



PRACTICAL  
**FARMERS**  
*of Iowa*



2021  
Annual Report

PRACTICALFARMERS.ORG



*A male dickcissel sings his courtship songs from the top of prairie plants in Jasper County, Iowa. These grassland birds return to Iowa's prairies and hayfields in early summer from their overwintering grounds in the tropics. Although they are currently one of Iowa's most common and adaptable summer visitors, dickcissels face the same threat as all grassland birds: namely, loss of the diverse prairies and grasslands they need to thrive.*

*Photo by Jorgen Rose*

## From the President and Director

Practical Farmers of Iowa, like the rest of the world, continued to adapt our work throughout 2021. We are proud to say we didn't merely stay afloat. We continued to provide programming to connect and engage with thousands safely while also strengthening this wonderful organization for long-term success. Thank you to the hundreds of you who showed leadership in 2021 by teaching at events, conducting research on your farms, sharing your experiences in the media, serving on PFI committees and providing ongoing feedback.

Resilience is the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events. Members of PFI's network really stepped up in 2021, showing their resiliency by tapping into their strengths and support systems to overcome challenges and work through problems. Coming together to address problems is the norm among Practical Farmers members.

In 2021, PFI members worked together to address the lack of local processing facilities for meat producers. We learned how to creatively market and add value to the products we produced on our farms, most notably small grains. We leveraged the power of going virtual to complement and widen the reach of our face-to-face events, which we safely brought back in 2021.

Long a "big-tent" organization representing agriculture's diverse forms and viewpoints, PFI has started to go beyond just welcoming people to our network: We are now identifying ways to actively invite members of the broader community of farmers and aspiring farmers to PFI's table. We believe that a rich tapestry of farm types, sizes, practices and philosophies creates a more resilient and inclusive agricultural landscape. Our "big tent" filled with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives enriches our understanding and broadens our impact. We are honestly examining our practices and policies with the aim of improving the lives of all who are farming or want to farm.

We are delighted that in 2021, PFI continued to grow. There are new faces on staff as well as many new faces within our membership. This growth is with purpose – we want to bring our farmer-to-farmer network to more people, accelerating farmer and landscape change.

In 2022, we are eager to get out onto farms for field days, and to continue growing our new program structure (read more about this on pages 6-7) while connecting with our members.

Please feel free to reach out to either of us, or our fellow board and staff members, to share ideas and provide feedback. Talking with PFI members is a fulfilling experience that we always welcome!

*Ann Franzenburg*

**Ann Franzenburg**  
Board President

*Sally Worley*

**Sally Worley**  
Executive Director

**Cover image:** Cattle graze in the early morning hours on Nick Wallace's farm near Keystone, Iowa.

## Our Mission

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

## Our Guiding Principles

Farmers lead our programming.

We focus on providing extensive opportunities for members and others to network.

We secure extensive media featuring farmers and our projects.

On-farm research and demonstration is a core part of our programming.

We partner with agencies, organizations and universities that can effectively help us achieve our goals.

## From PFI's 2021-2023 Strategic Plan

### Practical Vision

Many voices driving Iowa's agriculture narrative

Effective leaders creating positive change for our food and farm systems

PFI well-positioned for success, impact, and growth

Robust markets for a diversity of farm products

Healthy environments stemming from responsible land stewardship

Thriving rural communities filled with resilient and profitable farms

Farming is a desirable vocation and new farmers are equipped to succeed

A diverse and inclusive PFI network

### Strategic Directions

Equipping a deep bench of leaders to inspire change towards a diverse and vibrant landscape

Strengthening our network to foster deeper connections, a sense of shared community and partnerships that help spread PFI's vision

Driving the narrative and amplifying diverse viewpoints

Paving a path to prosperity for regional food and farm businesses

Growing organizational capacity for long-term impact

## PFI Staff

### Debra Boekholder

Membership & Office Assistant

### Alisha Bower

Senior Operations Director

### Sarah Carlson

Senior Programs & Member Engagement Director

### Steve Carlson

Membership & Office Manager

### Celize Christy

Beginning Farmer Education Coordinator

### Rebecca Clay

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

### Lydia English

Field Crops Viability Manager

### Meghan Filbert

Livestock Farm Viability Manager

### Stefan Gailans

Senior Research Manager

### Taylor Hintch

Field Crops Education Coordinator

### Tamsyn Jones

Editor & Outreach Coordinator

### Kayla Koether

Senior Farm Viability Manager

### Liz Kolbe

Senior Farmer-Led Education Manager

### Sarah Krumm

Graphic Design & Photography Coordinator

### Emma Liddle

Membership & Events Coordinator

### Martha McFarland

Farmland Viability Coordinator

### Hayley Nelson

Research Coordinator

### Maggie Norton

Farmer Outreach Coordinator

### Nick Ohde

Marketing & Communications Director

### Greg Padget

Beginning Farmer Viability Manager

### Jorgen Rose

Habitat & Policy Viability Manager

### Mike Roelf

Information Systems Manager

### Lara Schenck

Grants Manager

### Chastity Schonhorst

Bookkeeper

### Jason Tetric

Digital Media Coordinator

### Jacqueline Venner Senske

Horticulture Education Coordinator

### Sally Worley

Executive Director

### Christine Zrostlik

Marketing & Communications Manager

## PFI Board of Directors

### DISTRICT 1 (Northwest)

**Nathan Anderson** - Vice President

### DISTRICT 2 (North Central)

**Wendy Johnson**

### DISTRICT 3 (Northeast)

**Ann Franzenburg** - President

### DISTRICT 4 (Southwest)

**Jon Bakehouse** - Treasurer

### DISTRICT 5 (Southeast)

**Gayle Olson**

### AT-LARGE FARMERS

**Carmen Black**

**Jack Boyer**

**Vic Madsen**

**Mark Quee**

**David Rosmann** - Secretary

### AT-LARGE FRIENDS

### OF FARMERS

**Kristine Lang**

**Lisa Schulte Moore** (partial year)

**Matt Liebman** (partial year)

## PFI Co-Founders

### Larry Kallem

Ames, IA

### Sharon Thompson

Boone, IA

### The late Dick Thompson

Boone, IA



Practical Farmers of Iowa staff gathered for their winter retreat and staff party in early March 2022 at Alluvial Brewing Company in Ames, Iowa.

# Setting PFI Up for Long-Term Success

You've likely seen many new faces at Practical Farmers of Iowa, within both our membership and staff. In 2021, PFI has continued to grow with purpose. Our strategic plan, co-created with our membership, charges us to grow organizational capacity for long-term impact. In 2021, we redesigned our staff structure, including employee roles and how we collaborate to get things done.

This new hybrid, functional, team and network structure allows PFI to continue to grow in an efficient and effective way, further enabling us to achieve our bold strategic goals. This means bringing our farmer-to-farmer network model to more people, accelerating farmer and landscape change.

## PFI's Organizational Structure



### Member Leadership & Participation

Event leaders • Mentors • Network-builders • Outreach leaders • Researchers

Board of Directors

Member Governance

Partner Collaboration

## What Does This Mean?

Our staff departments are now organized by function, allowing employees to focus their efforts. This enables staff to have greater clarity about their roles, hone their skills and increase their impact.

PFI's **Operations, Finance and Development** departments provide the money, people and tools to equip PFI to build resilient farms and communities.

Our **Communications and Marketing** department brings the stories of PFI's members to life so we can share them with a wider audience.

The **Programs and Member Engagement** department is now organized into three areas (as shown directly below): Farmer-Led Education, Research and Farm Viability. Read more about these areas later in this report.



## The Importance of Working in Teams

A functional structure provides focus. But a functional structure on its own risks reducing transparency and collaboration, which are so important in our network model. To remedy this, PFI staff are also convening as teams. With these cross-functional teams we increase cooperation while distributing decision-making and accountability toward shared goals.

## The PFI Network – Our Crown Jewel

The network component of PFI's design is our greatest asset. The value and impact of our network cannot be overstated. Members lead our organization through guidance and participation. PFI staff and members work extensively with partners to collaboratively meet our shared goals.

Identifying PFI's network in our organizational design pays tribute to its importance, and helps us all understand why PFI has a reputation of building resilient farms and communities – we are doing it with a broad base of people. Alone, we only can do a little. Together, we accomplish a lot!

# Farmer-Led Education

Knowledge in the sustainable farming world can often exist within islands. Through a plethora of events, our farmer-led education programming seeks to connect these islands of information, helping farmers share knowledge and build networks. Events include PFI's annual conference, field days, workshops, farminars and other conferences and summits, as well as smaller groups focused on specific enterprises like horticulture, livestock and field crops.

**5,058**

people attended education and networking events that were held in

**40**

counties across Iowa and online.

**260**

members and supporters led these events.

**193**

of these were farmers, and others were non-operating landowners, friends of farmers and topic experts.

**94.5%**

of people who attended farmer-led education or participated in on-farm research reported a change in knowledge.

**159**

PFI members who attended a PFI event in 2021 felt they could help make a difference in their local community as a result of attending the event.

## In Practice

Francis Blake, of Blake Family Organic Farms near Waukon, Iowa, drove 2.5 hours each way to talk with Anne and Landon Plagge during their field day in August 2021. The Plagges, who farm near Latimer, Iowa, raise corn, soybeans, oats, rye and hogs. At this field day, they showcased a variety of small grains production and cleaning equipment, including their seed cleaner.

From Francis' experience selling rye, he knew his customers wanted it cleaned. "Buying a seed cleaner is something we had been thinking about doing for a long time," Francis says, "and to see one working for someone was a big plus. We spoke, not for long, but enough to get the information we thought was important. You can read and think about something all you want, but when you see something working for another farm, it makes it easier to take that next step."

Following the field day, Francis purchased his own seed cleaner to use on his farm – not the same type as the one at the field day, but it's working well for him. "We raise a variety of small grains and we will use this to save and use as much of our own seed as we can," Francis says. He plans to start with barley, oats and rye.



Anne and Landon Plagge



Francis Blake

## Looking Ahead

As we look toward the future, bringing farmers together to learn from one another remains at the core of PFI's mission. We will continue to prioritize in-person events featuring diverse farmer-leaders, while continuing to expand our virtual offerings for widely accessible learning and engagement.

# Research

Agricultural research abounds, but how much of that research is led by farmers? PFI's research programming channels farmers' curiosity into on-farm experiments and confidently shares the results far and wide. Oftentimes, the work dives into topics that farmers can't find information on anywhere else. Together, PFI scientists and farmers design the experiments, interpret the data and publish the findings in reports made available on the PFI website. Ultimately, the work illustrates what's possible on farms.

42

farmers participated in on-farm research trials.

82%

of farmer-led education and research participants have a new idea to explore as a result of their engagement with PFI.

78%

reported that PFI helped them make a beneficial change to their farming practices or farm management.

# In Practice

Fungicide and neonicotinoid seed treatments are commonly marketed to soybean growers. But do they live up to the hype or are they unnecessary costs? Influenced by previous research on the topic by fellow PFI cooperater Dick Sloan, Steve Saltzman set out to answer this question himself on his family's farm near Corning, Iowa. Together with Sam Bennett and Alec and Rachel Amundson, Steve observed no benefit to soybean yield or profitability from the seed treatments.

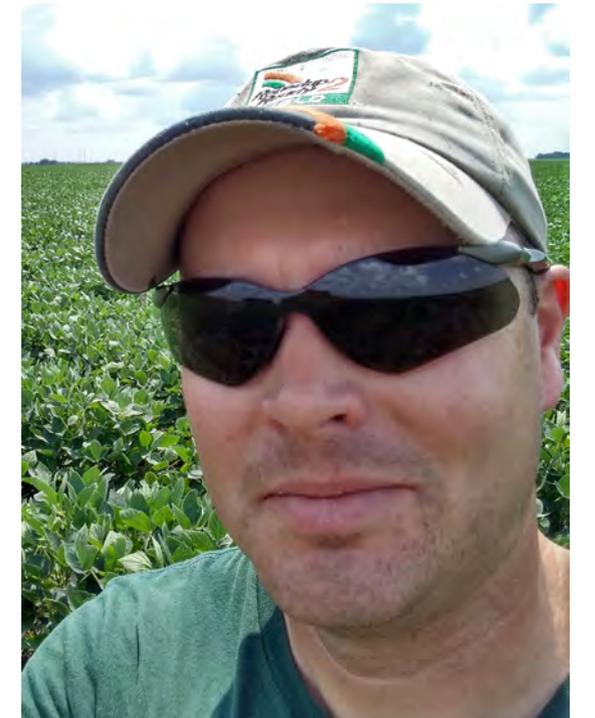
The untreated seed was less costly and resulted in better financial returns. The results confirmed Steve's hunch about seed treatments based on observations he'd been making on the farm from non-replicated tests over the years. "Results from our replicated strip trials provided empirical evidence that treating soybean seed offers minimal value, and it gives me more confidence in my approach to seed treatments," Steve says. "I will probably continue planting untreated soybeans."



Rachel and Alec Amundson



Sam and Danielle Bennett



Steve Saltzman

## Looking Ahead

In 2022, PFI members will again test their hypotheses on a variety of topics. A couple of sneaks peeks: Corn farmers will be testing whether or not healthy soils need less nitrogen fertilizer. Vegetable farmers will discover if cover crops can help control weeds in the pathways between beds.

# Farm Viability

PFI's farm viability programming provides personalized support to help farmers achieve their goals. Farm viability staff partner with farmers to create robust farm business plans, implement new on-farm practices and develop markets as we pave the path to prosperity together.

This work also seeks to improve the systems that impact farm livelihoods. We make key connections across the food and agriculture supply chain, develop strategic partnerships and shape the policies that encourage resilient farms to thrive. Our goal: to make farms and the businesses that support them successful, resilient and deeply connected.

**21**

people participated in PFI's cover crop business accelerator program.

**22**

people participated in our Savings Incentive Program, which offers business planning support, targeted learning opportunities, peer networking and a savings match after two years.

In fiscal year 2021, PFI paid or facilitated

**\$1,542,055**

in payments to farmers trying new things on their farms. These include payments to on-farm research cooperators, as well as to farmers enrolled in cost-share programs.

**88%**

of cover crop business accelerator participants followed up on the action steps from their business and marketing plan.

## In Practice

Since we launched the Savings Incentive Program in 2010, SIP has helped 174 beginning farmers on their journeys to establishing healthy farm businesses. To date, these farmers have saved over \$302,000. After receiving program match dollars, they have been able to purchase over \$470,000 in long-term assets to further their farming operations.

Mark Westbrook, a graduate of the Savings Incentive Program and owner of Solstice Farm near Waverly, Iowa, found that participating in SIP helped build his network of peers and mentors. He and his wife, Theresa, decided to take their years of hobby farming to the next level and purchased an acreage on which to establish perennial fruits and diversified livestock. Shortly after making this move, Mark applied to be part of the Savings Incentive Program to increase his chances of success as a new farmer.

Mark was connected to mentors Peter Kerns and Natasha Hegmann of Turkey River Farm in Elkport, Iowa. Collectively, the trio approached the mentorship very casually, which worked well for their personalities and intentions. "It has been a great experience getting to know Pete and Natasha," Mark says. "They have a similar worldview to us and their scale is not so much bigger than ours. This means we have many practices we can discuss that are relevant."

In addition to the mentorship, Mark has found success in meeting peers and mentors through local field days and conferences he attended as part of the program. "When at PFI events, I know I am going to meet others who have the same goals and ideals as me, which makes it easier to meet people I can connect with," Mark says.



Mark and Theresa Westbrook



Natasha Hegmann and Peter Kerns

## Looking Ahead

In 2022, we'll be expanding our work to serve more farmers and support additional on-farm practices. Our new Farm Business Coaching program will build on beginning farmer programs to provide one-on-one business consulting for beginning farmers in years six to 10, as well as fruit and vegetable producers. A broader suite of cost-share programs will help our members implement edge-of-field conservation, establish rotational grazing systems and reduce fertilizer inputs in extended rotations.

# Cost-Share

Mark Korth farms near Randolph, Nebraska, and joined PFI's cover crop cost-share program in the fall of 2021. He had never heard of PFI before applying, but was interested in getting some financial assistance for his second year seeding cover crops. After enrolling, Mark attended PFI's Cover Crop Boot Camp in November 2021 and the Small Grains Conference in March 2022, and appreciated the connections he made.

"One of the great things PFI has taught me in the short time I've been involved is the value of networking with other producers and sharing information," Mark says. "I could remember growing up, my father would often cooperate with our neighbors. It seems we are more independent now. With Practical Farmers, it is refreshing to have the connections with people who have experience with these practices, and we don't have to reinvent the wheel."

In addition to his plans to seed cover crops again in 2022, Mark is trying some new things on his farm that he learned from growers in PFI's network. He planted oats this spring for the first time and will continue to experiment with grazing and feeding cover crops to his cattle herd. "That's what I like about this program," he adds. "It's not just about paying for practices, it's about improving soil health and gaining knowledge along the way."



**Mark Korth**

*Practical Farmers of Iowa continues to offer cost-share for cover crops and small grains in extended rotations to farmers across the Corn Belt. Building communities of practice and connecting farmers is an intrinsic component of all our cost-share program offerings.*

# 251

**farmers became PFI members  
for the first time in 2021 due to  
the cost-share program.**



# Cost-Share Programs for Cover Crops & Small Grains



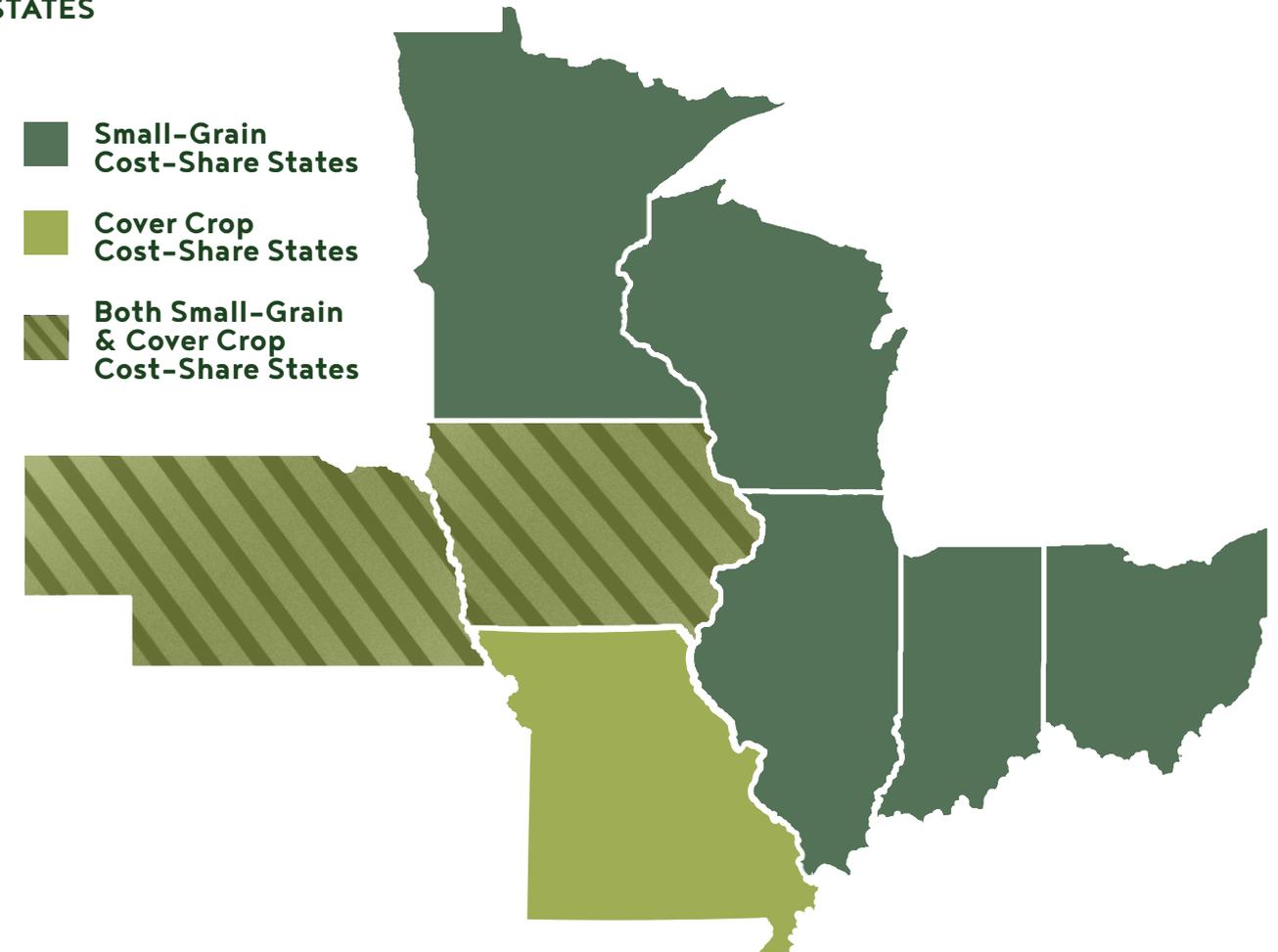
**83%** of cover crop participants said they had a change in knowledge after doing the program.

**62%**  
of small-grain participants said they wanted to increase their acres of small grains but cited a lack of markets and other infrastructure as barriers.

**75%**  
of cover crop participants said cover crops positively or very positively impact their overall farm financial goals.

## PARTICIPATING STATES

- Small-Grain Cost-Share States
- Cover Crop Cost-Share States
- Both Small-Grain & Cover Crop Cost-Share States



## FUNDERS



# Marketing & Communications

PFI's marketing and communications team brings the stories of PFI's members to life and shares them with a wide audience. We produce a quarterly magazine, quality videos, numerous publications and multiple email newsletters, and have a large presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We also ensure that our members are featured extensively in the media so that many viewpoints are driving the agriculture narrative.

**241**

**members were featured in the media.**

**223**

**The number of stories that appeared in local, regional and national media outlets highlighting key pieces of PFI's vision, like building community, soil health and water quality.**

**85%**

**of the members featured in the media were farmers.**

**61**

**The number of PFI members who spoke five or more times about agriculture at events.**

**10%**

**The percentage of Iowans who are currently aware of PFI (gathered via market research).**

## In Practice

Danelle Myer, a fifth-generation farmer, returned to Logan, Iowa, to start One Farm in 2010. Vegetables from One Farm are sold through various channels, including her own store, One Farm Market, which opened in late 2020. Danelle is passionate about nutritious and sustainable foods, and is willing to share her experience and insights with a broad audience to educate and engage others.



**Danelle Myer**

“There are people right here in our community creating food,” she says. “Sometimes our stories are generalized, or assumptions are made about us or our products. There’s an occasional disconnect between the producer and customer, when in reality, each producer has a colorful, passionate story that customers are eager to hear and connect with.”

Hosting various PFI events has taught Danelle how to identify the uniqueness of her farm story, along with aspects of her experience that connect her to others. In 2021, Danelle shared her story with diverse audiences. For instance, FarmHer, a project focusing on women in agriculture, highlighted her commitment to healthy communities on its website. This was followed by a segment on RFD-TV, a television network devoted to agriculture, rural lifestyles and related topics. First National Bank of Omaha then featured Danelle in a customer-highlight video.

She also shared her experience opening a local foods retail store with a Louisiana-based program for beginning farmers; presented to a group of southwest Iowa economic development directors; hosted a field trip for local kindergarten students; and hosted a learning opportunity for local agriculture teachers. Those were in addition to the three PFI events Danelle spoke at, and the PFI quarterly magazine article she was featured in. The article, “Growing Community,” appeared in the Autumn 2021 issue.

Beyond sharing her story to educate about local food systems, Danelle provides a platform for others to share their story as well. Since opening One Farm Market, Danelle has hosted many “Meet the Producer” events at which customers are welcomed to the store to meet the people and families who produce the food sold there.

## Looking Ahead

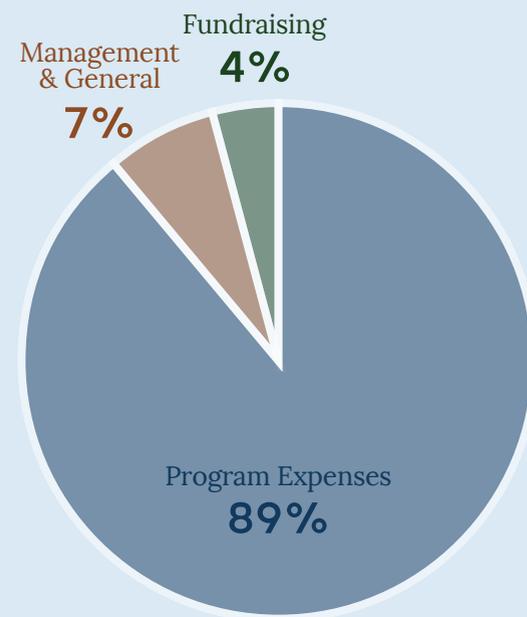
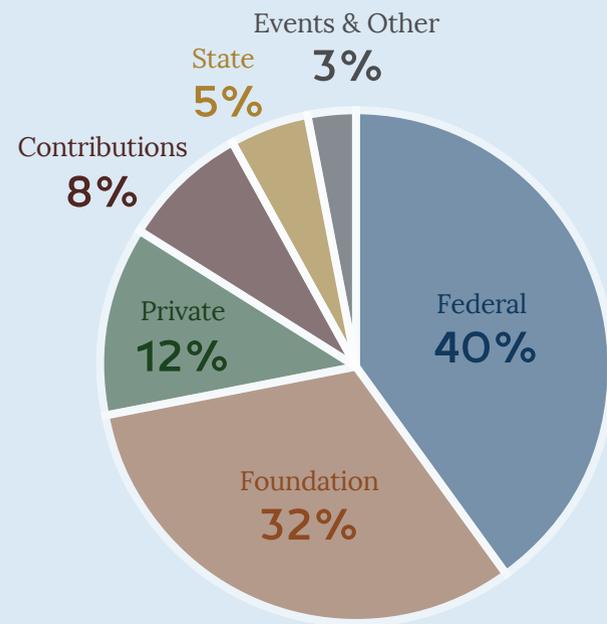
In 2022, we'll continue to tell stories through our many channels to further share our members' experience and drive the narrative about agriculture. One big project in the coming year is a new video series highlighting the ways that farmers are using diversity to mitigate risk, using innovative approaches to cover crops and diversified crop rotations.

# Financials

Trending with the other measures of the organization, Practical Farmers of Iowa's budget continues to grow. This allows more people to participate in our farmer-to-farmer network, which has been proven to create positive change for our farm and food systems.

Revenue  
**\$3.74 M**

Expenses  
**\$3.65 M**



## Showing Commitment to Farmers

**\$602,347**

The amount PFI paid to farmers to host events, conduct research, mentor others, and for small grains and cover crops cost-share.

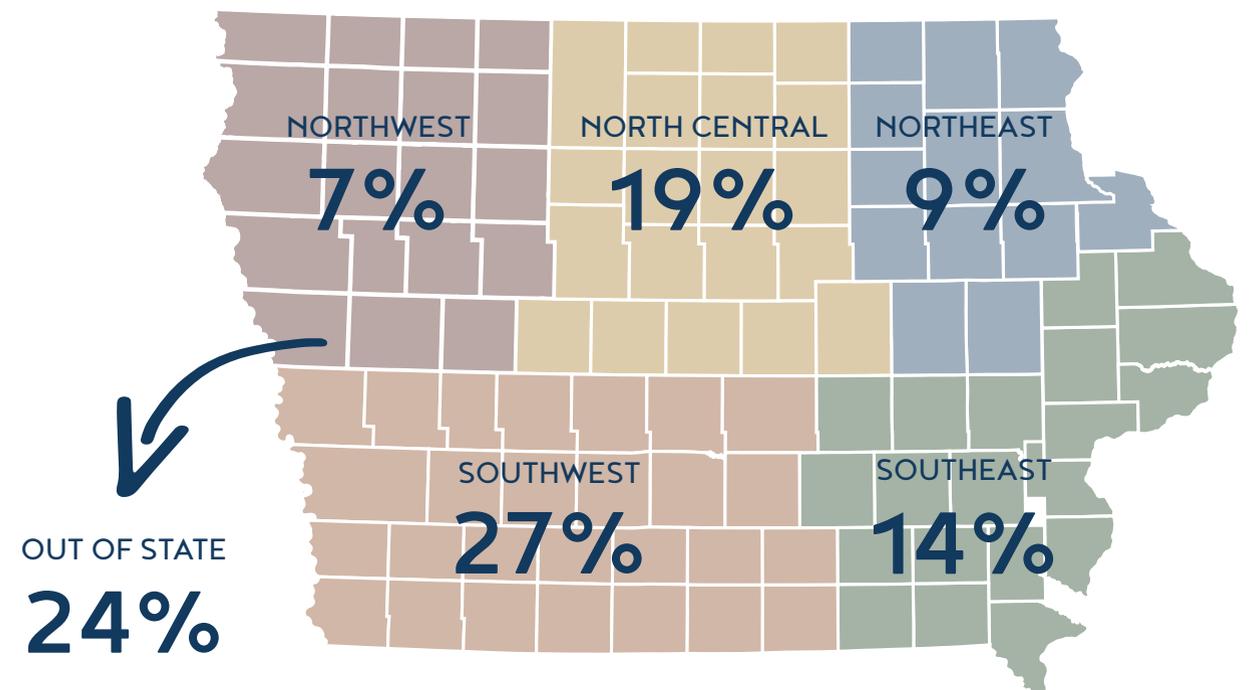
**\$1.04 million**

The amount PFI facilitated paying farmers enrolled in cost-share programs we administer for private companies. PFI administers a suite of cost-share programs with companies we partner with, and helped pay farmers enrolled in those programs through their grain merchandiser.

## Membership and Distribution

**4,994** TOTAL MEMBERS

**133** LIFETIME MEMBERS



**\$111,519**

of this revenue came from 409 members making donations above their annual membership dues.

A full list of donors and grantors will be available in the summer issue of our quarterly magazine, the Practical Farmer.



**\$119,553**

of this revenue came from annual membership income.



**\$15,950**

of this revenue came from lifetime membership income.

# Get Involved

## Join or renew your membership

Joining or renewing your membership is easy and immerses you in an incredible community that provides support and education on many agriculture issues, from production, to conservation, to profit and more.

## Serve as a PFI leader

Thank you to all of you who served as leaders of our organization last year. We truly value what you bring to the table and hope you will continue to serve this organization. We would love to have more of you join us to provide governance and guidance, teach at and host events, share your stories with others and help mentor beginning farmers.

## Attend our events

We organize events year-round to help you build resilient farms and communities. Please take time to attend, get to know others and learn from our member-leaders. Please bring your friends and neighbors along!

## Engage with us online

While many members value the chance to connect in person, we know it's not always possible. When you can't come to a field day, workshop or conference, connect digitally with PFI: Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, and like, comment, share and retweet our posts – and let us know what you're up to.

## Join the email conversation

Joining an email discussion group is one of the simplest ways to stay connected to the PFI community. Keep informed, share events, meet other farmers, landowners and non-farmers interested in diverse agriculture and get the support you need to make practical food and farm decisions. We often hear from members that these forums are one of the most valuable member benefits.

## Stay connected with us!



[practicalfarmers.org](https://practicalfarmers.org)



[twitter.com/practicalfarmer](https://twitter.com/practicalfarmer)



[facebook.com/practicalfarmers](https://facebook.com/practicalfarmers)



[youtube.com/pfivideos](https://youtube.com/pfivideos)



[instagram.com/practicalfarmer](https://instagram.com/practicalfarmer)



[linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa](https://linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa)

# Donate

Please continue to support Practical Farmers of Iowa financially. Donations are a vital funding source, helping to keep us financially nimble and able to respond quickly and directly to our members' needs. Your donation to Practical Farmers of Iowa is tax-deductible. We graciously accept cash donations, gifts from donor-advised funds, gifts of grain and employer match gifts.

Please consider making a planned gift to Practical Farmers of Iowa. This will not only help you create a legacy benefitting diverse farms and vibrant communities, it may also simplify your estate plans and increase your income. There are many ways to leave a planned gift.

## Visit [practicalfarmers.org](https://practicalfarmers.org) to learn more.



PRACTICAL **FARMERS** *of Iowa*

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101  
Ames, IA 50010

