
Beginning Farmer News - Meet farmers Paul and Miriam + Apply for a Labor4Learning position

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March 2025

Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.



Meet beginning farmers, Paul and Miriam

Paul and Miriam Skrade own and operate **Driftless Rock Farm**, a 5-acre farm in northeast Iowa they began in 2023. They have a targeted goat grazing business and raise Buff Orpington chickens for eggs and meat that they sell off their farm directly to consumers.

PFI asked Paul and Miriam: How did you know when the right time to start farming was for you?

Paul: The stars aligned, and we knew it was the right time. Our kids graduated from high school and went to college. Then a property within biking distance of my work became available. We were raising chickens in the backyard but thought this was the right opportunity to scale up.

Miriam: We had an empty nest and started to fill it with goats and chickens! We also knew we had great support through our network at Upper Iowa University. We were in a place where we knew we had plenty of people and community to turn to as we learned and continued to ask questions.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Grow your farm skills with a **Labor4Learning** position



Our 2025 Labor4Learning trainers are seeking employees across the state to work on their operations while receiving mentorship and support for learning opportunities.

The **Labor4Learning program** pairs beginning farmers seeking employment and additional training in farm management and production skills with experienced farmers seeking extra help on their farm.

[Explore the job postings.](#)

Is a USDA Value-Added Producer Grant right for you?



The Value-Added Producer Grant program helps fund agricultural producers' value-added activities to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities and increase producer income.

There is approximately \$30 million in total available funding and maximum grant amounts are \$75,000 for planning grants and \$250,000 for working capital grants.

[Take this self-assessment survey to help identify if you are eligible.](#)

Enroll in the Iowa Valley RC&D's no-till cost-share program



Iowa Valley RC&D's 2025 no-till cost-share program application is open now.

Like any new practice, using no-till for vegetable production has a learning curve with potentially reduced productivity.

To help with the financial risk, Iowa Valley RC&D is offering up to a \$500 cost-share to 10 Iowa vegetable growers to trial a no-till practice on their farm. **[Learn more and apply by April 1, 2025.](#)**

Video: "Establishing On-Farm Habitat for Beneficial Insects"



In our video, **Emmaly Renshaw**; **Mari Hunt Wassink** of Black Earth Gardens; **Grace Yi** of PFI; and **Sarah Nizzi** of Xerces Society share their experience establishing pollinator habitat to support beneficial insects at Feed Iowa First's Wanatee Farm in Marion, Iowa. [Watch the video.](#)

If you are an urban farmer curious about establishing your own habitat, [apply to our beneficial insects cost-share today.](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Webinar: “Building and Maintaining Fair Lease Agreements”



Tuesday, March 18 | Noon-1 p.m. | [Online](#)

Are you a beginning farmer thinking about entering into a lease agreement? Are you currently in a lease agreement that feels hard to navigate?

Join **Rachel Armstrong**, founder and executive director of Farm Commons, as she introduces materials and resources addressing lease power dynamics. [Register today.](#)

Webinar: “Watering Systems for Graziers”



Tuesday, April 1 | Noon-1 p.m. | [Online](#)

Based on his popular session at the 2022 PFI Annual Conference, **Dave Schmidt** is reprising his talk for a new and broader audience.

Access to water can be a barrier to grazing – but installing watering systems can seem daunting. In this webinar, Dave will share his experiences with different types of watering systems. Learn what might work for your grazing system during this webinar. [Register today.](#)

Webinar: "Getting Going With Grazing"

Tuesday, April 8 | Noon-1 p.m. | [Online](#)



It can be overwhelming to start rotationally grazing. **Olivia Pacha** has just reached the end of her "first full-blown year" rotationally grazing cattle, sheep and goats. She's also a participant in PFI's grazing cost-share and Savings Incentive Program.

In this webinar, Olivia will share what she's learned, from what to invest more in and buy less of, to navigating rental agreements and contract grazing.

[Register today.](#)

Upcoming PFI events

All events listed are in Central time.

**April 11: Shared Learning Call –
[Preventing and Managing
Disease in Oats](#)**

Noon-1 p.m. | [Online](#)

[View our events calendar](#)

Friends of PFI events

March 13: Training – Produce Safety Alliance Training

Hosted by: ISU Extension
8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. | Hiawatha, IA

March 19-20: Conference – Midwest Grazing and Soil Health Conference

Hosted by: Sustainable Farming Association
Willmar, MN

March 20: Webinar – Integrated Pest Management for Urban Farms

Hosted by: ISU Extension
1-2 p.m. | [Online](#)

March 26: Webinar – Supporting Your Farm Employees With Mental and Physical Disabilities: Legal Obligations for Injuries and Disabilities on the Farm

Hosted by: Farm Commons
11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. | [Online](#)

April 8: Webinar – Five Tips for Managing Your Cashflow at Your Farm Business

Hosted by: Penn State Extension
11 a.m.-Noon | [Online](#)

[View our events calendar](#)

Contact our team

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