listen to people's ideas and learn how trials are implemented.

DAN WILSON

Dan Wilson farms with his family at Seven Wilson Farm near Paullina, Iowa. Their 660-acre diversified farm includes organic corn, soybeans, hay and a variety of small grains; an organic dairy, grass-fed beef herd, sheep flock, pasture-raised



Top: Emily Fagan **Second from top:** From left to right: Dan Wilson, Lorna Wilson and Torray Wilson at the 2018 field day their family hosted.

broilers and laying hens; and farrow-to-finish hogs. Dan has been a part of the Cooperators' Program since 1994 and has completed 16 trials over the years. Dan's research interests have explored the efficacy of twin-row ridge planters, the value of composting bedding-manure mix from swine hoophouses, barley as an alternative to corn in swine grower-finish rations and soil quality indicators.

How did you get involved with the Cooperators' Program?

My brother, Colin, and I had just taken over the farm from my father in the late 1980s. We had just switched over to ridge-till when our good friend, Paul Mugge, told us we should join PFI. We were not that involved with the Cooperators' Program at first, since our real focus was on livestock instead of row crops. But it didn't take too long until PFI was doing research on using small grains in swine rations [and we became more involved]. We were growing barley at that time and were trying to figure out the best way to use the most barley in our swine rations.

How has the Cooperators' Program influenced you, your farm or relationships with other PFI members?

Through the Cooperators' Program, we have developed much closer relationships with other cooperators, which has developed into a trust that I don't think would be there if it weren't for the time and conversation that was involved with the program. By being involved with the Cooperators' Program, I feel I have become much more open to different ideas. I think one of the great aspects of the Cooperators'

Program is that it keeps evolving as farming and the people involved keep changing.

Being a cooperator is a commitment. What makes it worthwhile?

The answers you gain and the friendships you make are worth all the commitment it takes to be involved with the program.

What would you say to someone who might be interested in becoming a cooperator?

I would say to anyone that is interested in becoming a cooperator to go for it. The rewards are much greater than the commitment.

JAN LIBBEY AND TIM LANDGRAF

Lifetime members Jan Libbey and Tim Landgraf raise vegetables and pastured poultry at One Step at a Time Garden in Kanawha, Iowa. They have been part of the Cooperators' Program since 1999 and have conducted 17 trials. Their research has looked at the effect of pastured-raised poultry on nutrient content; aster yellows, a disease of garlic; and energy used during seed starting. Jan and Tim have also collected fruit and vegetable production data to create production histories specific to Iowa, and conducted multiple enterprise budgets.

How did you get involved with the Cooperators' Program?

Jan: Our involvement began with a conversation with Rick [Exner, who managed PFI's on-farm research program for many years]. We were trying to figure out what type of project would work best for our farm. For instance, in the beginning we were being labeled as hobby farmers, which we are not. We are hort farmers, so the language had to evolve over time. We were early on with our farming when we began. We had about 50 types of vegetables then and did not need much planting space, so variety trials did not really make sense.

Tim: The issue in the beginning [was that] PFI was doing a lot of replicated trials with row crops, which worked really well with row crops. But with CSA production, [we] only had so much feet of each crop. So it was hard to figure out what would work best with vegetables to create a replicated trial.

Jan: We came across a study from Minnesota that looked into standardizing analyses of farming economic benefits. Between Rick and us, we were able to compare the results from our farm with data from other farms. There was a lot of potential to figure out the best process for our farm. In late 2002, Tim actually quit his off-farm job based on the results of the study in 1999 on the CSA farming economic benefits in order to farm full-time.

How has the Cooperators' Program influenced you, your farm or relationships with other PFI members?

Tim: By participating in studies with other farmers, you are able to get to know other farmers better. You get to learn about their operations. You really get to understand who people are as individuals. At the annual conference, [where the Cooperators' Meeting took place in the early years], we

would first start out as a big group and then meet into little groups afterwards with just your hort group, livestock group, row crop group. Then we would come together and discuss what we are all interested in. It's fascinating to hear about what other groups are interested in.

Jan: By participating in this program, it has seeped into our way of viewing our farm and the way we think – which is why it is hard to articulate. I feel this characteristic of looking at one's farm through a critical, analytical lens is pretty common among farmers drawn to PFI or influenced by PFI programming and networking. That's one of the reasons I find PFI, and especially the Cooperators' Program, so energizing. The curiosity factor is strong and supported.

Being a cooperator is a commitment. What makes it worthwhile?

Tim: If you ask good questions at the beginning, take the time to make the data consistent and accurate. If you take the time to do things right, you will often find that you will learn something about your farm practices. This is something I really wanted to know. Then you can learn from the data. It's also very helpful when other farmers are interested in the same question – then you can compare across Iowa. It brings more purpose to the farm.

What would you say to someone who might be interested in becoming a cooperator?

Jan: It is a great place for creative energy. These are some of the smartest farmers in the state. It is very inspiring. Even if you don't come away with new information, it gives you hope.



Left: Tim Landgraf with his tomato trial. **Right:** Jan Libbey



PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA
**COOPERATORS'
PROGRAM**

*Find out more about farmer-led research
and the PFI Cooperators' Program
here on our website:
practicalfarmers.org/research*

Staying Focused on Community in Our Strategic Planning

Practical Farmers of Iowa's dedicated membership is working purposefully toward an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

PFI is so fortunate to have so many farmer leaders willing to teach each other. Most of you reading this have had the opportunity to attend a farmer-led event, and know they are top-notch. At these events, farmers talk some about why they are trying the things they are trying. But mostly, they share how they are farming. Often, they include highly detailed information, from enterprise budgets to cultivator settings.

Donna Warhover, of Mount Vernon, says, "I tell people all the time that becoming a part of PFI was the single most important thing I did when I decided I wanted to begin farming. The education and support I've received through events, mentors, and peers has been incredible. I'm so grateful for the good work PFI is doing to help farmers." Donna talks about education she's received through PFI, but also about peers and support.

Practical Farmers spends substantial time cultivating community among members. This is because research – along with members' feedback and decades of farmer-to-farmer community-building at PFI – has proven that a supportive community is integral to farmer-to-farmer learning.

Investing in people and relationships brings about positive changes that move us closer to our vision. As we created the next strategic plan (that will be unveiled at our annual conference!), we did so with the importance of community in mind. During the process, we also asked through visioning sessions, and through our survey, about the meaning of community to our members.

As you all know, Practical Farmers sends out a comprehensive survey every three years. THANK YOU for filling this out! Half of you participated, and the feedback you shared provides a trove of indispensable data that helps us see how we are doing serving your needs, as well as how we need to plan for the future. Our soon-to-be complete strategic plan had goals around building community:

Goal:

90% of members report an increased sense of community.

Member survey result:

76% report this

Goal:

80% report they have formed personal or business relationships through PFI.

Member survey result:

73% report this



Top: Wendy Johnson (left) hosted a grazing group on her farm near Charles City in June 2019.

Below: Jill Beebout (right) hosted field day in May 2017.

Here are some comments from the survey regarding community:

"Having a network of farmers and researchers to reach out to is invaluable."

– *Seth Watkins*, Clarinda

"The recent Holistic Management workshop was exactly what I needed to find colleagues and potentially important friendships to help me move forward."

– *Shami Morse*, La Vista, NE

"These connections have kept us inspired and connected, and helped us feel purposeful in sharing and receiving knowledge and working towards a revitalized rural landscape."

– *Kayla Koether*, Decorah

"The PFI community has become like a second family. It's fun to keep in touch with people from around the state. PFI members always seem willing to share what they are doing, what works and what doesn't."

– *Eric Madsen*, Audubon

"Friends that I've met through PFI have mentored me, helped me design soil plans, lent me tools and generally have been some of the most supportive folks in my corner."

– *Monika Owczarski*, Des Moines

"I have new friends through PFI whose presence bring me joy, and their farming practices and philosophies have helped in the evolution of my farm."

– *Jon Yaqula*, Iowa City

"Through PFI, I have made lifelong friends I can call on at any time."

– *Steve Weis*, Osage

"They have helped me build the confidence and skills to diversify my farm enterprises."

– *Josh Nelson*, Belmond

"All of my peer farmer friends are PFI members, and I met them through PFI. I did not come from a family farming background or grow up in Iowa, even, so I have not had that tradition or support or credibility to draw from. PFI in many ways has served that role for me, giving me a place and community in Iowa agriculture among people who were born here and have long family farming traditions. I have always felt embraced."

– *Jordan Scheibel*, Grinnell

"PFI's community fosters a great deal of learning and fellowship in working on positive changes to our farm's future. These connections make the work seem possible, and the sharing of ideas is so valuable."

– *Peg Bouska*, Iowa City

"They make us feel like we are not alone in trying to change how we farm. Others are going through the same struggles trying to improve their operations."

– *Rory Worthington*, Pleasantville

"PFI is a critical support network for our farming family. We chose to move home to Iowa in large part because we were familiar with PFI's resources and knew we'd feel well supported with PFI!"

– *Natasha Hegmann*, Elkport

"The PFI community has affected nearly every aspect of our farming life and was critical in establishing our social circle."

– *Jill Beebout*, Chariton

In March, we held three visioning sessions at which 33 members elaborated on some of the questions we asked in the survey. Members let us know that strengthening and expanding PFI's community should be a top priority. They have a deep personal connection to Practical Farmers, and have developed multiple lasting relationships through PFI. Practical Farmers members expressed a sense of belonging and support that helps them innovate and make changes. They appreciate that PFI is a big tent, with room for all who have an interest in agriculture.

Here are a few quotes from visioning session participants:

"PFI is a social support system for those willing to try something new or something old."

– *Beth Larabee*, Ames

"Without PFI, I wouldn't have the sense of community that I do. Without that sense of community, especially when you're starting out, it can be lonely and you question yourself all the time. This makes it harder to make decisions. Without PFI, I'd be behind in terms of knowledge. I'd have to learn on my own without the PFI community to learn from. I'd just be behind in general."

– *Wendy Johnson*, Charles City

"The community that I'm connected to through PFI is one of the reasons I'm farming, and remained in Iowa to farm."

– *Molly Schintler*, Mechanicsville

One question we wanted clarity on was about what PFI's role should be in creating community across Iowa, beyond our supportive membership network. Suzanne Castello, of Grinnell, expressed what visioning session participants felt PFI's role is in building healthier communities: "As PFI forwards the causes of mid- and small-sized farms, it is actively contributing to community. The more mid- and small-sized farms there are, the stronger Iowa's communities are." We heard that by helping all kinds of farmers, PFI makes positive ripple effects in rural communities. ■

PFI community, thank you. I hope these quotes from fellow members inspire you as much as they do me. Together as a community, we are changing agriculture for the better.

Building Community and High Tunnels After the Derecho

When the powerful straight-line windstorm known as a derecho tore across Iowa in August, wreaking havoc on trees, power lines, crops and buildings, high tunnels were among the many farm structures damaged or destroyed. These buildings help extend the growing season, and for farmers raising specialty crops – like vegetables, flowers, garden plants and more – losing them was a big blow to their farm operations.

In the storm's wake, the PFI community rallied to help members who lost these critical farm structures. During the weekend of Oct. 9-12, PFI hosted high tunnel builds at Donna Warhover's Morning Glory Farm near Mount Vernon, Laura Krouse's Abbe Hills Farm near Mount Vernon, and Eric and Ann Franzenburg's Pheasant Run Farm near Van Horne. With positive attitudes, area farmers came out to help rebuild the high tunnels while learning about their construction – and fostering important connections in the process.

The builds were led by Adam Montri, a PFI member and high tunnel expert from Bath, Michigan, who also operates Ten Hens Farm. Because of the pandemic, extra precautions were taken: Groups were limited to a maximum of nine participants, and everyone wore face masks. The smaller crew and shorter timeframe meant none of the high tunnels was finished. Still, the familiar sense of barn-raising that comes with a PFI high tunnel build lingered as the hoops were hoisted. Work began each day at 9 a.m. To help maintain social distancing, crews split tasks and ate a catered lunch at a distance – but there was still plenty of opportunity to ask questions about high tunnels and discuss each other's growing seasons.

High Tunnels as a PFI Tradition

High tunnels, closely related to greenhouses, are covered structures that protect fruit and vegetable crops from rain and extreme heat. They can range from small "caterpillar tunnels" that fit in the backyard of a house, to 30-by-96-foot structures; and they can be stationary or moveable. High tunnels can significantly extend growing seasons, improve quality and allow farmers to grow a wider range of horticultural crops.

That extra growing time is critical for Donna. "High tunnels have really allowed me to increase the length of my growing season," she says. "We start in February, harvest in April for commercial accounts, then my CSA begins the first of May. During April and May,

I am only harvesting from the high tunnels. From a financial standpoint, [having them] has really made farming so much more sustainable." Laura also attests to the financial benefits, estimating that crops from her two high tunnels represent half of her income.

Building a high tunnel, however, takes time and many hands. Knowing they can

"Due to the extensive damage we had, it was nice to put something up and see something new. We'd been in the tear-down phase for a couple of months, and it was a really good mental change [to see] that things at some point in time are going to get better."

– ERIC FRANZENBURG

substantially improve farm resilience, PFI has hosted five builds over the last decade: in 2009 at Abbe Hills Farm, 2010 at Genuine Faux Farm, 2012 at TableTop Farm, 2015 at Prairie Sky Farm and 2017 at Deal's Orchard. Adam led four of these, and at each, one tunnel was built to completion. Because of the necessary safety restrictions this year, he says the builds had a slightly different vibe. "It felt different in that it wasn't just one place with a lot of hands moving along," Adam says. "But things went incredibly smoothly, given everything."

After a rough year, the smoothness of the builds was a relief. The pandemic forced many farmers to rethink how to sell their items, since farmers markets and CSAs had to operate safer or less frequently. Then, just when tomatoes, peppers and eggplants were coming into peak production, and fall crops like broccoli and cauliflower were strengthening their stalks, the derecho hit.

Building Back From a Devastating Derecho

The storm started in Nebraska and gained strength as it moved across Iowa on its 700-mile trek. By the time it reached eastern Iowa, peak winds in some places hit 140 mph – a new state record for a non-tornadic wind gust. The ferocity rivaled a Category 4 hurricane. Unlike tornados, however, derechos produce long-lasting straight-line winds, which can be devastating for high tunnels, with their lightweight covering, as well as structures like silos – not to mention crops, livestock, trees, power lines and more.

Beyond damage to high tunnels, horticulture farmers emerged from the storm to find flattened crops, shredded crop leaves, fruit knocked from plants and snapped stalks. The high winds ripped Donna's high tunnel from the ground, sending it flying into her neighbor's soybean field. Laura's tunnels were taken out alongside trees, crops and soil. The Franzenburgs, who built their high tunnels to focus on flower production, lost the tunnels, greenhouses, buildings and acres of flowers and crops. After assessing the damage, they and other farmers spent the next few weeks picking up and hauling storm debris, disassembling tangled steel, triaging salvageable crops and assessing their capacity to meet production commitments for the rest of the season.

With horticulture farmers facing such extensive damage, PFI's horticulture program manager at the time, Liz Kolbe – who now serves as PFI's education and engagement director – reached out to Adam about leading high tunnel builds at a few hard-hit Iowa farms. Ultimately, they came up with an

(Continued on page 18 →)

T.D. Holub (left), Adam Montri (on the skidloader) and Jason Grimm (driving the skidloader) secure the channel lock that will hold the plastic cover in place on Laura Krouse's high tunnel. On the ground, Marty Roth and Roger Schrock install a storm door salvaged from the old tunnel.

“It felt different in that it wasn’t just one place with a lot of hands moving along. But things went incredibly smoothly, given everything.”

- ADAM MONTRI





“I don’t think other people realize how magnificent it is. It’s a lot more than just getting the high tunnel back up. I’m overwhelmingly satisfied [with the build] and couldn’t have asked for a better group.”

- LAURA KROUSE

(Clockwise from top left): Kristine Lang and Bonnie Riggan hold steady while Bill Warhover trims a metal sidewall component at Morning Glory Farm; the build crew at Pheasant Run Farm checks the level of the hip board. From left to right: Phil Ricks, Patrick Rose, Max Friton, Jeff Sindelar and Eric Jensen; Laura Krouse stands by her completed high tunnel, which volunteer helpers from her CSA, Sundog Farm, Wild Woods Farm, Trowel and Error Farm and Rainbow Roots Farm helped her finish in early November.

(← Continued from pg. 16)

intense weekend for an intense storm: building three high tunnels in four days.

Building Community While Gaining Skills

The build timelines were ambitious. Typically, a workshop will build one tunnel over three days with 15 attendees, and a little extra work from Adam and the hosts. Because of the extensive damage, Adam and Liz schemed a format to run three builds over two workshop days on each farm, with nine people at each. Talking with the farmers, they knew that even

if the high tunnels were not completely finished, the builds could give each farm a huge boost on their re-building efforts.

While Liz coordinated logistics, scheduling and safety with Adam and the host farms, Carmen Black of Local Harvest CSA helped recruit volunteers for the builds within the Iowa City community. “Although I didn’t talk to her directly, Carmen was definitely the power behind the build,” says Ilsa Dewald, of Radical Patch Cooperative Farm in Iowa City, who attended Donna Warhover’s build. “She really motivated me, helping me realize ‘yes, I’m going to commit to [the build],

reschedule my CSA harvest, take the weekend and do that.”

Before the builds got underway, the host farms had done as much site preparation as possible – leveling the site, squaring corners and pounding in most of the ground posts. They had also gathered a range of tools, most importantly 10- to 15-foot A-frame ladders, a bucket or skidloader and as many impact drivers as they could borrow or buy. Once all the ground posts were in, attendees worked atop ladders and along the sidewalls to assemble, place, align and secure steel bows, purlins and bracing, and footboards and hip boards along the sidewalls.

Because Adam couldn't be in three places at once, each farm had a designated foreperson to lead the build while Adam was off-site. Bill Warhover and Eric Franzenburg served as forepersons at their home farms, while T.D. Holub, of Garden Oasis Farm near Coggon, served as foreperson at Abbe Hills Farm. Adam's expertise, gained from building hundreds of high tunnels, helped each build run smoothly. Moving from site to site and communicating via text, he catalyzed each build's progress by demonstrating techniques, setting up stations, powering through the hardest jobs and contributing to complex design decisions.

Attendees expressed multiple reasons for volunteering to help with such physically taxing work: wanting to help rebuild after the storm, gathering with other farmers during a tough year and a desire to learn about high tunnel construction. Carly McAndrews and Bryant Mann, of Trowel and Error farm in Iowa City, knew Laura Krouse and wanted to help her rebuild. But they were also curious about the process of building a tunnel in case they wanted one. After learning more about high tunnels at the build, they realized how a high tunnel would benefit them. "We're always looking for opportunities to learn more and get hands-on construction experience," Carly says. "I didn't expect how inspired I would be to really want a high tunnel one day."

Patrick Rose, who operates Rose Farm near Norwalk, attended the Franzenburg build but visited the other farms to compare high tunnel manufacturers and designs. He says he felt especially grateful for Adam's guidance, and for the conversations with other attendees. Ilsa Dewald attended out of curiosity to learn about high tunnel construction, especially given the three builds happening simultaneously. Her friend and farming partner, Joe Klingelutz, attended Laura's build and Ilsa attended Donna's build so they could compare designs, methods and high tunnel manufacturers. "It was interesting to see how differently [the builds] went, because the farms were not building the same tunnel," Joe says. "Also, skill-building was important, wanting to get better specifically at high tunnel building, and it was nice to use more power tools."

A favorite part of any PFI event is the opportunity to commune and connect with other farmers. During a summer when every PFI field day was hosted online, being together felt especially poignant. Donna says, "Getting to hear peoples' stories, taking time to just laugh and visit, is something I've missed this season, since everything has

"Getting to hear people's stories, taking time to just laugh and visit, is something I've missed this season, since everything has been so distanced and safe for our shareholders and community in general."

- DONNA WARHOVER

been so distanced and safe for our shareholders and community in general." The sense of community extended across builds too: If a farm was short on steel bands, frame pieces or a bag of screws, the other farms sent over their extras. For the farm hosts, the community support offered a hopeful counterpoint to the stresses of the past several months. "Due to the extensive damage we had, it was nice to put something up and see something new," Eric says. "We'd been in the tear-down phase for a couple of months, and it was a really good mental change [to see] that things at some point in time are going to get better."

Beyond the immeasurable value of rallying as a community and strengthening those bonds, the builds offered valuable knowledge about the tools, tasks, and importantly, the logistics of building a high tunnel. The skills and knowledge gained will help participants on their own farms, and also better position them to help farming friends during future builds.

Optimism and Inspiration for the Future

Carly found inspiration from the high tunnel build, and wants to expand from her caterpillar tunnel to a high tunnel. However, she and Bryant will wait until they find a more permanent location for their farm to make the investment. Patrick is pleased he attended, and with his newfound experience plans to build two high tunnels, with help from friends and others, as soon as he gets his flowers out of the ground. He has pieces of the high tunnel kits on hand, and is waiting on other pieces to arrive soon. "I would encourage people to volunteer for these builds," he says. "Not only do you get to help someone in need, you gain experience and you gain new friends or a network of people doing the same things you're doing."

For Donna, it's difficult to determine the future, given the year has required one adjustment after another. But she is optimistic that the renewed appreciation for community and local farms, especially in the wake of

COVID-19, will continue. "For my shareholders, it's been a great year, being able to obtain locally grown, healthy food in a very easy, minimal-contact way during such a stressful and crazy year," she says. "I'm hopeful for next year that people will continue to support local growers."

With so much destruction on their farm, where winds may have reached 140 mph, Eric and Ann will continue the work of rebuilding. "This is the first step in getting the farm back on track," Eric says of the high tunnel build. "It gives you momentum going into the rest of the fall and winter." After making significant progress on the high tunnel, he feels the farm is headed in the right direction. He's even made specific plans for what the new tunnel will hold: "Most of it will house flowers or vegetables, but I'm going to play around with putting blueberries and fruit crops in there, and see if it would be economical."

In early November, Laura was able to get her high tunnel finished, with help from some of her CSA members and crew from Sundog Farm, Wild Woods Farm, Trowel and Error Farm and Rainbow Roots Farm. She says her neighbors comment often on her tunnel being rebuilt. "I don't think other people realize how magnificent it is," Laura says. "It's a lot more than just getting the high tunnel back up. I'm overwhelmingly satisfied [with the build] and couldn't have asked for a better group."

For everyone who participated, the high tunnel builds represented not just a classic PFI-style learning opportunity, but a perfect example of the power of a supportive network. "It was a very powerful community-building opportunity, and a skill-building one," Ilsa says. "I just feel very fortunate to have great support systems in our community." "The farming community around here is very strong," Joe adds. "I'm friends with a lot of the people who went to this high tunnel build, and it feels really good to have an impact in your community." ■

Learn More

To learn more about technical aspects of building a high tunnel, visit:

- practicalfarmers.org/workshop-recap-high-tunnel-build-at-prairie-sky-farm
- practicalfarmers.org/prairie-sky-farm-high-tunnel-build-2015-the-photos

To view videos of the scope of derecho damage at Morning Glory farm, Pheasant Run Farm and Abbe Hills Farm, visit practicalfarmers.org/resources and type "derecho" to filter results.

CROP-LIVESTOCK

INTEGRATION: *Three Ideas*

By Meghan Filbert

The more we learn about soil health and using agriculture to mimic natural ecosystems, the more we realize the benefits of including livestock in cropping systems. PFI farmers are exploring various ways to integrate livestock on our landscape, and finding what does and doesn't work for them. Their creativity is impressive – and necessary, if we are to meet the tenets of soil health.

This article explores three tiers of integration, each delivering a suite of benefits to the farms and farmers – and contributing to the revitalization of our rural communities.

Through these farmers, we're learning that reintroducing livestock doesn't mean forsaking the past for a wholesale embrace of the new. Instead, these farmers are showing how blending past and present agriculture practices and technology can help us find solutions, today, to integrate livestock on the land.

Cover Crops Grazed by the Neighbors' Cows

Near Udell, in south-central Iowa, John Burger and his uncle, Richard, raise row crops and have been experimenting with cover crops for five years. A few years ago, they invited their neighbor, Craig Swaby, a cattle producer who grazes pasture adjacent to the Burgers' crop fields, to graze their cover crops.

"This is the third or fourth year Craig has grazed them," John says. "Craig is a young farmer and my uncle, who is the landowner, was interested in trying to help him out. He needed more land and we knew there was some benefit with intensive rotational grazing. We know that, through the principle of biodiversity, more species per unit equals more productivity. Our motives were to help Craig out and enhance soil productivity."

Craig has a 15-foot no-till drill that he uses to drill cereal rye on the Burgers' fields at no charge. Richard pays for the rye. In 2020, Craig drilled the rye on Oct. 31, hoping to graze it twice in the spring before the Burgers planted to soybeans. He gets one grazing on years when the field is planted to corn. Craig grazes his group of about 130 yearling calves in strips throughout the 35 acres of cover crops, then opens the gate to his pasture when the cattle need to be let off the cover crops. This experiment has been successful because of how simple it is to move cows back and forth from cover crops to pasture.

"It also depends a great deal on the individual you allow on your land," John says. "Craig is not your ordinary cattle person. He has a degree in animal science. We notice how he manages his cows and he has his herd trained to electric fence. There are others I'd be cautious about – it's easy to let all the cows out and leave them in a field for a long time and cause compaction."

Compaction is John's biggest concern. When looking for someone to graze your cover crops, John



From left to right: John Burger, Richard Burger and Craig Swaby

recommends an interview and finding someone with a proven history of proper herd management, not someone just looking to rent ground to feed cows. “The right partner is someone who has a vested interest in a long-term relationship with their neighbors,” John says.

Craig and the Burgers don’t have a formal contract; the arrangement is based on a verbal understanding and mutual respect for one another. “If we were doing this on several thousand acres with more than one individual, there would need to be more definition,” John notes. When planting their fields, the Burgers wait to plant the 35 acres Craig grazes until last, to give Craig the longest grazing window possible. Because the parcel is relatively small, John says it’s easy to manage planting it last, which usually means it’s planted 10 days behind the other fields. That extra time, however, means significantly more grazing time for Craig.

Because the setup has been so successful so far, the Burgers like to “keep it simple,” planting a cereal rye cover crop, rather than experimenting with cover crop mixes. “We’re pretty happy using one cover crop because it’s really tough,” John says. “It grows fast, is relatively cheap and we can seed it late mixed with fertilizer. And it’s giving Craig feed value.”

Grazing Between Wide Corn Rows

Robert Alexander raises organic row crops and livestock near Granville, in northwestern Iowa, and has been experimenting with planting corn in 60-inch row-widths and interseeding cover crops between the rows. The potential to use these cover crops as forage and add more grazing days is a primary motivator for Robert.

In 2019, he seeded buckwheat, cereal rye, collards, cowpeas, crimson clover, phacelia, rapeseed and winter peas on July 8. The cover crop cocktail was interseeded into 100-day-maturity corn planted on June 6. Robert had heard of sheep grazing in standing corn before and wanted to try it for himself. “I turned my sheep in on Sept. 10, and that was too late,” he says. “Really, that’s when I should have been pulling them out. I learned you need to have the sheep out before the ears start pulling away from the corn stalks.”

Robert grazed 55 newly weaned lambs in 20-by-550-foot strips made of two strands of polywire, moving them every 24 hours. “We moved them fast because we wanted them to eat the cover crops and not the corn,” he says. “But this meant we left a lot of the cover crop forage behind.” Before he switched to a once-daily move, the lambs stayed in their first strip for two days. “They ate a



(Above): Newly-weaned lambs start grazing a cover crop cocktail after being released into standing corn planted in rows 60 inches apart. **(Below):** These specks of white are lambs grazing in standing corn planted in wide, 60-inch rows at Robert Alexander’s farm in northwest Iowa.

(Continued on page 22 →)



(← Continued from pg. 21)

lot of the bottom corn leaves, but then we noticed there were ears knocked to the ground with kernels missing.” The paddock was set up so the lambs also had access to a grassy buffer strip and waterway. The sheep grazed the buffer strip and waterway first, then slowly worked their way into the corn rows.

This experiment informed Robert of what he’d do differently in the future. He concluded he had planted his corn too late, which set back the cover crop planting date and made weed control challenging. He also realized he should have started grazing the lambs earlier, ideally in August. Robert lambs in May and weans 90 days later. He’d need to make sure the timing would line up to graze the weaned lambs in the corn. In 2018, he turned ewes and their lambs into standing corn, and the ewes jumped on the stalks to knock them over. They ate the leaves first then started in on the grain husks, going for the ears last. Fortunately, weaned lambs aren’t big enough to knock over the stalks.

In the future, Robert wants to try a six-year diversified crop rotation with one year of corn, one year of soybeans and one year of corn, followed by three years of a pasture and hay mix. He’ll rotationally graze the pastures similar to how he grazed in 2020 – 12-hour moves across 22 acres. After six years, he intends to use his stand of pasture and hay as fertility for his corn. Integrating livestock into crop rotations can be a dynamic, ever-changing process.

The Stock Cropper

Instead of 60 inches, Zack Smith, of Buffalo Center, leaves 20-foot swaths between plots of corn and soybeans so he can integrate livestock directly into the crop operation – a system he calls “stock cropping.” Zack describes his system as “the intersection and cross-leveraging of livestock and crops together in the field happening dynamically at the same time.” Zack and his business partner, Shelden Stevermer, have been experimenting with strip intercropping since 2010. When they first started, they were trying to achieve the “solar corridor” effect by planting soybeans between corn rows in hopes of getting a production boost in the corn. But they found they were always frustrated by the poor growth of the beans.



Zack Smith coined the term Stock Cropping and defines it “as the intersection and cross leveraging of livestock and crops together in the field.

“Instead of having a loser crop in the middle of the row, a friend suggested trying livestock instead of crops,” says Zack, who launched the stock cropper idea in June 2020. “This project is the genesis of two middle-aged, 41-year-old farmers having a midlife crisis on the direction on our farms and where we think the future is going.” The idea of stock cropping is rooted in helping small farmers find innovative ways to boost profitability by doing things differently and more efficiently.

The system works like this: In the 20-foot swaths between the crops, Zack and Shelden planted a variety of forages for sheep, goats, pigs and poultry to graze. Zack consulted with PFI member and forage agronomist Margaret Smith, at Albert Lea Seed House, on the best mix of plants. Together, they came up with a mix of annual ryegrass, Sudangrass, oats, forage rape and field peas.

“We had to find a way to confine the livestock, so we designed and manufactured a mobile barn unit called the ClusterCluck 5000,” Zack says. The barn is autonomous, and moves slowly down the swaths of forage with the help of a winch. The pen in front of the mobile barn houses the goats and sheep, who get the first pick of the forages. At the center of the barn is a shelter under a roof, which is angled to collect rainwater and used as the animal’s drinking water. The center of the unit also houses the animals’ supplemental feed. The pigs, which are kept in a pen off the back, also have access to the shelter but are kept separated from the small ruminants. A flock of broilers follows in a separate structure behind the mobile barn.

Describing the system as a “regenerative circle,” Zack says: “The thing we are really excited about is having self-sufficiency in nutrient cycling. We want to have row crops in the field grown specifically for the purpose of feeding animals the following year. On the flip side, the animals move through the strips and lay down a plethora of biodiverse manure to build fertility and interact with soil biology, making a rich place to plant crops the following year.”

Next year, Zack aims to improve his forage plan, which will include multiple forage species with multiple planting dates. He has already planted cereal rye this fall. Since the mobile barn doesn’t revisit the same swath for at least a month, he may try reseeding off the back of the mobile barn. He and Shelden will also experiment with integrating cattle into the system. As for his crops, he wants to grow corn and field peas as feedstuffs for the livestock.

The profitability plan includes direct-marketing pasture-raised meat. Zack explains it as “walking the value off the field in non-commodity form.” As Zack told Amy Mayer, with Iowa Public Radio when she interviewed him for a story about his stock cropping set up that aired Oct. 23, he foresees that a farmer could eventually put 30 ClusterCluck mobile barns on an 80-acre field and, in addition to crops, raise 200 sheep, 200 goats, 450 pigs and 9,000 chickens in a season. That level of livestock integration would require dedicated livestock workers, and probably a marketing person or team. Creating jobs on a diverse farm operation, Zack says, will help make living in a rural area plausible for families that don’t already own land and don’t see a path toward buying it. “I don’t know that we could get back to 16 [families], but man, if it was eight instead of one, what a change that could be for rural communities.” ■

Learn More

www.iowapublicradio.org/agriculture/2020-10-23/iowa-farmer-invents-cluster-cluck-5000-to-bring-livestock-back-to-crop-fields



GOT COVER CROPS BUT NO LIVESTOCK?

The new Midwest Grazing Exchange website aims to connect livestock farmers with landowners – it's like Tinder for cows!

Finding ways to integrate livestock back on the landscape has the potential to significantly benefit farmers, the environment and rural communities. From creating opportunities for beginning farmers, to improving the soil, to helping make cover crops profitable, livestock are often a missing piece in Midwestern agricultural systems, where the grazing of vast herds of bison and elk were vital parts of the historical ecosystem.

But accessing land to graze, or finding livestock farmers to partner with, can be a barrier to expanding integrated crop-livestock systems. A new website by the Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group – a network of grazing educators in the Upper Midwest that includes Practical Farmers of Iowa – seeks to address this challenge.

The Midwest Grazing Exchange (midwestgrazingexchange.com) is a free matchmaking service that aims to connect graziers and landowners who live in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin. Graziers can search for forage to graze and landowners can search for livestock to graze their land.

The website lets users:

- search listings, including through an interactive map with filters for criteria like season, land or livestock type
- create listings of what land or livestock they have to offer
- create a free account to save listings of interest, add new listings, see contact details and message other users
- browse a curated list of grazing resources, including examples of grazing lease agreements and contracts
- explore the benefits regenerative grazing for both landowners and livestock owners

The website also lists grazing specialists and organizations offering grazing support for each state participating in the exchange.

“The Midwest Grazing Exchange is unique because it serves multiple states in the Upper Midwest and expands beyond cover crop grazing. All grazing scenarios, including woodland and urban grazing, are represented. We want to unlock the plethora of benefits that come with well-managed grazing, and created a space to do so,” says Meghan Filbert, PFI’s livestock program manager.

“The other unique feature is that since there are multiple states involved, you can find land or livestock across state borders. This is handy for farmers who live close to state lines, because we know that it is common to haul livestock to grazing sites in other states,” continues Meghan.

The state of California launched a similar site recently Match.Graze, that is tailored to using grazing as a method of wildfire control. Many custom grazing businesses have popped up in California who use sheep and goats for targeted grazing. These types of enterprises are becoming more popular in Iowa – many have probably heard of Goats on the Go based in Ames – and are a viable way for beginning farmers to get a start.

The Midwest Grazing Exchange launched in October 2020. Farmers and landowners are encouraged to explore the site, and create an account to add livestock or land they have to offer.

LEARN MORE:

1/21/2021

Annual Conference session: Growing the Next Generation of Farmers through Grazing Cover Crops with Robert Jewell

2/16/2021

Farminar: Contract Grazing Cover Crops for Winter Feed with Jared and Jon Luhman

Anytime

The Big Show: www.iheart.com/podcast/the-big-show-podcast-20710704/episode/clean-water-in-iowa-starts-today-74425459

Coming Together Since 1985

Co-founders Dick and Sharon Thompson helped model PFI's core values

As Practical Farmers of Iowa celebrates its 35th anniversary this winter, we remain driven by the same interest in coming together to share information about profitable, environmentally sound methods of farming as when PFI was founded in 1985 by Dick and Sharon Thompson, Larry Kallem, Rick Exner and the first farmers who came together to learn from and support one another.

Yet in 2020, we realize more than ever that PFI is about more than just coming together to share information. We're wrapping up a year that has been full of hardship, and lacking the face-to-face social interactions that have been such an important aspect of our coming together for the past 35 years. The importance of PFI as a platform to network, socialize and build community was instilled in the organization from the very beginning.

Coming Together at the Thompsons

Long before PFI was conceived, Dick and Sharon Thompson were hosting field days on their 300-acre Boone County farm to showcase their integrated long-term crop rotations, and their cow-calf and farrow-to-finish hog operations. With the help of publicity from Rodale Institute's New Farm publication, hundreds of people came to the Thompson farm each year. One key individual who found himself at the Thompson farm was Larry Kallem, with the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives. Larry began talking with Dick about starting an organization that could more widely share the Thompsons' farming methods and coordinate similar efforts on farms across the state.

At the same time, Iowa State University graduate student Rick Exner was keeping bees and conducting his graduate research at the Thompson farm. He and Dick also engaged in regular conversations about different field designs for on-farm research, and about the need for building a network of others doing the same work.

Sharon remembers Dick's interest in such a network, saying, "He didn't want to be the whole thing. It needed everybody. He had questions that needed to be answered that he couldn't alone – and maybe if done in more than one area, would hold more

weight with people." Later in 1984, they began asking around, and encouraged by farmers' interest, decided to form an organization.

Prior to having an elected board, long-time member Vic Madsen, of Audubon, recalls that Dick and Sharon ran PFI from their kitchen table. "At first Dick and Sharon were PFI," Vic says. "Dick was president and treasurer, and Sharon was his right hand. When I called Dick in those early days, Sharon would always answer the phone, ask who it was and what I wanted. I teased her a bit about it recently and she asked if I felt I was being screened. We then both had a good laugh."

Soon a provisional board – including Dick, Sharon, Larry, Rick, ISU graduate student Ricky Volland and Mike Herman, a family friend of the Thompsons – began meeting around the Thompsons' dining room table to make official plans. Making Practical Farmers of Iowa a reality took the effort of many people coming together, including Larry leading the effort to create bylaws and set up the organization as a nonprofit, and Rick and Ricky founding and producing "the Practical Farmer" newsletter, the publication that has been the voice of PFI members since those earliest years. Even as the fledgling organization was buoyed by many people, the Thompsons helped enshrine and model several of PFI's values, such as their welcoming spirit and respect for differences of opinion.

"My husband enjoyed people so much," Sharon says. "He loved being around them and wanted them to feel welcome." Recalling his time at their farm and those early meetings at the Thompsons' table, Rick adds, "Dick and Sharon always showed such graciousness and hospitality, which set the tone for the entire organization. Dick loved people. He had social skills till the cows

come home. His openness and curiosity fit right in with starting PFI."

Coming Together Across the State

In the summer of 1985, the members of PFI's provisional board decided they needed to road-trip around Iowa to promote the young organization and recruit members. "A group of us took [Mike Herman's] motor home around the state to see if others had interest in an organization like PFI," Sharon recalls. They published a notice in the May/June 1985 issue of Rodale's New Farm magazine advertising the July meetings to be held in Denison, Waverly and Iowa City. Interest in learning about cutting costs and boosting profits attracted 200 farmers to the trio of workshops.

At these meetings, Larry stationed himself at a booth to take registrations for the very first members of Practical Farmers of Iowa. At the first annual winter meeting in 1985, five of these members were elected to represent each of the five regions of the state. These board members were encouraged to organize regional activities in the spring, such as field days, to come together and learn about an alternative farm practice and get to know other local members.

Whether it was on the Thompson farm or elsewhere, Dick and Sharon continued to lead by example and help model the values PFI embraced – among them, elevating women as leaders. At the first annual meeting in 1985, for instance, Sharon gave a slide talk on hog production without antibiotics. "I would sometimes do the speaking with the slides," she says. "It was Dick's preference for me to be a part of it. So he asked me to, and I would. He thought I had better projection, and that would let him listen and think, and maybe help him think ahead."

Ron Rosmann, a farmer near Harlan who served as one of PFI's first board members, reflects, "I remember at the Rodale [field day] presentations, or if [Dick and Sharon] would travel to speak, they would always go together. That was rare." In her modest fashion, Sharon says, "I filled the role of a supporting wife. I wasn't the wife who drove

“Dick and Sharon always showed such graciousness and hospitality, which set the tone for the entire organization.”

- RICK EXNER



PFI's co-founders and some of its earliest supporters gather before setting off on the first member recruitment tour in 1985. From left to right: George Moriarty, an advisor with the Iowa Farm Business Association; Larry Kallem; Bill Liebhardt, with Rodale Institute; Dick Thompson; Sharon Thompson; Mike Herman; Wes Buchele, of ISU; and Ricky Voland. *Photo taken by Rick Exner*

a tractor to help with harvest, but I did what I had to do.”

By 1987, PFI had a network of eager members and a system for bringing them together that we still follow today. Thirteen farmers conducted on-farm research that year (read more about PFI's Cooperators' Program on page 10), nine of whom also hosted field days that each saw dozens of attendees. The Thompsons capped off the field day season with an on-farm event that attracted 550 people. Rick believes the turnout reflected the hunger farmers had for learning about alternate approaches to farming from the Thompsons and their peers. “When the Frantzens, Rosmanns, Madsens and others would also host field days, you wouldn't have to drive halfway across the state,” he says, “though a lot of people still did.”

Long-time members like Ron and Maria Rosmann, who have now hosted 24 field days for PFI, learned a lot from the Thompsons, and were inspired by their example of using on-farm research to ground-truth the impacts of farming practices. “I think it all started with the Thompsons,” Ron says. “I remember going to their first field days with Rodale, and I was amazed at their graciousness with just opening up their farm.” As the Rosmanns began hosting field days

and attending other PFI members' on-farm events, it wasn't just Ron who was eager to come together. “I remember the boys would get so fired up about field days,” he says, referring to his three sons. “They participated in all the field days, just eating it up. They have fond memories of those because it was a family affair.”

Beyond modeling a welcoming attitude, the spirit of information-sharing and their “get along but don't go along” approach to farming, the Thompsons' focus on sharing the data collected on their farm, rather than just general observations, was unique and had a lasting impact on PFI. “You would go and observe and you could make informed opinions just from observation,” Ron says. “But it was made more reliable because Dick had the science, the plot work, to give it credibility. All of that had a huge impact on us. I could relate to that, and we tried to do the same.”

Coming Together Today

Fast forward to the end of 2020, and PFI's membership has grown to more than 4,500 people. This includes members in 98 of Iowa's 99 counties, and 41 additional states in the U.S. Our on-farm research program, field day season and annual conference

continue to attract more attention to profitable, environmentally-sound methods of farming.

But while many organizations working in agriculture can boast of membership or attendance numbers, what makes Practical Farmers unique is the continuing legacy of Dick and Sharon Thompson's graciousness, hospitality, openness and curiosity. This legacy is evident in the results of our most recent member survey, in which 76% of respondents reported feeling an increased sense of community through their association with PFI. Even though COVID-19 interfered with our ability to gather on farms this year, we found ways to come together through our virtual field day season – which let us share the spirit of PFI with new people in new places. As we look to 2021, we are inspired by the continued strength and support of the PFI community – and the prospect of coming together on farms once again. ■

Learn More

See page 35 for a photo of the cover of *New Farm* magazine from 1984 showing a large crowd that had come to an early field day at the Thompson farm, and visit PFI's blog to read the full article from that issue about the event.

Hatching Farms and Community

Nettle Valley's incubator farm program offers a lower-risk way to start farming

Tucked near Spring Grove, Minnesota, in southeastern corner of the state, Dayna Burtness and Nick Nguyen started Nettle Valley Farm by purchasing 67 acres of woodland and pasture in 2015.

After three years of living in a camper without running water on their farm, they had the opportunity to purchase a nearby homestead in the spring of 2018. This accelerated their dream of starting an incubator farm. With permanent land access, they could install the infrastructure – like a well, barns and storage space – to support beginning farmers.

Dayna's journey learning and starting to farm eventually led her to southeastern Minnesota, where her father grew up. Even though she was raised in the suburbs of the Twin Cities, she is the sixth generation to farm in Houston County. Being a generation removed from farming didn't stop Dayna from jumping in with both feet. Before starting Nettle Valley Farm, she worked on an incubator farm in Northfield, Minnesota. Here she was able to make mistakes and learn from others before investing capital into her own land and farm business.

An incubator farm is a place or project that aims to minimize barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers. This is typically done by providing land, resources and training to new farmers. Seeing the value Dayna got from her time on an incubator farm, and wanting to provide that for others, Dayna and Nick were mindful of

their goal to become an incubator farm host as they were looking for farmland. "We felt it was really important to provide a space between learning and working for other farmers," Dayna says, noting that many beginning farmers have to leap straight from working for someone else to incurring all the expenses associated with starting their own farm, such as getting a mortgage and buying their own tractor or other infrastructure.

At the end of 2018, she and Nick put out feelers for aspiring and beginning farmers to join their incubator project. They created a program that would let these aspiring farmers bring on their own enterprise that would complement the land and enterprises Dayna and Nick already had. As beginning farmers themselves, Dayna and Nick didn't want to serve as trainers, but as mentors who were sharing resources. "When we envisioned the program, we knew we

wanted to make it clear from the get-go what this isn't," Dayna says. "It's not an internship, apprenticeship, commune, cooperative, job, collective or intentional community. Those can all be wonderful things, but we had a specific vision given our own personal strengths and weaknesses." Setting this expectation was vital to creating a successful program.

Getting Started

In 2019, Bailey Lutz and Heidi Eger each started their own enterprises on Nettle Valley Incubator Farm. Both brought their prior experiences and passion for farming. Bailey, who uses the pronoun "they," started Listenmore Farm, raising ducks and goats. Heidi operates Radical Heart Farm raising chickens and sheep. Both also live on the farm in Dayna and Nick's farmhouse – a beneficial arrangement that lets them be close to their livestock while reducing the burden of finding and affording off-farm housing. Bailey and Heidi each pay a monthly cash rent to live in the house, and then help out on the farm 12 hours a month in exchange for participating in the incubator farm program.

Bailey started their farming experience through a workshare with Sin Fronteras Farm and Food. Through a job with the local food co-op Bailey, was able to connect with Eduardo Rivero, the owner of the Sin



"The incubator program at Nettle Valley lends different support systems – Dayna and Nick, fellow incubatees, the different communities we're able to tap into – and also provides space for relatively low-risk experimentation with your enterprises."

- BAILEY LUTZ

“We felt it was really important to provide a space between learning and working for other farmers.”

- DAYNA BURTNES



Fronteras, which supplied food to the co-op. Bailey says the workshare offered important insights into what it takes to produce food. “During the end of this workshare, something clicked for me and I knew I wanted to keep farming,” they say. Bailey then learned of a farm in Wisconsin that was using livestock to restore a native oak savanna. Apprenticing on that farm completely changed Bailey’s perspective on farming. Soon after the season ended on the Wisconsin farm, Bailey learned of Nettle Valley Farm and decided to pursue their own farm business, Listenmore Farm, through Nettle Valley’s incubator program.

“The incubator program at Nettle Valley lends different support systems – Dayna and Nick, fellow incubatees, the different communities we’re able to tap into – and also provides space for relatively low-risk experimentation with your enterprises,” Bailey says. “There’s room for mistakes, people lend support when things go really wrong and there’s a circle to celebrate successes. I’ve been very fortunate to get my start in growing into the farmer I want to be at Nettle Valley.” Next season, Bailey

plans to cease their duck enterprise and focus on raising meat goats.

Heidi’s journey included spending six years working for different farmers, seeing different types of production and operations, before deciding it was time to start her own farm. “Working for other farmers has helped me figure out what I like and don’t like in terms of enterprises, community and farm business,” she says. After meeting Dayna at a local field day, she learned about the incubator program. Knowing her own tendency for tunnel vision when pushing towards a goal, she was looking for lower-risk ways to start a farm. Being part of Nettle Valley’s incubator program has given her vital support and community around the farm she is looking to build. After finding some Katahdin-Dorper sheep, Heidi was able to trial a grazing operation and fell in love with sheep.

Communication Is Key

According to Nettle Valley Farm’s website, the purpose of the incubator program is to support and help launch beginning regenerative farmers by providing access to collaborators, land, shared equipment, business coaching, low interest microloans and joint marketing opportunities for one to three years. None of this would happen without solid communication among all those involved. When Bailey and Heidi joined the program, Dayna and Nick wanted to start off on the right footing. This led

them to hire Martha McFarland, of Hawkeye Buffalo & Cattle Ranch near Fredericksburg, to guide them in facilitating communication and setting expectations.

Martha guided everyone through a full day of exercises and conversations, ending with a list of agreements about how to treat one another and a document about house and farm rules. This understanding helped Dayna, Nick, Bailey and Heidi create simple systems that have helped them live and farm well together on a daily basis. They started the season with formal check-ins every other week, which changed to an as-needed basis by midseason. Martha now serves as an outside sounding board and mediator in case any large conflicts arise that cannot be dealt with internally. “I think it’s imperative that whatever kind of incubation program a farmer or landowner would establish, they are clear and explicit about expectations,” Bailey says. “Clear communication is the backbone of a successful program.”

“Humans are messy and I wouldn’t want anyone to think that it’s been completely smooth-sailing,” Dayna says. “Everyone realizes that things will not always go as planned and there will be disagreements. But they all realize that keeping communication open is foundational to

(Above): From left to right: Bailey Lutz, Dayna Burtness and Heidi Egers at Nettle Valley Farm.
(Opposite): After joining Nettle Valley Farm’s incubator farm program, Bailey Lutz started Listenmore Farm raising ducks and goats.

(Continued on page 28 →)



Heidi Eger operates Radical Heart Farm, raising chickens and sheep, on land she accesses through Nettle Valley Farm's incubator program.

(← Continued from pg. 27)

making it all work. We all have strong personalities and our own quirks, visions and communication styles. When you put a bunch of people, working towards a common purpose but living together, working together, socializing together, it's a lot and there have been conflicts we've had to work through. But in the end that's okay."

Dayna and Nick have enjoyed the challenge of launching their incubator program, and have found ways to improve. "We quickly discovered hidden expectations that hadn't been made explicit," Dayna says. "For instance, my philosophy for incubatees is that when it comes to an idea for an enterprise, I will share my advice and opinions, but then I will stand back and let them make their own decisions and mistakes. Turns out Heidi was expecting an incubator farm to be more like an egg incubator – safe and protected from risk. Major difference!"

Community Is Support

Since starting the incubator program, Dayna and Nick have helped bring community to Nettle Valley Farm – but they have also realized the important role their neighbors play in their success. For instance, Dayna

"It has . . . been wonderful to be part of an incubator farm community that is an active member of the wider community."

– Heidi Eger

says that when faced with challenges such as machinery repairs or caring for sick animals, the advice and support of neighboring farmers has been important.

Participating in building community can decrease the feeling of isolation so many farmers feel, especially in the throes of the season. "It has also been wonderful to be part of an incubator farm community that is an active member of the wider community," Heidi says. "Many farms I have worked on have felt isolated from an intern's perspective. Here, we know and visit with our neighbors, have folks over to dinner every week and attend community events."

The sense of community is also fostered through sharing in each other's successes and struggles. The sense of being part of a bigger whole flows both ways. "I love feeling useful when I get to help them out with something I have learned in my years of farming," Dayna says. "I love that we have each other to celebrate our successes. But

there's a lot of hard things we all deal with on a daily basis, and we have that built-in support network." Working together has meant Dayna, Nick, Bailey and Heidi have all learnt more about different enterprises and how they all work together to improve the ecosystem. The group is also able to support one another when additional labor is needed, such as when it's time to process the ducks or broilers. "We all have more to learn about grazing our respective species," Heidi says, "but are connected by a desire to improve the health of the valley."

Dayna and Nick would love to see more incubator farm programs that create opportunities for beginning farmers to get started and build community. Right now, Dayna says the concept isn't all that common. But she thinks the idea would gain more traction if more programs like theirs were available. "Even as recently as 50 years ago, the most common way to get into farming was just to be born into it," she says. "You just had your mom and your dad telling you what to do and teaching you. But now as farming has changed so much, we don't have as many of those traditional avenues." ■

REVIEW OF “Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth”

“Heartland,” by Sarah Smarsh – the keynote speaker at PFI’s 2021 annual conference – is a memoir of family, a love letter to the child she never had as a teenager and an account of how poverty shapes a life without stability. It is a deeply researched account that follows four generations of her family – of young, single mothers across the windy plains of Kansas – and describes the economic and social context that prevented Sarah from having a stable childhood.

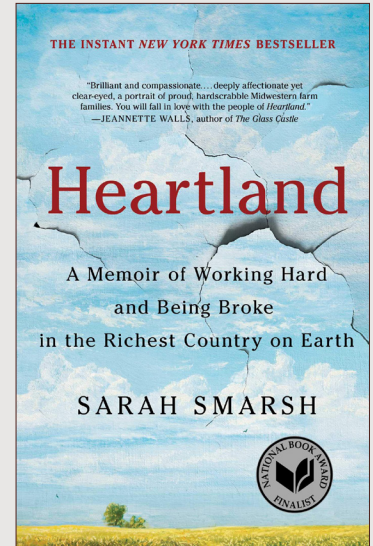
Sarah illustrates not only her life, but her mother’s, her grandmother’s and her great-grandmother’s, showing that the cycle of poverty has lasting repercussions. She shows not only what poverty looks like for a rural family in the heartland, but how it feels and lasts in the way one thinks. Through her poignant storytelling, both from her own memory and carefully researched family history, we gain a sense of perspective through the generations.

The chapters Sarah writes of her life on the farm contain a spirit and connection to place we can all relate to. I could feel the strong winter wind that rips across the Great Plains and gets into your bones – not just as an imagining, but as a memory. When she writes of the red Kansas dirt and the way the wheat planting and harvest schedule overlaid their lives, I found myself replacing it in my mind with our rich clay and the dominant rituals of corn and beans that surround us. Connection to place always speaks to me, and I’ve often wondered why I feel so strongly about where I am. Sarah’s book helps to answer that question.

So often, the Midwest is a region overlooked by scholars and writers. The complex history of our country’s policies shaped the very patchwork of fields and rivers across this heartland; yet it is hard to find words that put this place into context.

Sarah Smarsh does just that. Through telling her family’s history, stories from her parents and grandparents, overlaid by meticulously researched policies and programs, Sarah is able to illustrate to us how the actions of politicians impacted the lives of millions of working class and poor people in the Midwest, which in turn, also shaped the farmland. Ultimately, what she makes clear is that family, farming and failure are not reflective of an individual’s actions alone. Instead, they are dependent upon the decisions made by people in power – often with very little understanding of their constituents.

Sarah writes of a place that she loves, with great detail and respect for the land and her family, without sacrificing some of the hard truths we must acknowledge about land, class and poverty in the U.S.



For myself, a millennial farmer reader, Sarah writes about times I’ve only heard of: the farm crisis of the 1980s, the Great Depression, her grandpa’s farm’s auction held after his death. She puts words to things it seems like most folks have tried to forget.

Our agricultural landscape of today begs us to understand how we got here. I know what it feels like to be one of the few young people who stayed. I know how it feels to drive through our depopulated state and feel the hopelessness of a deserted Main Street. I know how impossible it is for young, beginning farmers (especially farmers of color) to access land on which to grow.

“Heartland” reminds us that there are greater powers at play: that the economics and politics of rural flyover states don’t hold much weight compared to those from other places; that those people might not fight for us in the way we need. But it also reminds us that it is okay to love what is good – hard work, the feeling after a long day of harvesting a good crop, the connection you feel after helping an animal give birth – while fighting for what is better. ■

Maja Black is a member of the Sundog Farm crew in Solon, Iowa, where they raise four seasons of vegetables and rotationally graze sheep and goats.

PFI is Seeking a Strategic Initiatives Manager

We are seeking applicants for a strategic initiatives manager to join our strategic initiatives team. This group of staff works creatively to build collaborative connections between the private and public sectors that accomplish the goals of our farmer members on the broader Iowa and Midwestern landscape.

The strategic initiatives manager will support that team by:

- developing and implementing processes to stimulate effective teamwork
- managing day-to-day work in cover crop and small-grains farmer programs to ensure timely, high-quality program delivery

- fundraising to support and expand strategic initiatives programs and staff
- managing a \$1.5 million operating budget
- leading grant management and reporting for the strategic initiatives team
- managing strategic initiatives staff and contractors.

Full details are at practicalfarmers.org/employment. To apply, please send a cover letter, resume and references to Sarah Carlson at sarah@practicalfarmers.org by Friday, Jan. 22. ■

Two PFI Staff Author Chapter in New Book by the SWCS

In December, the Soil and Water Conservation Society published a new book – “Soil and Water Conservation: A Celebration of 75 Years” – exploring the conservation progress made since the SWCS was founded in 1945, and the future of conservation in an age of climate change and more dire pressures on Earth’s natural resources. Sarah Carlson, PFI’s strategic initiatives director (at right in the photo), and Alisha Bower, our operations director, co-authored Chapter 28, “Marketing Conservation Agronomy: Cover Crops from Two Practitioners’ Points of View.”



tackle the forbidden, tricky space of pushing the dominant cropping system to do better, for example focusing on practices in the field like cover crops, managed grazing and diverse crop rotation. PFI exists to advocate on the behalf of agriculture as a solution to many of our natural resource and conservation challenges. The recent history of cover crop adoption in Iowa shows a similar change in message from conservation professionals over time toward a more agroecological focus that can impact natural resource stewardship at scale.”

Here is a brief excerpt from the opening of their chapter:

“Our work as professionals at Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) is focused on the intersection of conservation and agronomy. We

A hard copy of the book is available to purchase for \$25, or for free as a downloadable ebook, from www.swcs.org. ■

New Gifts for New Lifetime Members

Since creating a lifetime membership option in 2012, 124 individuals and families have signed up, gaining full member benefits for life – as well as an end to all renewal notices. Until recently, these members received a thank-you gift in the form of a PFI-branded half-gallon crock from Red Wing Stoneware Co. Now, newbies to the lifetime member club will be receiving handmade charcuterie boards. These beautiful and functional boards were created by the Iowa City-based company Krafka Kraft, which used spalted maple engraved with PFI’s new logo and the words “Lifetime Member.”

These boards represent our lifetime members in so many ways: they are practical, thoughtfully sourced, well-deserved and no two are the same. Please

consider becoming a lifetime member today. Learn more at practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership. ■



Watch the Virtual Cover Crop Boot Camp Online

If you were unable to attend our 2020 virtual cover crop boot camp in December, or want to revisit a few of the sessions, we recorded the entire event. . The two-day workshop explored how cover crops boost soil health, improve weed control and provide grazing opportunities. Sessions focused on field fitness, initial adjustments for weed control, linking the forage chain, measuring soil improvement, long-term success with weed suppression and innovative ways to graze. Videos of each session are available at practicalfarmers.org/2020-virtual-cover-crop-boot-camp. ■

2021 Winter Farminar Season

Mark your calendars for the kick-off of our winter farminar series on January 26!

The weekly, evening webinar series will occur **Tuesday nights from 7-8:30 p.m. CST**, and is free for anyone with an internet connection. Farmers and subject-matter experts provide insights and reflections on a variety of production, conservation and business management approaches with ample time for live Q&A.

This coming season's topics will include presentations on interseeding 60-inch corn, contract grazing, grazing cover crops, pasture-finishing pigs, high tunnel storm protection and maintenance, habitat, working lands conservation and farm transfer.

Farminar Dates

- January 26
- February 2
- February 9
- February 16
- February 23
- March 2
- March 9
- March 16

Check out our website for more details.

We hope to see you there!

practicalfarmers.org/farminars

PFI's Community Connections Committee is Here for You

This past year has been difficult for many people, and for many different reasons. Whatever the challenge you're facing, we want Practical Farmers of Iowa to be a community you can turn to. To help facilitate this community support, we've formed a committee of members who are available for anyone who would like to chat.

If you could benefit from social support, and would like to connect with another PFI member, please let us know at practicalfarmers.org/connections (scroll to "Connect with PFI" and fill out the form there). A committee member will then reach out to you for a confidential, one-on-one phone call. ■

Wide Range of Merchandise Options in PFI's Online Store

Have you visited PFI's online store lately? We now have 25 items available to purchase, ranging from shirts and hats in a variety of colors, to travel mugs and masks, to stickers and onesies, to water bottles – and more. The store also features T-shirts with our newly redesigned Don't Farm Naked logo, designed by Sarah Krumm, PFI's graphic design and photography coordinator. The new shirts are available in mustard yellow and light grey.

Some of the other shirts in the store represent older designs that have been

phased out, and sizing may be limited. From our homepage (practicalfarmers.org), hover over "Get Involved" and click on "Merchandise." ■



View Missed Field Days Online

Did you miss a virtual field day this summer or autumn that you wanted to see? All events have been recorded, and there are a few different ways to view them:

- Check back on the field day webpage of the event you missed. View the list here: practicalfarmers.org/field-days
- Watch in our video library (practicalfarmers.org/video) or on Facebook (facebook.com/practicalfarmers/videos)
- Watch on our YouTube channel (youtube.com/user/pfivideos). You can also subscribe to this so you know when new videos are posted

See Members in the News

PFI members are regularly featured in the media. We try to highlight these members in "Practical News," our weekly email newsletter, but if you've missed any, you can view past members in the news (and PFI in the news) at practicalfarmers.org/newsroom. ■

Welcome, New Members!

DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Dale Behrens - Carroll
- Dwight Dial - Lake City
- Bill Ellis - Graettinger
- Dan Ferneding - Wall Lake
- Mark Johnson - Moorehead
- Kevin Klocke - Templeton
- Jason Kohorst - Carroll
- Daren Miller - Galva
- Jon Potts - Lake City
- Curt Radcliff - Storm Lake
- Jon Reaman - Odebolt
- David Smith - Lake City
- Jasen Tiefenthaler - Breda
- Brent Wells - Fonda
- April Wilson - Paullina

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Roy Bardole - Rippey
- Tim Bardole - Rippey
- Mike Bielenberg - Ames
- Landon Brown - New Providence
- Mike Callon - Fort Dodge
- Craig Christensen - Ogden
- Alan Dooley - Albion
- Jim Eisenmenger - Ames
- Margo Eness - Ames
- Chris Falkavage - Iowa Falls
- Mark Hanson - Raddcliffe
- Dylan Havens - Paton
- Mike Heimer - Osage
- Peter Heintz - Nevada
- Chet Hollingshead - Ogden
- Ben Hollingshead - Ogden
- Thomas Hollingshead - Ogden
- Carly Kanipe - Ames
- Leonard Larson - Cambridge
- Brian Mackie - Boone
- Ruth McCabe - State Center
- Andrew Michels - Marshalltown
- Curt Muir - Rippey
- Katherine Neese - Grand Junction
- Kristen Obbink - Madrid
- Kenneth Okland - Huxley
- John Okland - Kelley
- Tim Okland - Kelley
- Dale Peterson - Harcourt
- Daniel Rinehart - Boone
- Justin Robbins - Scranton
- Jaiden Shahan - Ackley
- David Skattebo - Mason City
- Rodney Uthof - Bancroft

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Jane Allen - Cedar Falls
- Theresa Eberhardt - Elkader
- Jon Robertson - Hudson
- Mikaela Seely - Cedar Rapids

- Graham Thompson - Janesville
- Iowa Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, Tim Wagner - Decorah

DISTRICT 4 - SOUTHWEST

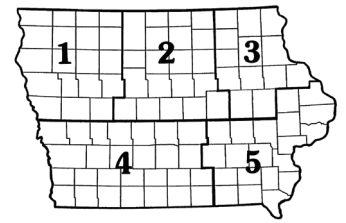
- Warren Bachman - Osceola
- Lona Bandstra - Pella
- Gene Beary - Lovilia
- Rick Blom - Reasnor
- Dennis Bogaards - Pella
- Darren Boot - Otley
- Daren Chambers - Lacona
- Brandon Clark - Logan
- Todd Cohrs - Logan
- Chad Comes - Atlantic
- Norman Cook - Osceola
- Jake Crozier - Harvey
- Byron De Vries - Earlham
- Delbert Dittmer - Lacona
- Dan Easton - Bagley
- Heath Ellison - Ankeny
- Regina Frahm - Newton
- Ryan Frederiksen - Grimes
- Wade Hauser III - Clive
- Steve Heffron - Melrose
- Chad Kaane - Runnells
- Kent Kiburz - Winterset
- James Klein - Panama
- Jordan Krummel - Avoca
- Brandon Kuiper - Otley
- Curtis Lee - Woodbine
- Matt Marchant - Newton
- Neil Martin - Leon
- Timothy Myers - Monroe
- Larry Nees - Coon Rapids
- Douglas Neppel - West Des Moines
- Justin Pfeifer - Russell
- James Pfeifer - Russell
- Dan Pfeifer - Russell
- Mike Potts - Leon
- Brock Robson - Guthrie Center
- Joe Schaben - Dunlap
- Joshua Schneider - Lacona
- Amber Shipley - Lynnville
- Neal Shivers - Bondurant
- Benjamin Shivers - Bondurant
- Kristi Skinner - Stuart
- Aaron Steenhoek - Pella
- Ronald Stone - Ankeny
- Howard Stutzman - Garden Grove
- Jamie Swanson - Marney
- Matt Vermeersch - Council Bluffs
- Michael Vos - Des Moines
- Richard Vos - Lynnville
- Judson Vos - Sully
- Norm Vote - Melrose
- Michelle Werner - Ankeny
- Lee Wisecup - Missouri Valley

DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST

- Seth Bartlett - Solon
- Daron Blanke - New Sharon
- Charles Brown - Ottumwa
- Jacob Davis - Eddyville
- Jason De Bruin - Leighton
- Wayne DeBruin - Oskaloosa
- Kurtis DeBruin - Oskaloosa
- Mark Goodman - Rose Hill
- Patrick Hammes - Batavia
- Andrew Lydolph - Stockport
- Andy Mart - Barnes City
- iWorkMarket, Irina Mealy - Muscatine
- Greg Poe - Blakesburg
- Dee Sandquist - Fairfield
- Randy Schweitzer - Hedrick
- Paige Shafer - Eddyville
- Ryan Story - Iowa City
- Dan Terpstra - New Sharon
- Zach Timm - Monticello
- Todd VanDee - North English
- Brian Vander Wal - Leighton
- Donald Vos - Oskaloosa

DISTRICT 6 - OUT OF STATE

- Shauna Rabinowitz - Berkeley, CA
- Cory Weil - Jacksonville, FL
- Rebekah Ahrens - Milan, IL
- Susan Brehm - Chicago, IL
- Jim Carley - Potomac, IL
- David Ebert - Onarga, IL
- Luke Frantz - Lovington, IL
- Glen Hamman - Nauvoo, IL
- Jason Hessman - Joy, IL
- Al Klein - Freeburg, IL
- Ryan Mosier - Heyworth, IL
- Keith Reynolds - Onarga, IL
- Jacob Robinson - Aledo, IL
- Cliff Schuette - Breese, IL
- Michael Sigwalt - Geneseo, IL
- Steve Stacker - Aledo, IL
- Dave Stuzman - Lexington, IL
- Mat Willits - Joy, IL
- Ray McCormick - Vincennes, IN



- Ryan Goertzen-Regier - North Newton, KS
- Heidi Eger - Spring Grove, MN
- Jeff Friese - Lakeville, MN
- Greg Fynboh - Donnelly, MN
- Tim Harder - Butterfield, MN
- Sherry Johnson - St Paul, MN
- Emma Liddle - Bloomington, MN
- Mark Madison - Adrian, MN
- J. L. Meagher - Elbow Lake, MN
- Robert Schumacher - Edina, MN
- Mayrene Bentley - Omaha, NE
- Graham Christensen - Lyons, NE
- Todd Cornwell - Blair, NE
- Dwight Dam - Hooper, NE
- Rusty Hilgenkamp - Arlington, NE
- Bill Hotchkiss - Omaha, NE
- Randy Jensen - Blaire, NE
- Scott Langemeier - Scribner, NE
- Alana Pearson - Craig, NE
- John Peterson - Ceresco, NE
- Mark Pojar - Dodge, NE
- Brendan Pojar - Scribner, NE
- Jason Pojar - Scribner, NE
- Aaron Ruwe - Hooper, NE
- Chad Scebold - Bennington, NE
- Tom Sherman - Ashland, NE
- Ronald Hansen - Greenwich, NY
- Matt Aultman - Greenville, OH
- Lucas Delcamp - Pleasant Hill, OH
- Megan Sweeney - Troy, OH
- Kathy Baker - Blacksburg, VA
- Dani Heisler - Viroqua, WI
- Christopher McGuire - Belmont, WI
- Adrian Roberg - Norwalk, WI
- Anne Sherman - Cedarburg, WI
- Kevin Wagner - Platteville, WI

Thank you
to our newest lifetime members!

Tom and Jayne Rowles Oxford, IA	Gary and Carol Gadbury Manhattan, KS	Margaret and Eric Chamas Smithville, MO
John Scanlan Lost Nation, IA	Carol Bouska Minneapolis, MN	

Lifetime membership is open to anyone, and confers the same benefits as regular membership - without any renewal notices! Learn more about this option at practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership.

Practical Farmers Events

Note: Times are in CST. Full details about all events are available at practicalfarmers.org/events.

JANUARY

JAN. 21-23: PFI Annual Conference, "Coming Home"

Various | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/2021-annual-conference

JAN. 26: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

FEBRUARY

FEB. 2: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

FEB. 9: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

FEB. 16: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

FEB. 23: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

MARCH

MARCH 2: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

MARCH 9: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

MARCH 16: Farminar - Topic TBD

7-8:30 p.m. | Online | To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org/farminars

Other Events

Note: Times are in CST. Find more events at practicalfarmers.org/calendar.

JANUARY

JAN. 19-20: Iowa Specialty Producers Conference

Online | Learn more at mda.state.mn.us/environment-sustainability/minnesota-organic-conference

JAN. 19 & 21: Minnesota Organic Conference: "The Challenges of Our Times: Climate Change, COVID, and Organic Farm Viability"

3 p.m. | Online | Learn more at iowaspecialtyproducers.com

JAN. 21: Returning Oxbows to Iowa's Landscape

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at iowalearningfarms.org/page/events

JAN. 21: Minnesota Organic Conference: "The Challenges of Our Times: Climate Change, COVID, and Organic Farm Viability"

3 p.m. | Online | Learn more at mda.state.mn.us/environment-sustainability/minnesota-organic-conference

JAN. 23: Kids Create Workshop: Pinecone Bird Feeders

9-10 a.m. | Online | Learn more at estore.learnconnect.org/online_kids_create_workshops

JAN. 26: Webinar: Cover Crops, Herbs, and Cut Flowers for Pollination and Pest Management

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at conservationwebinars.net

JAN. 27: Webinar: Soil Health in Organic High Tunnels

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at conservationwebinars.net

JAN. 28: Minnesota Organic Conference: "Soil Health on Organic Farms"

3 p.m. | Online | Learn more at mda.state.mn.us/environment-sustainability/minnesota-organic-conference

FEBRUARY

FEB. 4: Stacking Practices for Improved Water Quality in the Upper Iowa Watershed

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at iowalearningfarms.org/page/events

FEB. 6: Kids Create Workshop: DIY Plant Press

9-10 a.m. | Online | Learn more at estore.learnconnect.org/online_kids_create_workshops

FEB. 8-13: Minnesota Sustainable Farming Association Annual Conference

Online | Learn more at sfa-mn.org/conference

FEB. 10-15: Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association Annual Conference

Online | Learn more at conference.oeffa.org

FEB. 11, 18 & 25: Webinar Series - "Regenerative Grazing: Fundamentals for Farmers"

Online | Learn more at thelandconnection.org/event/grazing-series

FEB. 12: Webinar - "Farming for the Future: A Forum Exploring Ecosystem Markets"

11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at ilsustainableag.org/ecomarkets

FEB. 22-27: Growing Stronger: Collaborative Conference on Organic and Sustainable Farming

Online | Learn more at bit.ly/GrowingStronger2021

MARCH

MARCH 4: Water Quality and Quantity Improvements in the Clear Creek Watershed

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at iowalearningfarms.org/page/events

MARCH 10: Webinar - Cultivating Conversation: Understanding Opportunities to Access Federal Conservation Programs

11 a.m. | Online | Learn more at extension.umd.edu/womeninag/webinars

MARCH 24: Webinar - Getting The Most Out of Your High Tunnel-Best Management Practices

11 a.m. (CDT) | Online | Learn more at extension.umd.edu/womeninag/webinars

GROW YOUR FARM WITH PRACTICAL FARMERS. JOIN OR RENEW TODAY!

Want to join or renew online? Visit practicalfarmers.org/join-or-renew.

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____ County: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____ Email 2: _____

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

JOIN OR RENEW

1. THIS ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP IS A:

- New Membership
- Renewal

2. I AM JOINING AT THE LEVEL OF:

- Student – \$20
- Individual – \$50
- Farm or Household – \$60
- Organization – \$110
- Lifetime Member* – \$1,000
* See details at bit.ly/PFI-lifetime

3. I AM JOINING OR RENEWING AS:

- An Aspiring Farmer
- A Farmer or Grower
- Non-Farmer

4. HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT PFI?

EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUP SIGN-UP

When you join our email discussion groups, you can network, build community and exchange ideas from anywhere, at any time. Sign up for as many groups as you'd like (and be sure to include your email address above)!

- Announcements
- Perspectives
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DONATION

For the sake of the long-term health and vitality of Practical Farmers of Iowa, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c)3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

I would like to make a one-time, tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

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

Or, make a recurring monthly or quarterly donation. This will be automatically charged to your credit card on the first day of each month or quarter.

- Yes, I would like to give \$ _____ per month OR per quarter

PAYMENT

Membership Level\$ _____ per year for ____ year(s) = \$ _____

Additional Donation = \$ _____

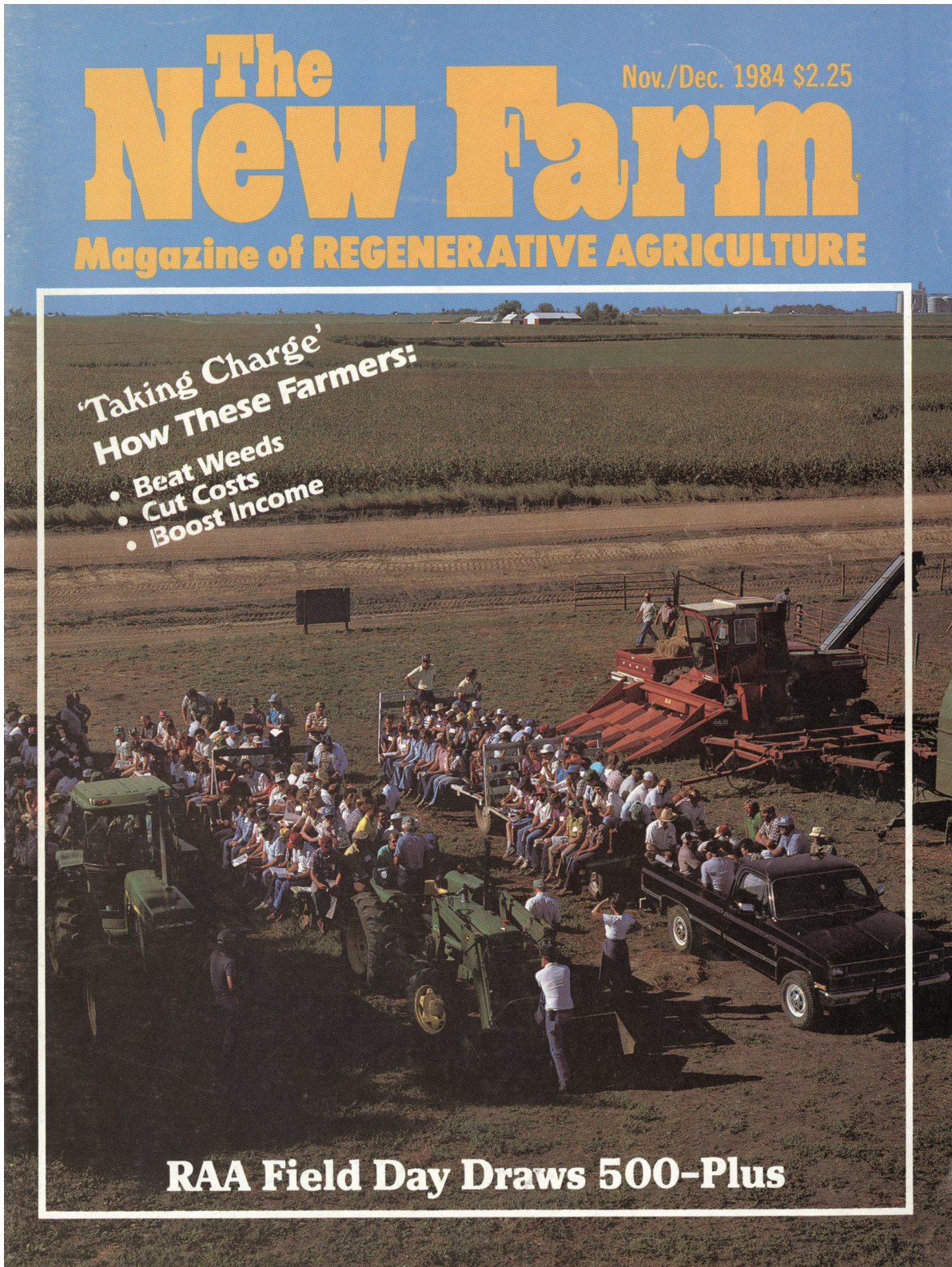
TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

- Check or money order is enclosed (Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")
- Credit card (Visa, MasterCard or Discover only)

Name on card _____ Number _____

Exp. Date _____ CVC# (3 digits) _____ Please automatically charge this credit card annually for membership

Office Use Only: Check # _____ Check date _____ Total amount _____ Notes _____



This cover image from the 1984 November-December issue of *The New Farm* magazine, published by the Regenerative Agriculture Association (which became the Rodale Institute), shows a big crowd of farmers who had come to attend a field day hosted by PFI co-founders Dick and Sharon Thompson.

Dick and Sharon were organizing field days on their farm well before PFI was founded in 1985, and these events were so popular – and the message and methods the Thompsons were sharing – that farmers would travel hours, and even camp out overnight, to attend. Read the article that accompanied this cover image on PFI's blog at practicalfarmers.org/blog, and read more about the early years of PFI in Steve Carlson's article on page 28. *Reprinted with permission from Rodale Institute*

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101
Ames, IA 50010

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Waterloo, IA
Permit No. 901

Story County, December 2020

PFI photographer Sarah Krumm captured a recent late-December snowfall during a hike at McFarland Park near Ames, Iowa.

