

# the PRACTICAL FARMER

AUTUMN 2022



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Pathways to Peppers

Farming for Those  
Downstream

Taking Ownership of  
Seed Treatments







Attendees to Chris Henning's field day on June 24 peruse the diversity of plants within her established prairie. Read on page 12 about how Chris works with her tenants to implement conservation practices on the land.

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Lucas Bleyle and Kate Solko look over the colorful peppers they grow at Root to Rise Organic Farm in Ames, Iowa. On page 8, read about how they connected with a local restaurant to sell their peppers.



## 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

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## Envisioning Viable Farms and Communities

Earlier this summer, I got to brainstorm with my colleagues as we started to set a multiyear vision for the newly minted farm viability department. This department provides personalized support to help farmers achieve their goals and long-term viability. One question we pondered, which I think about a lot – and which you all probably think about a lot, too – was: What does our vision, “an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities,” actually look like on the landscape?

There are many facets to this vision. Jacqueline Venner Senske, PFI’s horticulture education coordinator, and I brainstormed about fruit and vegetable farm viability. Here’s what we thought it would require:

- **More fruits and vegetables raised and consumed in Iowa:** Iowa is an agricultural powerhouse; 85% of our land base is in agricultural production. Yet, according to Iowa State University, Iowa imports more than 90% of its food. Raising and consuming more Iowa-grown vegetables would increase our food security. It would also bring substantial employment and income potential to farms across Iowa, since fruits and vegetables are high-value, labor-intensive crops.

A dated but relevant report authored in 2010 by Rich Pirog and Dave Swenson, “Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruits and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest,” estimates that feeding Iowans 28 fruits and vegetables seasonally would require an additional 16,000 acres of land.

Iowa reported 11,344 acres of land in vegetables, orchards and berries in the 2017 census. Adding 16,000 acres to this tally would barely register relative to Iowa’s 30.6 million farmed acres. But the economic impact would be significant: \$61.4 million in direct farm sales and \$230 million in retail value, according to 2010 estimations.

- **More fruit and vegetable infrastructure:** Iowa fruit and vegetable farms presently lack sufficient



**Flowers for the Soul:** The PFI office has been brightened up by a weekly CSA flower share from Hannah Scates Kettler of Minerva’s Meadow near State Center, Iowa.

infrastructure – from processing, consistent markets and insurance to aggregation, transportation and more – to achieve their income potential. To farm in Iowa, they must take on substantial risk. Creating the needed infrastructure would bolster the viability of these farms while bringing more jobs and economic development to Iowa communities.

### Picturing a Patchwork of Farms Across Iowa

Investing in fruits and vegetables will markedly boost the viability of Iowa agriculture. Other colleagues brainstormed how to increase viability of field crops, small grains, livestock and habitat, and we touched on how to weave all of these enterprises together. Achieving PFI’s vision is not an either-or solution, but a yes-and. It’s energizing to envision what inclusive agriculture looks like in Iowa. A healthy food and farm system will be a patchwork of different kinds and sizes of farms.

While visioning is fun, visioning without action is merely a recreational activity. We are busy putting this vision into action with

all of you. Stay tuned for more farm viability department action, from expanded cost-share programs to business development and much more.

This magazine is a treasure trove of inspirational actions members and others are taking to improve farm, landscape and community viability in Iowa. On page 12, for instance, learn how Chris Henning, recipient of PFI’s 2022 Farmland Owner Legacy Award, is working to improve soil health, water quality and habitat.

On page 26, read how new Iowa-based meat processors are creating infrastructure to increase the viability of farms like Chad and Katie Hensley’s. And on page 8, read how restaurateurs Daisy and Berenice Valderrabano are working with farmer Kate Solko to get more local foods on the menu.

If you haven’t gotten to a field day yet, there are still some on the docket for this fall. These are first-hand opportunities to see how PFI members are working toward an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities.

On Oct. 5, JR Jenkins will share how he makes grazing on leased land viable with mobile grazing infrastructure near Wilton, Iowa. And on Oct. 8, Tim Swinton will share how he’s creating a diverse food crop and conservation farm on former row crop ground near Clemons, Iowa.

Thanks for all of your hard work on this noble journey. Together we continue to inspire and make change.

*Sally Wooley*



# Going BIG

## *With Cover Crops*

Inspired by the floods of 2019, Arthur and Lee Wisecup have embraced an ambitious cover crop strategy for their river-bottom farm

By Taylor Hintch

**Like many farmers near the Missouri River in 2019, father-son farming team Lee and Arthur Wisecup found themselves looking for something creative to do with some of their farmed acres as flooding in March and May disrupted normal operations.**

Historic floods that year, which affected nearly 14 million people in the Midwest and South, caused extensive damage to homes, communities and farms along the river and its tributaries, as well as other rivers in the region. Seeking to improve soil health, suppress weeds and learn how to work with cover crops, Lee and Arthur decided to plant a multi-species cover crop mix on 500 of their 1,600 acres near Missouri Valley, Iowa.

"Half our acres we did not plant [in 2019] because we had a wet spring," Arthur says. "So we got into doing a lot of prevent-plant acres with about eight or 10 different cover crop species. We really liked planting soybeans into that, so the following year, we started planting cereal rye. Our main goals are soil health and weed suppression."

Just three years on, they are proving that productive river-bottom farmland is prime ground for cover crops and conservation. Committed to using practices that boost profits while protecting the environment, the family has embraced an ambitious cover crop adoption strategy that includes

experimenting with roller-crimping and different cover crop mixes.

That commitment culminated this year in a new milestone: For the first time, the Wisecups covered all 1,600 acres of their cropland in diverse cover crop mixes ahead of the 2022 growing season. In July, they also hosted their first PFI field day to share what they have learned about integrating cover crops and conservation on their farm.

### **Expanding Conservation**

Arthur and Lee are part of Wisecup Family Farm and Museum, which is home to four generations of farmers: Arthur, his father Lee, grandfather Charlie and their families, who all play an integral part. Established in 1942, the farm today is a mix of conventional corn and soybeans planted into diverse cover crop mixes, restored wetlands, pollinator and quail habitat and an on-farm museum.

The family's journey towards more conservation practices on the land picked up after Arthur returned to the farm in 2014 from Doane University, in Crete, Nebraska, where he studied environmental science. While the family had started experimenting with no-till in 2010, once Arthur returned, they invested more time and energy pivoting towards a no-till cover crop system. By 2020, the Wisecups had transitioned all their acres to no-till.

In 2018, the Wisecup family enrolled 237 acres of their land into the federal

Conservation Reserve Program and installed wetlands. Their commitment to conservation has not gone unnoticed: In 2019, the family received the Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever Precision Farmer of the Year Award.

In 2020, the family got involved with Practical Farmers through PFI's cover crop cost-share program, which has helped them in their push to expand cover crops on their land. One of their goals, as conventional farmers, is to find ways to reduce herbicides and synthetic nitrogen. They are making progress. "We have noticed some reduction in herbicide use," Arthur says. "Nitrogen reduction has been trial-and-error. We are learning but we are confident in cover crops."

### **Sharing Their Journey**

In July, Arthur and Lee hosted a field day to showcase practices they have adopted in their recent journey with cover crops and no-till. "We want farmers to not be afraid to plant cover crops on the river bottom," Lee says. "Very few people are doing it in our local area."

The event was an opportunity for Arthur and Lee to highlight their cover crop mixes for corn and soybeans, their first attempt using a roller-crimper and their ongoing experiments – including on-farm research looking at short-stature and short-season corn. They also shared some of the changes they've noticed since adding cover crops, as well as some of the challenges they've encountered – like seeding cover crops in

the mud. Before planting cover crops, for instance, Arthur says compaction was a noticeable problem. Now, in the short time since they've planted covers, the soil structure is starting to improve and water is draining more easily.

"We're trying to get a coffee ground-like structure, and we are starting to see that structure versus a thick layer of compaction," Arthur says. "Compaction is probably our biggest worry for corn."

### Getting the Job Done

Part of the Wisecups' learning process has involved experimenting with the best ways to seed their cover crop. Common seeding methods include aerial seeding, drilling and broadcasting after harvest in the fall. Different factors can influence the choice of seeding method – such as what equipment a farmer already has that can get the job done.

"Going big" with covers requires thinking ahead and looking for new ideas, particularly when trying something outside the norm. For Arthur and Lee, this has involved finding creative ways to outfit their existing seeder to save money while making it work better for diverse cover crops mixes.

Currently, they use a 1990 CCS John Deere air seeder with single-disc no-till openers to seed all of their cover crops and soybeans. In the fall of 2021, Arthur and Lee used it to seed a cover crop mix of cereal rye, barley, rapeseed and winter camelina ahead of their corn and a mix of rye and barley ahead of their soybeans. The family has owned the seeder for about 10 years and continues to add new technology to it.

**"We want farmers to not be afraid to plant cover crops on the river bottom"**  
*- Lee Wisecup*

"Last year, we completely rebuilt the air seeder without having to buy a new one," Arthur says. "It had a new serial number put on it because we added more computers. The frames don't really go bad. It's all the wear and tear on parts."

Parts such as closing wheels and springs, for instance, typically require replacement every 5,000 acres. With the current air seeder, Arthur says they can control how densely cover crops are planted by adjusting the seeder's seed-metering wheels that control seed to the row units.

So far, Arthur says the air seeder has worked well on their wet, muddy river-bottom ground. It has good seed-to-soil contact, which helps ensure the seeds germinate. It also pairs well with the family's precision technology, which they began using in 2012 and is now an integral part of their operation.

### Refining Equipment Plans

But father and son have also encountered some limitations to the seeder. "In our current air seeder, all the cover crop seed is blended in one tank," Arthur says. "Blending seed in the tank gets all the cover crops seeded in one pass, but plants all the seeds at the same rate and depth."

The Wisecups would now like to get a no-till drill with at least two seed tanks that will let them plant multiple cover crop species simultaneously. "With two tanks, we're hoping to split the winter camelina to give it a better chance to start growing than it has in the blended tank," Arthur says.

The new planter also needs to successfully plant their cash crops. Lee and Arthur recently tested a multi-tank minimum-till drill and immediately ran into some snags. "We hoped that minimal-till would be sufficient to plant soybeans into corn stubble, but the row units did not operate evenly in their full no-till system," Arthur says. "It was shooting the beans on top of the ground instead of putting it in an inch deep."

An uneven planting depth will lead to poor emergence and a poor stand. While they're back to the drawing board, father and son continue to workshop ideas that will let them plant at the correct depth in a no-till system. "We're hoping we can work with our local John Deere to build something," Arthur says.

While the Wisecups continue to experiment and refine, the cover crops trajectory spurred by the floods has blossomed into committed curiosity about the ways cover crops can help them build farm resilience – and that is perhaps a silver lining of the disaster: After successfully covering all of their acres, they are now poised to envision even more ambitious ways to improve cover crops and conservation on their farm. ■



**(Above):** The Wisecup family has been using their 1990 CCS John Deere air seeder to seed their cover crops, and they continue to modify it so it works better for their cover crop goals. **(Right):** Arthur Wisecup speaks to attendees at the family's July 16 field day at their farm near Missouri Valley, Iowa. **(Opposite):** Lee Wisecup, left, and his son, Arthur Wisecup, are working together to expand cover crops and conservation on their fourth-generation family farm.



# PATHWAYS TO PEPPERS

*Small decisions led two local businesses to connect over a surprise harvest bounty*

By Amos Johnson



Life is made up of countless decisions, moments that branch our paths this way and that. Occasionally, we encounter a crossroads that leads to dramatic and instant outcomes. But between these momentous occasions, we walk through an ether of small choices and seemingly random events.

While dramatic shifts and inflection points matter, most of life accrues through the little choices we make. This is a story of the small decisions – and a serendipitous interaction – that led to something wonderful in Ames, Iowa: local peppers in a delicious burrito.

## **A FAMILY BUSINESS**

Sisters Berenice and Daisy Valderrabano, owners of the beloved Ames taqueria Mr. Burrito, have their roots in farming. They grew up raising cattle in Puebla, Mexico, and their father also worked seasonally on a Texas horse ranch. He eventually saved enough money to bring the rest of the family to the United States.

In 2003, the family found an opportunity in Ames and moved north to work in, and eventually buy, the restaurant that became Mr. Burrito, located in the city's Campustown area. "My father knew Iowa was the place for us to have opportunity with hard work," Berenice recalls. Founded in 2010 with their parents, and now owned by Berenice and Daisy, the taqueria's menu is built on family recipes brought from Puebla by their mother. They knew the idea would work "because my mom cooked really delicious food," Berenice says.

When you order a meal from Mr. Burrito, the peppers' color draws the eye – vibrant reds, yellows and oranges, or a deep, healthy green, all flaked with the black confetti of char. Using only fresh ingredients, the Valderrabanos strive to take advantage of special opportunities to source produce. At the right time of year, if the summer weather has been kind and the peppers prolific, these peppers come from Kate Solko at Root to Rise Farm, less than 6 miles away.

The Valderrabanos have always wanted to use local produce, but the opportunity never arose – until the summer of 2021 when they chanced to connect with Kate. The two Ames businesses crossed paths at a time when Kate was dealing with a unique pepper problem: one of prodigious pepper abundance. The unexpected bounty stemmed in part from Lucas Bleye, an Ames native studying sustainable food systems at Purdue University who interned with Kate and designed a high tunnel trial for pepper production. Kate's decision to try this new pepper-growing method proved highly successful at boosting pepper yields.

Ideal pepper-growing weather that season combined to create a perfect storm for prolific pepper growth. Kate and her team found themselves harvesting thousands of pounds of peppers – and facing the quandary of how to market that much product.

## GROWING BEAUTIFUL FOOD

Kate has been farming for 13 years, the last three at Root to Rise Farm on the northern edge of Ames. The farming bug bit while she was searching for produce for her family. At the time, the best local food was simply out of her price range. Undeterred, she decided to create the solution.

“We love food, we love cooking, we love really beautiful food,” Kate says. “The path to accessible, high-quality food was working for it.” Kate started participating in a workshare CSA. In exchange for her labor in the field, she got a CSA share at a reduced price. It was a small decision that led to a personal revelation: Working in the earth fed both her body and her spirit. Kate has been farming ever since, turning it into her full-time profession.

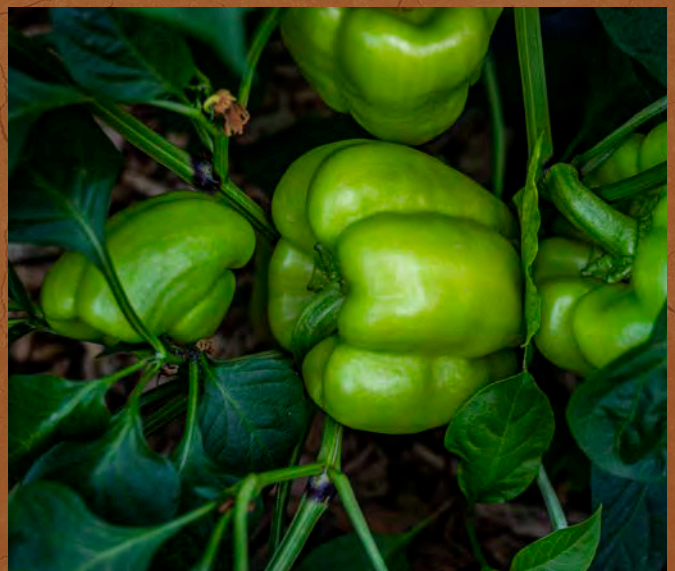
When she started Root to Rise Farm in 2019, Kate decided to market through a CSA and farmers market. Since launching the farm, her CSA has more than doubled from 30 to 70 shares, and her stall at the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market is always busy. But even split between her boxes and farmers market sales, she couldn't move enough peppers the season she met the Valderrabanos. Needing an outlet for her tidal wave of produce, she turned to wholesale.



“To be honest, wholesale is hard for our production model. We barely make any profit from it,” Kate says. “The reason it's profitable at all is because it's surplus.” Because of this, wholesale marketing is not built into her

(Continued on page 10 →)

*“We love food, we love cooking, we love really beautiful food,” Kate says. “The path to accessible, high-quality food was working for it.”*



*“I feel like I have to help other small businesses,” Berenice says, highlighting a desire to “give back to the community and help other people grow.”*



farm production plan and only happens if there is an unexpected bounty she can't sell elsewhere.

“It's not consistent, so it's one of the reasons we appreciate the wholesale customers we do have,” she says. “They're so flexible. It's almost like they're on call.” Kate has sold to restaurants and food co-ops throughout Ames and Des Moines. The Valderrabanos, however, have bought the majority of Kate's surplus produce. The collaboration has helped prevent an abundance of peppers – and their revenue – from going to waste.

## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Preventing this food waste is important to Kate. The United Nations estimates that nearly half of all fruits and vegetables are wasted every year. In the United States, losses at the farm level range from 15% to 35%. If food waste were a country, it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gas in the world.

Kate strives to avoid contributing to that statistic. A large reason why food gets wasted comes down to appearance. Consumers have come to expect produce that looks a particular way – often, a stereotypical, homogenized version of the diverse shapes, sizes and even benign blemishes that naturally occur. Produce that strays too far from artificial aesthetic standards is colloquially called “ugly produce” – and though it's perfectly edible, many consumers perceive it to be flawed and are unwilling to buy it.

But Kate says the Valderrabanos are knowledgeable buyers who aren't so prejudiced on pepper appearance. “One of the great things about Mr. Burrito, because they are chopping and sauteing peppers, they were able to take seconds peppers that are unmarketable because of shape.”

Besides the challenge of selling oddly shaped peppers, Kate ran into an unexpected marketing problem with her farmers market and CSA customers: their ingrained belief that pepper shape indicates flavor. Carmen peppers are wildly productive, Kate explains, “beautiful and sweet,” but they taper at one end, much like an oversized chili pepper.

“I could not convince people at farmers markets that Carmen peppers were not hot,” she says. “People believe all bell-shaped peppers are sweet and all pointed peppers are hot.”

The Valderrabano sisters know better. Berenice says that because they chop and grill the peppers fresh every day, accepting a non-standard shape is no barrier to them. “We are happy to use any pepper that tastes good and fits our budget. It was an easy choice to take Kate's peppers.”

Here we arrive at the confluence of these two paths we've been following. Nobody remembers exactly how it happened, but Berenice and Kate recall Facebook being involved. Kate had posted about her pepper problem, and the platform's algorithm put that post in front of Berenice just as she was scrolling by and

in need of local produce. Once the connection was made, the choice to work together was easy.

## FINDING THE FUTURE

Motivated in part by her own experience growing up in a farm family, Berenice says her goal is to work with more farmers to get local ingredients on the menu. Doing that, however, will require overcoming some notable challenges. Price is one barrier. Farmers have to be able and willing to sell a significant quantity of vegetables at a wholesale price, which isn't always an option for small-scale organic farmers with tight margins.

Cost is also a big concern for Berenice and Daisy. "I feel like organic is too expensive for us," Berenice says. "I don't want to raise prices." The sisters want to keep costs low for the community, and are also keenly aware that the majority of their customers are college students with limited funds. Because Kate's peppers were surplus, she was able to agree to a price point the Valderrabano sisters could afford.

Perhaps more significantly, though, the Valderrabanos lack the relationships that could help them find farmers to partner with. Berenice is not sure where to look besides farmers markets. "I don't go to farmers markets much since I work in the restaurant," she says. "So I don't make those connections."

While there are various online directories listing local producers (PFI has one on our website), there are few such resources focused on finding local wholesalers. This means the Valderrabanos would have to inquire with each individual

producer, something they lack the time to do.

Despite the broader challenges Berenice and Daisy face to using more locally raised ingredients, their connection with Kate is a positive first step – the result of decisions each made that enabled their paths to cross and a relationship to grow and blossom. For the Valderrabanos, it was the decision to browse social media at a particular time.

For Kate, it was the decision to launch a pepper-growing experiment when she did – and then to post on Facebook about her need for takers of surplus peppers. While neither could foresee the outcome of those decisions, the little choices they made – and continue to make each day – are growing change.

Beyond the immediate benefits to their two small businesses, by working together, Berenice, Daisy and Kate are also building community. For Berenice, supporting and creating solidarity with other small businesses is especially important.

"I feel like I have to help other small businesses," she says, highlighting a desire to "give back to the community and help other people grow."

Kate expresses gratitude for the Valderrabanos' support and knowing she is not alone, especially when facing difficulties. "They really step up in those times," Kate says. "It helps keep us afloat. I appreciate them deeply." ■



# FARMING FOR THOSE *Downstream*

*For decades, Chris Henning has sought to manage her land for landscape and community health*

By Martha McFarland



**For over 30 years, Chris Henning has worked in partnership with her tenants to implement conservation practices that safeguard the soil in her fields – and communities downstream. With a willingness to question, try new practices and work through hard conversations, she demonstrates the impact engaged landownership can have on the landscape.**

Chris traces her philosophy of engaged landownership and conservation to her experience of the devastation caused by the Great Flood of 1993. She and her late husband, Max, had just started their journey as landowners the year before, when they purchased their 145-acre farm, located near Jefferson, Iowa.

Chris had grown up in the area but had lived in Des Moines for 27 years, working at Meredith Corporation. The property included an 1870s farmhouse in need of restoration, four creeks and 120 acres of rented corn and soybean fields. After purchasing the farm, Chris opted to work with her father George's tenant. Rather than cash rent, Chris decided to crop-share expenses and the profits with her farm tenant just as her father did.

In 1993, historic flooding inundated much of Iowa and the Midwest, including

the city of Jefferson and Chris' farm. Roads north and south of the house were torn out, the farm's four creeks swelled and overflowed and rain washed across the land. When Chris could finally drive out onto her fields, she recalls seeing gullies so deep, "you could lose a tractor in them."

Like the receding floodwaters, the soil swept from her farm by the deluge was carried downstream. "And then, three days later – which is how long it takes for that water to travel – my kids living in Des Moines got it," Chris says. "Des Moines was underwater. My kids had no water. And it was then that it struck me – what I did on my farm made a hell of a difference downstream."

Even after the flood waters crested, Des Moines went without safe drinking water for weeks. The magnitude of the disaster, and her personal connections to those impacted downstream, ignited Chris' awareness about how her farm practices can affect those living far from her land. "The bottom line," she says, "is what I do on my farm makes a difference to lots of people, including my neighbors and friends that worked at Meredith, and now all the people drinking the water that comes from up here, 500,000 in the greater Des Moines area."

That epiphany has shaped Chris' land management ever since. She has spent years working with her farmland tenants to manage the land in ways that protect

water quality and soil health while enhancing productivity on her farm through practices like cover crops, regular soil sampling and adherence to conservation principles. Today, she is known throughout Practical Farmers of Iowa and the broader community as a leader in land stewardship and a role model of engaged farmland ownership.

This dedication to the well-being of those on and off the farm, and to managing her land for long-term sustainability, led to her selection by Practical Farmers' board of directors as the 2022 recipient of PFI's Farmland Owner Legacy Award, which was presented at a ceremony and field day on her farm on June 24. The award acknowledges landowner partnerships with farmers and the vital role they play in shaping the agricultural landscape and rural communities.

"What impresses me is how successful Chris has been implementing conservation practices," says Nathan Anderson, who farms near Aurelia, Iowa, and is vice president of PFI's board of directors. "She is so good at learning new strategies, thinking about how it will work on her farm, communicating those ideas to her tenant and then putting them into practice."

## **Challenging "The Way It's Always Been Done"**

Chris recalls the first harvest as a new farmland owner in 1992. Though she was



Sally Worley presents the Farmland Owner Legacy Award to Chris Henning.

working with the same farm tenant as her father, the return on investment was not impressive.

“The ones who had leased it before we bought the farm were farming 1950s style,” she says. “They may have been cultivating but didn’t use herbicide. We had such a weed seed bank that when we planted first crop, we grew as many weeds as we grew corn. The corn yielded 100 bushels an acre. Beans were horrible, 25 [bushels per acre].”

After the 1993 floods, a local agronomist approached Chris and invited her to sign up for a program to install buffer strips along her creeks. Given the gullies gouged in her fields during the flooding, she was eager to participate. The buffer strips required 100 feet from the field’s edge. Because of how the stream meandered, the buffers took 26 acres out of production.

Despite the poor performance the previous year, Chris’ decision to install the buffer strips put some strain on the relationship with her tenant. “He wasn’t crazy about taking farmland out of production,” she says.

He often referenced Chris’ father and their tenant-landowner relationship when he disagreed with the changes she wanted to make. Remembering that conversation about the prairie buffer strips, she says with a laugh, “That might have been the first time he said, ‘Well, this isn’t the way George would do it.’”

It wouldn’t be the last time she heard that sentiment from her tenant. Chris continued to ask questions and was invested in how land was managed. This led her to consider strategies that made sense for the land, even when she and her tenant didn’t see eye-to-eye. Over the years, Chris continued to hear, “Well, George wouldn’t do it that way,” but she continued to learn, invest, innovate and stay involved.

**“The bottom line is what I do on my farm, makes a difference to lots of people, including my neighbors and friends that worked at Meredith, and now all the people drinking the water that comes from up here, 500,000 in the greater Des Moines area.”**

*- Chris Henning*

Ultimately, Chris ended her contract with that tenant because she recognized the need for conservation practices in places to preserve the long-term health of her land. “We had different values and different goals for the farm,” she says. “He was more concerned with the yield, and I was more concerned with the habitat, diversity and preservation of the soil, and the waste of money.”

She attributes much of her success implementing conservation practices to the fact that she was crop sharing. Sharing in the risks with her tenant, she says, spurred her to pay more attention to what was happening in the field – and

continues to help her in stewarding her land.

“You’re learning a lot more than if you’re just watching the crops grow in the field,” she says. “When my husband Max was sick, I rented it out instead of crop sharing for a few years. I didn’t like that at all. I thought I would like it more with everything else that was going on, but I couldn’t walk across my driveway into my own field. It was someone else’s field. It was someone else’s crop.”

### Innovating and Taking Risks

Poor prices for corn and soybeans in the early 2000s led Chris to continue to innovate, answering the call of an Iowa banker who, as Chris tells it, was tired of hearing farmers’ frustrations when they couldn’t make their payments by raising corn and soybeans. He challenged farmers to try growing something else. A group of west-central Iowa farmers answered the challenge and came together to research raising edible beans and other alternative crops with greater profit for farmers.

The group became The Greene Bean Project, which featured farmers who together planted 1,000 acres of alternative crops in 18 Iowa counties, including garbanzo and adzuki beans for export to Japan. Chris was very involved in the project. Like all farming, growing an experimental crop meant failures and successes. The adzuki bean held great

*(Continued on page 14 →)*

potential, both growing the bean in Iowa soils and securing a direct market in Japan.

However, the infrastructure for cleaning and storing the beans in Iowa proved challenging. While the project involved many members of the community, including county extension, local agronomists and bankers, Chris' tenant was unwilling to take those risks.

During this project Chris planted 5 of her acres in alternative crops, following the advice that she should only plant as much as she could afford to lose. Tom Thorpe, his 12-year old son Troy and Tom's dad helped plant those beans on Chris' farm. She and Tom got to know each other riding along in the combine. "When I was ready to switch tenants," Chris says, "he was my first choice."

Twenty years later, Troy and Tom still work with Chris on her farm. Over the years, their collaboration has led to more conservation on her land – along with higher yields. She explains how putting some of those less productive acres into the federal Conservation Reserve Program has meant more return on those acres while not wasting the money on places that don't grow as well.

Chris is most proud of her work to install wetlands on her land – like the 10-acre wetland she created on land inherited from her father. Beyond the wildlife benefits, taking out those unproductive 10 acres also improved her average yield for that field.

**"We're still fine-tuning our chemical programs so we are using less herbicide and a different nitrogen program than we used to,"** *Chris says.* **"Most years our yields have been equal to or better than neighbors who haven't been using cover crops."**



Chris shows attendees her established prairie and pollinator flowers, explaining why she took marginal land out of production, and the benefits it provides to the farm.

Chris and her tenants have also been using cover crops since 2008, and they have switched to no-till. While she's still learning and experimenting with covers, she says she has noticed a big difference in soil health.

"We're still fine-tuning our chemical programs so we are using less herbicide and a different nitrogen program than we used to," Chris says. "Most years our yields have been equal to or better than neighbors who haven't been using cover crops."

Chris says the best part of working with her tenant on her cover crop strategy was having him announce he'd be doing cover crops on his own farm. "If we could just get more farmers into covers," she says, "we would save a great deal of erosion when that first great rain comes in the spring."

### Plans for the Future

It's been nearly 30 years since the flood waters swept across her land and down into Des Moines, and those buffer strips are in their third 10-year contract. But Chris' work with soil and water conservation is just getting started. Her leadership, speaking and teaching for organizations continue to inspire other landowners, helping them recognize the role they can play on the land. She has additional goals, too. "I hope to be more proactive with environmental groups that are looking at planting trees, cut back on fossil fuel use and, as always, mindful of the chemicals we use in our daily lives and in our farming," Chris says. "Some land should not be farmed and other land should be farmed lightly. I have a mix of both, and hope to encourage the habitat, the wildlife and the elements, and be the carbon sink of the neighborhood."

Chris is working now to get a baseline of the quality of the water coming and going from her land, finding ways to show neighbors, friends and other farmers how they might also make a difference in their practices. She is looking forward to demonstrating the slake test, using nitrate strips and actually wading in the water to look at it and raise awareness.

Her advice to other landowners looking for a successful relationship? "Get in the combine. See what your land looks like," Chris says. "You'll see what the problem areas are, you'll know where there's water ponding and you can ask, 'Is there always a pond here? How much does that area grow for us?' The other thing you're doing when you're riding in the combine," she adds, "or even in the planter – you're learning what's important to your farmer." ■

# 2022 FIELD DAY Season

**Over the years,** we've learned a lot about running field days. We've adopted best practices and streamlined planning and coordination. But no two PFI field days are ever alike. Your farms are too different, too interesting; your experiences and backgrounds too unique, the nuances of your knowledge full of nooks and crannies that surprise us every time. And you, field day hosts, aren't the only ones thwarting uniformity.

As of August, over 1,300 people have attended PFI field days in 2022 – and for 38% of participants, that field day was their first interaction with PFI. For all you new faces, welcome to our farmer-to-farmer network – we hope to see you again! To all attendees and hosts, thank you for coming together this field day season to connect, share knowledge and learn from one another – your curiosity and openness are what define PFI's community spirit.







**Cover story page:** Attendees poke around the honeyberry bushes at Jeff and Deb Sindelar's field day. Though Jeff and Deb encouraged attendees to sample different varieties, the in-row structures typically hold bird netting to reduce avian sampling of the ripe fruits. (June 16, Newhall, Iowa)

**(1)** The PFI banner greets attendees to the Wisecup family's field day. (July 16, Missouri Valley, Iowa) **(2)** Sara Pearson (left) pauses the tour to look at the organic small grains at Prairie Skye Farm. (July 23, Wesley, Iowa) **(3)** This weir at Heath Stolee's farm, Nutty Farmer Chestnuts, raises water levels to create open-water and wetland areas, but still allows the water to continue flowing to a nearby creek. Read more about Heath's conservation practices in the Summer 2022 edition of the Practical Farmer. (June 25, Radcliffe, Iowa) **(4)** Monika Owczarski (standing, left) and Amy Joens kick off the Beginning Farmer Social on Sweet Tooth Farm. Attendees also joined in a fabulous potluck! (June 23, Des Moines, Iowa) **(5)** Bella sports some festive collar flair during her human's (Meredith Nunnikhoven) flower farming field day. (July 17, Oskaloosa, Iowa) **(6)** From left: Abby Barten and Nancy and John Brannaman share a laugh. The trio are collaborating to launch a lavender U-pick farm on Nancy and John's land. (July 6, Lisbon, Iowa) **(7)** Fred Abels, standing near the roller-crimper in the tan polo, shares his experience (and experiments) with roller-crimping prior to the equipment demonstration. As a conventional farmer, Fred is hoping to reduce his herbicide passes by using the roller-crimper instead. (June 11, Holland, Iowa)





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**(1)** Angela Smith leads attendees on a tour of Middle Fork Farm's pollinator and beneficial insect habitat projects designed to support ecological services to their fruit, vegetable and herb production. (July 16, Oronoco, Minnesota) **(2)** Attendees spread out in the evening shade for dinner as they celebrate Chris Henning, who received PFI's 2022 Farmland Owner Legacy Award. Read more about Chris on pages 12-14. (June 24, Jefferson, Iowa) **(3)** Honeyberries, ripe for the picking by mid-June! Read more about honeyberries on pages 22-23. (June 16, Newhall, Iowa) **(4)** From left: Joe Lynch, Rebecca Clay, Lonna Nachtigal, Alisha Bower and Bri Postlewait warm up for the field day season during PFI's office open house. (June 6, Ames, Iowa) **(5)** Tim Youngquist (left) identifies (and appreciates) the prairie blooms arranged and held by Lisa Leopold during Eric and Kelly Hoiien's field day. The focus of the day was on prairie strips and watershed protection adjacent to Big Spirit Lake. (July 9, Orleans, Iowa) **(6)** From left: The Brahms family, including Mike, Donna, Shawn, Diane, Steve, Jack and Nora, pose after their field day. Their multigenerational field day featured their hydroponic tomatoes, field vegetable production, apple orchard and agritourism. (June 26, Griswold, Iowa) **(7)** John Van Horn shares how he uses his Gandy seeder for cover crops. (July 30, Glidden, Iowa) **(8)** Geneva Rosmann assumes a front-tire seat during Grandpa Ron's field day, co-hosted by the Rosmann family and Eric Madsen. (Aug. 2, Harlan, Iowa) **(9)** Arthur Wisecup talks about how he and his dad, Lee, seed cover crops and what they're looking for in their next multi-species drill. (July 16, Missouri Valley, Iowa) **(10)** Sisters-in-flower farming, Meredith Nunnikhoven (left) and Ann Franzenburg, pose for a photo during Meredith's field day. (July 17, Oskaloosa, Iowa)



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(1) Andy Linder's field day attendees check out a summer cover crop. Since 2016, the Linders have planted 100% of their acres to cover crops after harvest. (July 15, Easton, Minnesota) (2) Steve Brahms talks with attendees about onion production at 3 Bees Farm. (June 26, Griswold, Iowa) (3) Lyle Grimm (right) oversees attendees' progress during the evisceration portion of Grimm Family Farm's field day focused on on-farm poultry processing. (June 24, North English, Iowa) (4) Bob Pearson (left) and Jack Knight show off the soil texture under Prairie Skye Farm's organic corn. (July 23, Wesley, Iowa) (5) Ron Rosmann (left) and Sarah Carlson pass the mic during the field day co-hosted by the Rosmann family and Eric Madsen, which featured Buffalo equipment. (Aug. 2, Harlan, Iowa) (6) A friendly farm cat gets a scratch from Sawyer Stolee. (June 25, Radcliffe, Iowa) (7) Dan Voss shows attendees his no-till drill, which he uses to drill oats for feed and straw. (July 7, Palo, Iowa) (8) Chad and Katie Hensley share how they have used EQIP and CSP for a variety of conservation projects on their farm. (June 20, Lamoni, Iowa) (9) Elias Mendenhall-Borus brings out a turkey poult while his mom, Kate Mendenhall discusses their pasture-based systems. (June 17, Okoboji, Iowa) (10) Xerces Society's Karen Jokela teases apart the ligules of a prairie grass during Middle Fork Farm's field day. (July 16, Oronco, Minnesota) (11) Lavender begins to bloom at The Lavender Farm at Sutliff. (July 6, Lisbon, Iowa)





# Singing the Praises of a Promising Perennial

Drawn to the taste and ease of growing honeyberries, Jeff Sindelar has become a vocal champion for this little-known and hard-to-define berry

By Jacqueline Venner Senske

When Jeff Sindelar starts talking honeyberries, a few things happen. First, he encounters a nearly ubiquitous response: *What's a honeyberry?*

The prompt is his cue to effuse about the little-known fruit he and his wife, Deb Sindelar, grow at Deb's Berry Farm, the business they operate near Newhall, Iowa.

Jeff's enthusiasm then spreads – igniting curiosity and excitement among those listening.

*How can a berry elicit such emotion?*

## Meet the Honeyberry

To the question of what a honeyberry is, there are several answers.

Honeyberries are the fruit of a woody, perennial shrub, a non-invasive cousin of the honeysuckle and a native of northern regions of Russia and Japan, where the berries are known as haskaps. With cold hardiness to minus 55 degrees and flower frost tolerance to the mid-20s, honeyberries are an exciting, season-extending crop option for Iowa producers. The berries ripen earlier than the earliest strawberries and last into mid- to late June.

Honeyberries have a bluish-purple hue and a tender skin reminiscent of blueberries, but the fruit are more oblong in shape, from ½ inch to 1 inch long, and growers consider the plants much more adaptable and easier to grow than blueberries, which require acidic soil.

*Most compelling, however, is the taste.*

“Honeyberries are similar to, yet very different from, blueberries,” Jeff says. “They have kind of a general berry flavor, but with a kick. They have a little bit of a zing.”

Jeff and Deb planted their first honeyberries in 2011. At the time, they were experimenting with a range of other perennial berries, including blueberries, and honeyberries were less a focus of their time and efforts. Blueberries proved frustrating to grow, however. Today, honeyberries are a focal point of their production, along with red currants and hardy kiwi – a smaller, smooth-skinned relative of the fuzzy kiwi – and asparagus.

“Honeyberries are a great option for someone who doesn't have luck growing blueberries but wants something kind of similar,” Jeff says. “For me, blueberries are a pain. They're hard to get right in terms of soil and moisture needs, so I ripped out all my blueberries and planted honeyberries instead, and they have just been great for me.”



Alice McGary, who owns and operates Mustard Seed Community Farm near Ames, Iowa, also raises honeyberries and finds them to be a nice addition to her operation. *“I love eating honeyberries,” Alice says. “They're tangy and exciting to taste – but they are also easy to grow.”* They're cold-resistant and very winter hardy, and they're shade-tolerant. They don't need special soil amendments and can handle quite a lot of water. The only challenge, besides keeping the birds off, is that people don't know them.”

## Developing a Market

Jeff and Deb currently market their fresh berries, honeyberry juice and jams through Facebook, where they can post as needed and get to know their customers on an individual basis. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the myriad changes it brought about, Jeff and Deb consistently sold out of their honeyberries through marketing on Facebook.

“We were tickled pink with the amount of honeyberries we were selling, but customers disappeared with the pandemic,” Jeff says. Inspired by the success selling his hardy kiwis to local schools, he tried to find a new market for his honeyberries there too, bringing samples for the cooks and students to taste.

“I think they liked them okay, but the timing doesn't work well,” he says. “Hardy kiwis are ripe in the fall, when school is just getting going, but honeyberries are ripe in the late spring

and early summer, when school is just getting out, so the timing isn't ideal."

As Jeff and Deb grow their honeyberry business, questions remain. Jeff hopes that finding the answers, such as the best temperature to store honeyberries, will create new markets. Details like that, he says, will be vital to selling the berries to local groceries.

### Experimenting With Varieties and Planting Methods

Jeff and Deb's success with honeyberries stems from the fact that Jeff has done his homework.

Since venturing into honeyberries, Jeff has tried growing dozens of honeyberry varieties from dozens of retailers, with sources ranging from big-box stores to special mail-order companies. What was supposed to be a retirement project after Jeff's career in building maintenance at the University of Iowa has grown into a passion with real potential. *Currently, Jeff and Deb grow over 200 honeyberry bushes representing 22 varieties.*

"We're winnowing those down, though!" says Deb, who, in addition to helping manage production, serves as the operation's chief jam maker, baker and honeyberry juicer.

The plants they're culling tend to be the older, less productive varieties that yield 2 pounds or less of berries in a season. In their place, Jeff is planting more of the berries with flavor he really likes. "My top five varieties are 'Solo,' 'Keiko,' 'Opus,' 'Beauty' and 'Blizzard,'" he says. "You have to send away for these, and they are all Japanese-based varieties, but these are the ones I really love to eat. And they do better in Iowa."

Jeff is also one of four farmers, including Alice, conducting a honeyberry research trial with PFI's Cooperators' Program, funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant. The research explores honeyberry shade



tolerance during establishment and the first year of fruit production.

In 2021, participants planted honeyberries in randomized, replicated plots in full sun and under shade structures. The first year of data (on vegetative metrics) will be reported at PFI's Cooperators' Meeting in December, and the results should help guide future honeyberry management decisions.

### Honeyberry Networking

Beyond his own experiments, Jeff seeks out growers in more northern areas to learn from their honeyberry growing, processing and marketing experiences. Recently, he and Deb traveled to North Dakota where they got some honeyberry wine and learned how honeyberry growers there market their products, the prices they charge and the varieties they use.

"One guy is making juice and he knows exactly what varieties to use for what purpose," Jeff says. "For juice, he likes 'Solo' and 'Keiko.' He sells a 12-ounce container of honeyberry juice for \$30 – and he sells out!"

Bringing that knowledge home to share with other berry growers in Iowa is one way Jeff hopes to spread the word about honeyberries. To that end, Jeff hosted a PFI field day at his farm in June. The event let him share the full range of his operation, from plantings to products, and gave the public a chance to learn in-depth about this unfamiliar but promising perennial.

Attendees ranged from commercial berry growers, to hobbyists with a couple of bushes, to the completely uninitiated. One highlight of the field day was the chance to taste honeyberry juice, juice blends, jam, baked goods and fresh berries.

*The network of honeyberry enthusiasts definitely grew that day.*

### Berries in Between

Mark Westbrock of Solstice Farm near Waverly, Iowa, is another budding enthusiast. In spring 2020, he added honeyberries to his farm's apple orchard in a unique way: He interplanted them between the rows of trees. He was inspired to do so after seeing the wide aisles (12 to 16 feet) between rows after he had planted 90 apple trees and 10 pear trees on semi-dwarf rootstocks.

Mark had recently attended a honeyberry presentation by Bernis and Jim Ingvaldson of Honeyberry USA at PFI's 2020 annual conference and thought honeyberries sounded easy to grow and adaptable enough to his farm's clay loam soil.

"The honeyberries have been easy to manage," Mark says. "We get enough production for our own consumption right now. Once they are more established and producing more fruit, we hope to experiment with making honeyberry-infused cider."

So far, Mark is pleased with the decision and excited about what may lie ahead with the berries.

Spreading this enthusiasm is partly what motivates Jeff to continue his evangelizing. As he connects with more Iowans like Alice and Mark who are curious about honeyberries, Jeff sees a horizon of possibility for these versatile and farmer-friendly perennials. He hopes their enthusiasm will be just as infectious as his.

*"Oh, mercy," he says. "I'm just ecstatic about the number of people interested in honeyberries." ■*

# Taking Ownership of Seed Treatments

PFI members use on-farm research to ground-truth the need for expensive and sometimes harmful seed treatments on their farms

By Jorgen Rose

**Sam Bennett and his wife Danielle are PFI members from Galva, Iowa, in Ida County. They raise corn, soybeans and small grains as part of a larger six-generation family farm (Bennett Farms). Six generations is a long time to get good at something, but Sam and his family are constantly looking for ways to improve.**

Over the last few years, Sam has watched with interest as fellow on-farm research cooperator Dick Sloan, of Rowley, Iowa, has conducted multiple trials exploring neonicotinoid pesticide seed coatings – commonly referred to as seed treatments – and whether they offer any benefits for soybeans. After seeing the results of Dick’s trials, Sam finally decided in 2021 to test seed treatments on his own farm.

“The goal was to build on Dick’s research,” Sam explains. “Dick is obviously in a different part of the state than I am, but he also plants later. We wanted to see if the seed treatments were valuable for early planting.”

In general, a full soybean seed treatment includes a fungicide, a nematicide and an insecticide – typically a neonicotinoid product. With his research, Sam wanted to find out how using only the fungicide, but not the nematicide and insecticide, would affect his soybean yield and profitability. “I had a good sense from Dick’s trials and other research that the treatments weren’t necessary in late-planted soybeans,” Sam says, “but I wasn’t convinced about early-planted beans.”

Working with PFI’s Cooperators’ Program and fellow farmers Alec Amundson of Osage, Iowa, and Steve Saltzman of Ames, Iowa, Sam set out to design an on-farm trial that could test the agronomic and financial benefits of using soybean seed treatments.

## Understanding Seed Treatments

Chemical seed treatments are growing in popularity. The idea behind the approach is simple: By coating seeds with chemicals that kill fungi, nematodes and insects that might



harm crops, plants gain critical defenses at germination and within the first few weeks of growth.

But there is little evidence these treatments actually boost yields. The consensus is starting to widen, and Dick’s on-farm trials add to the growing body of research: When he compared treated and non-treated soybean seed on his own farm, he saw no difference in soybean yields.

Neonicotinoids (often called neonics) are one class of insecticide often applied as seed treatments. According to the Xerces Society, an international invertebrate conservation nonprofit PFI frequently works with, neonics are perhaps the most widely used class of insecticide on the planet. The neonic family includes several different chemicals (imidacloprid, clothianidin, thiacloprid and thiamethoxam are some of the most common), and even more trade names: Poncho, Gaucho, Admire and Cruiser are just a few.

Neonics are water-soluble, which means plants like soybean seedlings can absorb the chemical through their roots. The insecticide then spreads throughout the plant, making it toxic to insects that feed on it. On paper, this systemic action makes neonics look valuable

to farmers – proponents argue it’s a way to deliver whole-plant protection quickly and easily without additional field work.

## Unintended Consequences

When neonics first came on the market in the mid-1980s, they were hailed as an environmental solution to challenges with existing insecticides. Older classes of chemicals like organochlorines (DDT) and organophosphates (malathion, chlorpyrifos) were immediately toxic to vertebrates, including birds and mammals. Neonics are much less so. Previous classes of insecticides were also aerially applied, resulting in regular drift incidents; in contrast, neonics applied as seed coatings have a much less overt risk of leaving the area they’re intended for.

Time has revealed, however, that the traits that make neonics appealing as seed treatments are also causing unintended environmental harm. According to the Xerces Society, the same water solubility that confers whole-plant protection against insect damage also makes neonics especially prone to migrate with water as it moves across fields and through tile drainage.

While this kind of pesticide drift moves differently than aerially applied chemicals,

the end result is the same: potent chemicals end up in unintended places, harming and killing non-target species in the process. Beneficial insects like pollinators are especially vulnerable. Because plants absorb the chemical systemically, neonics can show up in pollen and nectar, poisoning bees as they forage. For ground-nesting bees and wasps, another exposure route is through direct contact with contaminated soil.

Neonics also persist for a long time in soils and in water. Because these chemicals indiscriminately kill any invertebrates, not just those that damage cash crops, they can pose threats to species long after they've moved from where they were originally applied. In particular, there is growing alarm over the impacts of neonics in wetlands and other aquatic environments, where even low concentrations have the potential to ravage aquatic invertebrate populations. Because those species are a critical food resource for fish, amphibians and birds, when invertebrates decline, animals higher up in the food chain also suffer.

As an avid outdoorsman, the potential wildlife impacts of neonics weren't lost on Sam when he decided to conduct his on-farm trial. "I'm passionate about the environment and pollinators and don't want to be responsible for damage that was unnecessary," he says. "But I also don't want to misuse the tools and see them regulated or go away down the road as a result."

The human health impacts of using so much treated seed also concern him. "I think a lot about how much seed dust I'm breathing in every year," Sam says. "It can't be good. What kind of chemicals am I breathing in when I pack the bean planter? It used to be that we'd shove all our corn seed into the pick-up if it was going to rain or something, and inevitably someone always got sick. Why would I do that to myself if I didn't have to?"

### Sourcing Custom Seed

To conduct their trial, the first thing Sam and the other cooperators had to do was find the right soybean seed – something easier said than done. Most seed dealers default to a full treatment program that includes a fungicide, nematicide and insecticide. Occasionally, they will offer untreated seed. Sam and the others, however, wanted to test seed with the same genetic traits but two different treatment programs: a full treatment, which would represent the status quo, and a partial treatment consisting of just a fungicide. "When I first inquired into different treatment types for soybeans, the dealer said no," Sam says. "I had to stay

persistent, but I had done the research and knew that products were available."

For farmers seeking custom seed, Sam has a few tips. Because some seed products come in large quantities, he says dealers aren't going to buy a lot of seed if they don't have a market for it. For the same reason, purchasing small quantities of seed with non-standard treatments might be harder than purchasing larger quantities. "If they still have trouble finding non-standard seed treatments or untreated seed, they might have better luck with a regional brand."

**"You have to take some responsibility for knowing what you're using on the farm – is it harmful or not? Why would I be using it if I didn't need to?"**

– Sam Bennett

In the end, he managed to find and secure a seed that included the same fungicide treatment without the nematicide and neonicotinoid insecticide. "You have to build a relationship with your dealer, and you have to approach them in the right way," he says. "I had to start the conversation earlier, in late summer, early fall, and I bought full-box or full-pallet quantities."

### Clear Results, Hard Decisions

During harvest in fall 2021, Sam and Steve Saltzman found no yield difference between the treatments: Soybeans treated with just the fungicide had statistically similar yields to those that had all three seed treatments. They also ended up saving money by



(Above): Sam Bennett holds soybeans treated with a neonicotinoid seed coating. (Opposite): Danielle and Sam Bennett pose with son Harry on their Galva, Iowa, farm.

skipping the neonicotinoid and nematicide treatments in a part of their fields. Steve saved \$3 per acre on treatments and Sam saved \$10 per acre.

Their results echo what Dick's on-farm research has consistently shown – that it's possible to forgo nematicide and neonic insecticide seed treatments without losing yield while saving money in the process. Sam notes that one trial isn't enough to say for sure that soybean seed treatments aren't worth it. But his results add to a growing body of research that indicates chemical seed treatments may only improve yields in narrow and infrequent scenarios.

What's next after his trial? Sam says he is still planting fully treated seed, but he plans to slowly transition over the next several years. "You have to start small, try it first somewhere on the farm and then grow over time."

Another complicating factor for Sam is that his dealer offers a replant guarantee for soybeans – but only if he purchases the fully treated seed. And while he hasn't had to replant often during his farming career, that type of insurance is hard to pass up. Beyond the extra reassurance, perceived or otherwise, that farmers feel when planting seed with neonic and nematicide treatments, replant guarantees could be a major factor in farmers' decisions about using treated seed.

Sam encourages other farmers to do their homework, think about what they're paying for at the dealer and weigh the pros and cons themselves. "There never appeared to be options until I started looking hard for different treatments," he says. "For most, treatment sounds like really cheap insurance, and we don't think about potential negatives, including the extra cost."

"Saving a few dollars is nice," Sam adds, "but it's more about taking ownership of what's applied to our farm. You have to take some responsibility for knowing what you're using on the farm – is it harmful or not? Why would I be using it if I didn't need to?" ■

### Learn More

- Read the full results of Sam's trial at [practicalfarmers.org/are-soybean-seed-treatments-justified](https://practicalfarmers.org/are-soybean-seed-treatments-justified).
- Read results of Dick Sloan's on-farm seed treatment research: [practicalfarmers.org/are-neonic-fungicide-soybean-seed-treatments-justified](https://practicalfarmers.org/are-neonic-fungicide-soybean-seed-treatments-justified)
- Learn more about neonics: [www.xerces.org/pesticides/understanding-neonicotinoids](https://www.xerces.org/pesticides/understanding-neonicotinoids)

# Bringing Meat Closer to Home

By Amos Johnson

*Legislation supported by PFI members has helped address meat processing barriers facing small- and medium-sized farms*

**Chad Hensley had to leave the state. He wasn't fleeing the law; he simply needed to get his cattle processed. Farming near Lamoni, in southern Iowa, the closest federally inspected plant with reliable openings for him was in Kansas City, Missouri, about 115 miles away.**

Now, thanks in part to legislation championed by members of Practical Farmers of Iowa, a new processing plant is opening its doors fewer than 5 miles from the pastures where Chad's Pineywoods cattle graze. In May, Red Barn Meat Market opened in Lamoni, offering custom beef and pork processing, as well as a fresh meat counter offering beef, pork, seafood and poultry and homemade deli items.

For Chad and other area farmers, the new meat locker fills a glaring gap in local meat processing capacity and means a shorter commute, less money spent on fuel and new opportunities to market their meat. "It's a top-notch facility," Chad says. "Transporting the cattle 3 miles versus over 100 miles is huge."

For local residents, the business brings both jobs to the community – Red Barn Meat Market hired 19 positions, ranging from butchers, smokers and counter staff to front office workers, sanitation

crews and delivery drivers – and more access to locally raised meat.

Co-owner Enos Swartzentruber says the upheaval caused by COVID-19, which made meat harder to access in grocery stores, is what motivated him to start Red Barn Meat Market with fellow co-owner and friend Tad Whitton. "Some grocery stores implemented rations on their meat, limiting the amount that customers could buy at one time," Enos says.

In an April article on the business in *Wallaces Farmer*, Tad says, "We want our community members to have a place to go and purchase quality, local meat or have their own processed with us."

## The State of Beef Processing

The dearth of accessible processors Chad experienced is not unique to farmers in southern Iowa – nor to the country as a whole. But the numbers for Iowa are particularly striking. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Iowa ranks fourth nationally for number of steers over 500 pounds. In 2022, for instance, Iowa farmers marketed about 1.2 million head of cattle.

But only about 25% of finished Iowa cattle are processed in-state, according to 2017 data from Iowa State University. That means nearly 1 million cattle are shipped out of state each year. Apart from the financial and logistical

challenges farmers incur as a result, sending cattle to slaughter facilities out of Iowa also exports money that could be infusing local communities.



Chad and Katie Hensley

Iowa's experience is part of a larger trend around the country. A study by Auburn University found there are around 800 federally inspected livestock slaughterhouses and 1,900 custom or state-inspected facilities – a steep decline from the nearly 10,000 meat processing plants 50 years ago. That attrition has occurred even as the amount of meat being consumed in the U.S. has risen by about 40% over the same time span. The result: Far fewer processors are handling far greater numbers of animals.

## Making Space for New Processors

Today, four companies account for more than 80% of the nation's meat processing output. This consolidation has come at the expense of local processing capacity – and the ability to weather major shocks to the system. In 2020, that shock came when thousands of meat packing plant workers were infected with COVID-19, shutting down processing plants across the country.

"There were fears there wasn't going to be enough meat," recalls Jake Bigelow, who raises Hereford beef and pork at Bigelow Family Farms near Winterset, Iowa.

"Everyone was trying to bring their livestock in to be processed at the same time," says Chad Tettinger, cattle producer and president of a new



processing plant slated to open near Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 2023. “In some cases, processors were booked solid several years out.”

He gives credit to the major processors for expanding over the years to handle most of America’s meat processing needs, but says the processing bottleneck they’ve created makes the whole system fragile. “When plants can’t get cattle through to process, it backs up the whole supply chain and drives down live cattle prices.” Creating more small- and mid-sized meat processors isn’t about “being anti-big processor,” he says. It’s simply about adding redundancy to make a resilient system. “We fundamentally have to have more capacity in the Midwest.”

Two years after COVID-19 first wreaked havoc, most facets of the food supply chain are returning to normal. But there remains a strong demand for more meat processing options. Chad Hensley believes more local and regional processors can benefit not just farmers, but consumers as well. “If consumers want more stable prices than what they’re seeing at the grocery store, they need to put in effort to supporting local options.”

Jake agrees. “We tried to make things so efficient in the ag industry that we’ve assumed resiliency is just going to be there.” He points out that sometimes the end goal of efficiency isn’t enough. Redundancy has to be built in too, so that when one piece breaks it doesn’t topple the entire system. “I think we’ve been lacking that for a long time.” But Jake believes the state and federal governments are finally taking notice.

### Statewide Action on Meat Processing

During the 2021 session of the Iowa General Assembly, legislation passed that aims to address Iowa’s meat processing challenges. Practical Farmers of Iowa worked closely with members who advocated for the Butchery Innovation and Revitalization Fund, which offers financial assistance to Iowans seeking to

renovate or upgrade existing facilities, or to establish new businesses.

The bill allocates \$750,000 to meat lockers with 50 or fewer employees. It also gives priority to projects that create jobs; expand opportunities for small-scale farmers to market processed meat under private labels; or make processing animals more convenient for local small-scale farmers. Since its passage, lawmakers have awarded \$20,000 to \$50,000 per business to 15 processors across the state.

During the same legislative session, lawmakers also established the Artisanal Butchery Task Force. The group was charged with exploring the feasibility of starting an artisanal butchery program at a local community college or Iowa Board of Regents university to develop and maintain the skilled workforce local meat lockers need to be successful. “Even without looking to grow, finding a workforce is our biggest challenge right now,” says Ty Gustafson, co-owner of Story City Locker in Story City, Iowa.

In January, the task force released its recommendations. These include creating a one-year artisanal butchery certificate program through Iowa’s community college system; finding ways to reduce regulatory hurdles; and creating a directory of all Iowa meat lockers, among others.

### Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program

The Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program is another solution PFI members supported. In 2020, Iowa became the seventh state to join the program, first championed by Ty, which allows meat processed at state-inspected plants to be sold outside of Iowa.

Prior to Iowa joining this program, farmers who wished to sell their meat across state lines had to process their products at a federally inspected plant. The U.S. Department of Agriculture



carries out those inspections, but Iowa has few USDA-inspected facilities – and accessing slots can be difficult, or require farmers to drive long distances.

Small- and mid-scale farmers also had trouble accessing those plants due to volume requirements and logistics tailored to larger-scale producers. As a result, smaller farms were effectively excluded from accessing customers and more lucrative market options in bigger Midwestern cities.

Chad Hensley encountered this challenge: Despite living so close to Iowa’s border, he needs a federally inspected facility to sell his meat at farmers markets in nearby Missouri towns. Given the large numbers of animals raised in Iowa, out of state sales are crucial for farmers who want to grow their businesses.

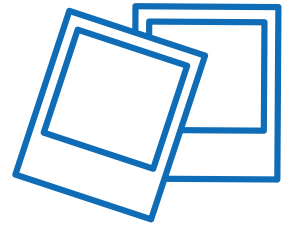
With Cooperative Interstate Shipment, the USDA opened up new sales channels for Iowa farmers like Chad. Animals can now be slaughtered under the supervision of state inspectors and still be sold across state lines, bypassing the logjam created by the limited number of federally inspected facilities.

Chad’s cattle also bypass the stress of a long journey to their final destination. Grazing beneath the sky dance of swallows, bothered only by flies, they live good and quiet lives. Their last day will be a quick jaunt into town, barely far enough away to miss the cool waters of the pond from their morning wading. ■

# PFI MEMBER

## Photo Album

The PFI Member Photo Album features photos submitted by PFI members from their farms. Whether you capture images of the everyday, the awe-inspiring or the curiously beautiful on your farm, send them our way and we'll work to curate them into the album.



Garrett Watson (left) and Jerome Grant II (right) help sort lambs at Red Fern Farm in May 2021 during an apprenticeship through the Savanna Institute. (Photo: Kathy Dice - Red Fern Farm, Wapello, Iowa)



Planting cereal rye, turnips, canola, and radishes into the corn stubble on Sept. 23, 2021. (Photo: Anne Plagge - Plagge Farms, Latimer, Iowa)



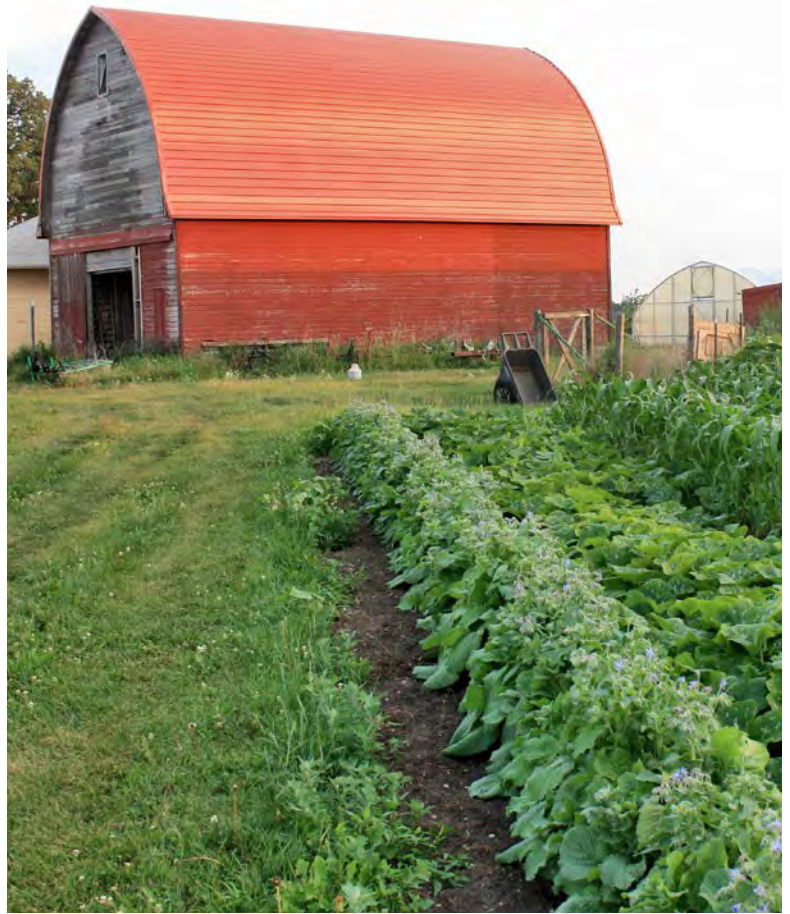
Adeline tests the steers' feed quality at Gibraltar Farms (August 2021). (Photo: John C. Gilbert - Gibraltar Farm, Iowa Falls, Iowa)



Rainbow takes a break from work to share a sunset with Vivienne Johnson. (Photo: Wendy Johnson - Jovia Food Farm, Charles City, Iowa)



Mari Hunt Wissink (left) and Conner Johnson wrap up the summer cabbage harvest at Buffalo Ridge Orchard on July 6. Mari is a trainee in PFI's Labor4Learning Program. (Photo: Emma Johnson (no relation to Conner!), - Buffalo Ridge Orchard, Marion, Iowa)



Borage blooms at Genuine Faux Farm. (Photo: Rob Faux - Genuine Faux Farm, Tripoli, Iowa)



The cattle at Grandview Beef gather around Harbor Severson and his dad, Knute. (Photo: Amanda Severson - Grandview Beef, Clarion, Iowa)



Have a photo you'd like featured in the album? Email it to [liz.kolbe@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:liz.kolbe@practicalfarmers.org).

## Coming Home, Passing It On

After a storied career in government that took him across the globe, lifetime member John Norris finds hope for Iowa agriculture through PFI

John Norris, a lifetime member from Des Moines, was in-between meetings when I called him in early July.

Following a long career in government at both the state and national levels, he currently serves as the Polk County administrator, where he has kept busy since 2021 managing daily county operations and handling financials. We had a positive conversation about John's work in agriculture, his vision for Iowa agriculture and how he defines a "friend of farmer."

The question arose because, until recently, PFI membership forms and member surveys included the category "friend of farmer" as an identifying term. Internally, we defined it as "a non-farmer who does not own farmland, nor plans to farm in the future." While the label helped us identify our non-farming members, it also proved to be confusing: Many farmers, aspiring farmers and farmland owners also consider themselves friends of farmers. For this reason, we switched to using the straightforward "non-farmer" label in our member database. But the "friend of farmer" notion still holds sway – and meaning – for our members.

For John, it means actively supporting farmers in their goals. "What I'm trying to do is empower what PFI farmers are trying to do and support them in making a good living and producing healthy food," he says.

John grew up on a hog and grain farm near Red Oak, in Montgomery County, Iowa, where his brother still lives. John kept close to home, serving with various agricultural non-profits during the farm crisis of the 1980s, owning and managing a restaurant in Greenfield, Iowa, and gaining a law degree. His knowledge of agriculture and energy issues eventually led him to work in government, which included serving on Iowa and national political campaigns, and in other political roles in Iowa.

In 2009, John served as the chief of staff for U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. More recently, he represented the U.S. Department of Agriculture for two years as the U.S. minister counselor for agriculture to



**"What I'm trying to do is empower what PFI farmers are trying to do and support them in making a good living and producing healthy food."**

– JOHN NORRIS

the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which took him and his family to Rome, Italy. As that work ended, the Norrises moved back to Iowa and its agricultural landscape.

John learned of PFI at its inception in 1985, but his bustling political career prevented him from keeping close tabs on the organization. When he returned, PFI member Matt Russell, who now directs Iowa's Farm Service Agency, invited John to PFI's 2018 annual conference. The positive, collaborative energy of the event resonated with him and he joined as a member that year.

"You just see the dedication and belief in the farming community that PFI represents, reconnecting land to food to the environment, which is so essential for sustainability," John says. He attended more

PFI events, spread the word and became a lifetime member in 2019.

PFI's vision – an Iowa with healthy soil, healthy food, clean air, clean water, resilient farms and vibrant communities – speaks to him. "Farmers in PFI are providing living examples in our state, and around the world, of how you farm sustainably," he says, adding it's "not just business but a life commitment to raising food in a sustainable way."

John sees the work PFI members have done to create resilient farms and communities – holding events; sharing their experiences with cover crops, small grains, on-farm habitat and other practices; mentoring others; and more – and says the best solution is more of the PFI approach: connecting farmers to share knowledge and build community.

"I think that's the collaborative community spirit of PFI members and farmers," he says. "They want to share. Everyone tells Iowa that we should feed the world, but if we can teach the world to deploy practices PFI farmers use, that plays a critical role." ■

## Review of James Rebanks' "Pastoral Song"

When James Rebanks' "Pastoral Song" was first published under the British title "English Pastoral" in 2020, there was an overwhelming response from many readers that it should be required reading in every school.

It does indeed include important information, but this book should not be read as an assigned educational task. This book should be read for the pleasure of the language it contains and the images and feelings it conjures. This is a personal and reflective piece of extraordinary work from an ordinary farm, both remarkable and deeply relatable to anyone with an agricultural background.

"Pastoral Song" follows James Rebanks' New York Times bestselling memoir "The Shepherd's Life," and centers on a small sheep farm in northern England. It was written while the centuries-old farm passed to the next generation amid changes in climate, economy and political priorities in Great Britain. After experiencing the farm under the watch of two previous generations, James finds himself at last responsible for the future of the farm. "I had inherited a complex bundle of economic and ecological challenges," he writes, "and that, perhaps, was what it really meant to be a farmer."

The book is written in three parts: "Nostalgia," "Progress" and "Utopia." The first part covers James' childhood when his grandfather was still farming and passing traditional knowledge to his grandson. These formative memories provide us with an understanding of one way a farm can work and the values instilled in James at a young age.

The second part describes changes made to the farm while James' father was at the helm and strove to keep the farm by becoming more efficient and modern. It does a good job of demonstrating the decisions farmers face and discussing why many go in a particular direction. The final part of the book describes the direction the farm is currently taking and what it could become. It details the role agriculture could and should play in Britain's landscape, sets priorities and talks about how to get there while also acknowledging existing limits.

James Rebanks keynoted PFI's 2018 annual conference while he was working on this book. He had the chance to talk to farmers from all over Iowa and hear our stories of farm transitions, management adaptations and landscape changes. When I met him, he felt familiar. Although he is from thousands of miles away and lives in mountains by Iowa standards, our small farming communities and day-to-day activities are comfortingly similar.

Characters described in his books could easily walk into the local co-op and pass a few hours waiting on the weather. James knows and struggles with the same big questions we ask ourselves. How can agriculture meet



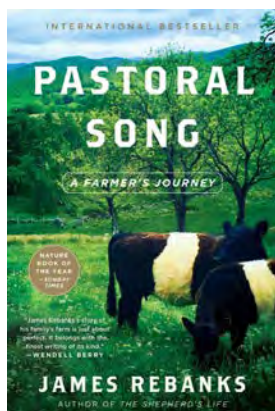
all the world's needs at once? Can we provide feed, fuel and fiber for everyone while supporting healthy, diverse ecosystems, stopping climate change and making a living for a farm family? Where do we set priorities and make trade-offs?

It is inspiring to see the same old questions from a new perspective. The PFI conference theme when James spoke was "Revival," reflecting efforts here to revitalize rural communities and bring back ways that have all but vanished from the landscape. But James is still trying to hold onto something that has never really been lost over hundreds of years. His farm and community are encountering similar global pressures, but on a different timeline and with a very different history of agricultural practices and relationships with natural habitat.

The similarities and contrasts are enough to help us look at our own problems and solutions from a different angle. As James defends his own family's farm, he covers basic regenerative farming mechanisms, economic significance and societal tensions. He so elegantly puts into words a lot of the stuff many of us farmers do not have the skill to articulate.

"Pastoral Song," published in the U.S. in 2021, was recently released in paperback and is available as an audiobook for those of you fond of British accents. You can follow James on Twitter by searching for @herdyshepherd1. James' wife, Helen, is not an author, but you can see her between every line of this book and follow her on Instagram as @theshepherdswife. ■

**Ranae Dietzel is an agronomy data scientist and fourth-generation farmer. Her family, including husband Kevin and two children, manage a grass-based dairy at Lost Lake Farm near Jewell, Iowa. They follow regenerative practices and turn all milk from their cows into cheeses they produce on the farm.**



## Welcome Our Newest Staff Members

New staff join communications, farmer-led education and finance departments

### Andy Ball – Finance Director



Andy Ball joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa staff in June 2022. As finance director, Andy works to further PFI's strategic vision, mission and goals in concert with the PFI community. This effort includes leading financial aspects of administration, budgeting, reporting, grants management and policy development.

Andy views his contribution in terms of empowering PFI staff to achieve their individual mission goals. This approach requires an in-depth knowledge of all departments and operations, and he knows that it's a neverending effort. He considers finance a "team sport" and appreciates input and advice from all community members.

The Midwest has been Andy's home for many years, and he earned an undergraduate degree from Drake University and an MBA

from the University of Iowa. After 15 years at a computer software company where he worked in sales, marketing and international operations, Andy embarked on a non-profit career that has included working for three human service organizations as well as the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.

When not working, Andy likes to spend time with his family and watch financial news. He also enjoys hiking and exploring central Iowa's bike trails, as well as sampling local food truck fare.

He makes weekly trips to an 18-acre farm in Taylor County, Iowa, that he's restoring to native condition. It was once an oak savanna, and a number of noble pre-settlement oaks still shade the plot. His plans include eliminating invasive species (for which he received a Resource Enhancement and Protection grant) and developing natural prairie. ■

### Vanya North – Habitat Education Coordinator



Vanya North joined the PFI staff in August 2022 and currently serves as the habitat education coordinator.

Her first career after high school was as a logistics coordinator for a rodeo supply company in Missouri. After eight years in that role, she decided to pursue conservation. After receiving a bachelor's

degree in environmental geography from the University of Arkansas in 2014, she took an AmeriCorps position in southwest Virginia as an environmental educator before working a series of seasonal positions in environmental restoration and as a small-farm assistant and environmental interpreter.

Vanya completed a second AmeriCorps term in southwest Washington as an invasive species technician and worked seasonally as a park ranger and period actress for a history museum based on the Oregon Trail before returning to Arkansas to earn a Master of Science in geography in 2022. Her research focused on sustainability in the global cement industry, looking at inequities in resource allocation.

After work, Vanya enjoys curling up with her latest embroidery project, a cup of tea and her pets. On days off, she enjoys anything outdoor-related such as exploring a new hiking trail, kayaking and visiting new vineyards. ■

### Bri Postlewait – Content Coordinator



Bri Postlewait joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in June 2022. As the content coordinator, she writes and edits copy for a range of PFI communication pieces, as well as co-curates PFI's social media platforms, email newsletters and website to expand Practical Farmers' reach and impact by driving food and farming narratives that showcase resilient agricultural systems.

Bri is originally from Missouri and is a descendent of dairy farmers on both sides of her family. Prior to working at PFI, she received a

Bachelor of Arts in English and creative writing from the University of Iowa, and a Master of Arts in creative writing, with a focus in poetry, from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

She lives in Iowa City, Iowa, with her partner, Scott, and her cat. Bri is an avid trail runner, home herbalist and urban gardener. She enjoys reading, thrifting, camping and foraging for wild plants. ■

# New PFI Animated Videos Distill Complex Topics

Videos explore role of nitrate in water quality, weed control benefits of cover crops and how green manure crops grow nitrogen and help the climate

Earlier this summer, PFI unveiled three new videos that represent a milestone in our efforts to educate the public about key issues central to many of our members. For the first time, the videos – which explore how nitrate gets into waterways, the weed control benefits of cover crops and how green manure crops can save money on fertilizer while lowering greenhouse gas emissions – incorporate custom animation to help illustrate these complex concepts.

A year in the making, the videos were produced with animation expertise from Studio Iowa and range in length from four minutes, 25 seconds to just under 10 minutes. The knowledge of PFI members also infuses the videos. Here is a brief synopsis of each video. To watch the full videos, visit our YouTube page at [youtube.com/pfivideos](https://www.youtube.com/pfivideos).

## Nitrate and Water Quality:

For years, PFI members have been leaders in understanding the Midwest's nitrate problem, coming up with solutions and applying those practices on the landscape. Our members believe that truly resilient farms and communities need clean water. But the problem is complex – and invisible to the naked eye. Many of the processes that lead to nitrate contamination of water happen underground, and all are microbial.

Water that's high in nitrate looks pretty much the same as any other water (until an algae bloom occurs, that is).

Because of that, we have struggled to explain the process, and have heard many inaccurate depictions of how nitrate contamination occurs. To help shed light on this complex process, we created a video that explains how nitrate gets into the water in the first place and the different practices farmers and landowners can use to keep it in their fields.

## Green Manure Crops and Nitrogen:

Decreasing dependence on purchased inputs has been a tenet of PFI farmers since our inception. For years, we've been looking for ways to diversify our farms by adding other crops and cover crops to our rotations. Not only does diversifying help cut down the need for purchased inputs, growing green manure crops reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

This style of farming is being recognized as "climate-smart" agriculture – full of farming



solutions that make farms more resilient to climate change and less reliant on purchased inputs. Learn more in this animated video about how green manure crops fix nitrogen and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## Cover Crops and Weed Control:

Cover crops, like winter cereal rye, are rapidly becoming an important tool for farmers to control weeds. While cover crops have been used for years to protect water quality and improve soil health, more farmers are designing cover cropping systems that smother weeds and improve their overall weed management system. The final video illustrates how these processes work. ■

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## PFI's Lifetime Membership Rate Increased on Oct. 1

Every year in their summer meeting, PFI's board of directors reviews the organization's membership levels and discusses any changes proposed by staff. This year, board members approved a rate increase for the lifetime membership level from the one-time payment of \$1,000 to \$1,200, set to take effect with the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

The lifetime membership level first became an option in 2012, and has not had a rate change until now. Lifetime memberships include all the same benefits as a Farm and Household membership, but without any renewal notices, lapses or potential rate increases.

As of the time this issue was sent to print, there are 157 individuals or families with a lifetime membership. The reasons cited for becoming a PFI "lifer," as these

members sometimes fondly describe themselves, often include sentiments similar to Cory Bennett's view of it as a sound investment. "It ends up being cheaper than renewing a membership every year for what is hopefully a long farming career," says Cory, of Galva, Iowa.



Tim Sieren, of Keota, Iowa (pictured at left), appreciates the many ways his farm has benefited from the organization: "PFI has rewarded my operation more than that [membership fee] every year, and I wanted to support all that you guys are doing to keep us farmers resilient."

Please consider investing in PFI and resilient farms by becoming a lifetime member today. To learn more about a lifetime membership, contact Steve Carlson at [steve@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:steve@practicalfarmers.org), or visit our website: [practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership](https://practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership). ■

# Become a sustaining donor!

## Long-Term Impact:

### Please consider signing up for monthly giving!

Making a donation each month helps sustain PFI, and is more manageable on your budget. You can sign up for monthly giving on our website, [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org).



## Why Emma Gives Monthly:

PFI's membership and events coordinator, Emma Liddle, recently became a monthly donor. Emma says, *"I signed up for monthly giving because that's what works best for my budgeting. A little money on a regular basis goes a long way, and I want to continually support PFI!"*



## A Gift for Your Gift:

### Act now to get a thank-you gift!

The first 20 people who sign up will receive a free PFI hat or T-shirt.



## Don't Farm Naked this fall!

Plant cover crops! Receive \$10 per acre on up to 200 acres and \$5 per acre on everything above that for seeding cover crops.

**Enroll here today!**

[practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share](http://practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share)

## Welcome, New Members!

### DISTRICT 1 – NORTHWEST

- Caleb Clemon – Soldier
- Mike Hagan – Carroll
- Kerry Scheidegger – Jolley
- Mark Schmith – Orange City
- Courtney Schut-Sandbulte – Boyden
- Thomas Woodford – Emmetsburg

### DISTRICT 2 – NORTH-CENTRAL

- Kevin Anderson – State Center
- Douglas Christiansen – Dike
- Sally and John Elbert – Ames
- Richland Family Farms – Radcliff
- Matt Goodman – Rhodes
- Mark Hintch – Fort Dodge
- Charlie Johnson and Susan Zeigler – Boone
- Delaney Kidd – Ames
- Alan Laubenthal – Whittemore
- Andrew Laubenthal – Algona
- Tanner Lawton – Jefferson
- James Legvold – Vincent
- Erin McCord – Northwood
- Michael Murphy – Dike
- Jason Murphy – Reinbeck
- Duane Nowatzke – Ames
- Jerry Ose – Blairsburg
- Ryan Petersen – Dike
- Nathan Voss – Algona
- John Wheeler – Nevada

### DISTRICT 3 – NORTHEAST

- Louis and Pat Beck – Buckingham
- Sean Dolan – Masonville
- Kent Eiklenborg – Cedar Falls
- Ryan Gibbs – Worthington
- Clayton Gibbs – Sherrill
- Kevin Glanz – Manchester
- Roman Lechuga – Ridgeway
- Solas Lenth – West Union
- Emily Oyloe – Decorah
- Jim Pellett – Atlantic
- Mike Schlarman – Worthington
- Eugene Thurm – Readlyn
- Rylan Zwanziger – La Porte City

### DISTRICT 4 – SOUTHWEST

- Taber Andersen – Marne
- Jennifer Beard – Anita
- Dwight Bintz – Avoca
- Travis Clark – Guthrie Center
- Sean Dengler – Urbandale
- Don Denning – Neola
- Brad Eiklenborg – Stout
- Chris Endres – St. Charles
- Lee Goldsmith – Grimes
- Don Herman – Urbandale
- Alexis Huddleston-Monroy – Waukee
- Nicole and Joseph Josselyn – Henderson
- Daniel Kawamura – Des Moines
- Justin Lain – Corydon

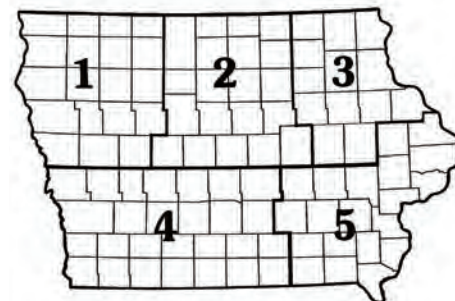
- Kenton Lain – Corydon
- Terry Lain – Corydon
- Jeni Lansing – Perry
- Rob Mackey – Cumming
- Kent Marsden – Red Oak
- Kevin Martin – Mount Ayr
- Laban Miller – Leon
- Lyndon Miller – Leon
- Vinh Nguyen – Greenfield
- Randy Nikkel – Sully
- Derek Noteboom – Grundy Center
- Richard Teig – Norwalk
- Justin Tuel – Bayard
- Charles Wisecup – Missouri Valley

### DISTRICT 5 – SOUTHEAST

- Andrew Adam – Richland
- Dick Drost – Oskaloosa
- Grace Freerks – Iowa City
- Keaten Kennedy – Birmingham
- Arlyn Klyn – New Sharon
- Daron Oberbroeckling – Davenport
- David Oberbroeckling – Davenport
- Tyler Smith – New Sharon
- James Yenter – Marengo

### DISTRICT 6 – OUT OF STATE

- Erin Knox – Lafayette, CO
- Jeff Bassett – Oglesby, IL
- Rex Bastian – Cobden, IL



- Monte Bottens – Cambridge, IL
- Julie Cross – Oak Park, IL
- Sydney Giacalone – Boston, MA
- Jerry Ackermann – Lakefield, MN
- Keagan Drietz – Canby, MN
- Chris Johnson – Minneapolis, MN
- Steven Nelson – Cannon Falls, MN
- Mitchell Skaar – Hayward, MN
- Angela Smith and Erik Tryggestad – Oronoco, MN
- Scott Volz – Blue Earth, MN
- Brent Nold – Savannah, MO
- Kim Wells – King City, MO
- Ryan and Koryn Koinzan – Neligh, NE
- Randy Moeller – Pender, NE
- Darrel Osten – Columbus, NE
- Scott Schmidt – Columbus, NE
- Neil Rubel – Belmont, OH
- Reed Scott – Wessington Springs, SD
- John Groenenboom – Madison, WI
- Stephen Hampton – Hartland, WI
- John Heywood – Shorewood, WI
- Mike Lessiter – Brookfield, WI

*Thank you*

to our newest lifetime members!

**Jake and Crystal  
Bigelow**  
– Winterset, IA

**Tim and Maureen  
Daley**  
– New Hartford, IA

**Kyle and Kristin  
Poppens**  
– Parkersburg, IA

**Marc  
Hemmes**  
– Estes Park, CO

**Sarah  
Garst**  
– West Des Moines, IA

**Rosemary and Mike  
Roelf**  
– Iowa City, IA

**Mark Quee and  
Jennifer Schmidt**  
– West Branch, IA

*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](https://practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership).*

## Other Events ↘

Note: Times are in CST. Full details about all events are available at [practicalfarmers.org/calendar](https://practicalfarmers.org/calendar)

### OCTOBER

**OCT. 4: ISU Sustainable Agriculture Colloquium Series Featuring Jean Graham and Anna Geyer**

3-5:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [susag.iastate.edu/events](https://susag.iastate.edu/events)  
**OCT. 4: Kickapoo Grazing Initiative: Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Pasture Walk**  
*Hosts:* Bonnie, Vance & Olaf Haugen | 10:30 a.m. | Canton, MN | Learn more at [kickapoo Grazing Initiative.com/events](https://kickapoo Grazing Initiative.com/events)

**OCT. 7: Soil Management for the Small Acreage Farm**

1-4 p.m. | Mount Horeb, WI | Learn more at [learnrowconnect.org/craft-event-registration](https://learnrowconnect.org/craft-event-registration)

**OCT. 8: Hudson Farm Agroforestry Field Day**  
 9 a.m.-1 p.m. | Urbana, IL | Learn more at [savannainstitute.org/events](https://savannainstitute.org/events)

**OCT. 12: Webinar: Stewards of the Land \_ Loran Steinlage**

12-1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [agsoilregen.com/event-info/stewards-of-the-land-loran-steinlage](https://agsoilregen.com/event-info/stewards-of-the-land-loran-steinlage)

**OCT. 12: Webinar: Managing Plant Surplus Carbon to Generate Soil Organic Matter in Regenerative Agriculture**

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-managing-plant-surplus-carbon-to-generate-soil-organic-matter-in-regenerative-agriculture](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-managing-plant-surplus-carbon-to-generate-soil-organic-matter-in-regenerative-agriculture)

**OCT. 16: ISU Sustainable Agriculture Colloquium Series Featuring Tom Philpott**

3-5:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [susag.iastate.edu/events](https://susag.iastate.edu/events)

**OCT. 17: Planning to Transfer the Farm Workshop Series – Part 1**

8:30-11:30 a.m. | Online | Learn more at [oeffa.org/events](https://oeffa.org/events)

**OCT. 17-21: 2022 Borlaug Dialogue**

Des Moines, IA | Learn more at [worldfoodprize.org/en/borlaug\\_dialogue/2022\\_borlaug\\_dialogue](https://worldfoodprize.org/en/borlaug_dialogue/2022_borlaug_dialogue)

**OCT. 19: Webinar: Update 2022 – Organic Control Strategies for Swine Parasites in Organic Pastured Pork Systems**

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-update-2022-organic-control-strategies-for-swine-parasites-in-organic-pastured-pork-systems](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-update-2022-organic-control-strategies-for-swine-parasites-in-organic-pastured-pork-systems)

**OCT. 19: Illinois Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework Cohort Meeting**

Online | 1-2 p.m. | Learn more at [ilsustainableag.org/event/illinois-agricultural-conservation-planning-framework-cohort-meeting/2022-10-19](https://ilsustainableag.org/event/illinois-agricultural-conservation-planning-framework-cohort-meeting/2022-10-19)

**OCT. 25: Rodale Institute Midwest Organic Center Monthly Tour**

Marion, IA | 4-6 p.m. | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/midwest-organic-center-monthly-tours/2022-10-25](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/midwest-organic-center-monthly-tours/2022-10-25)

**OCT. 26: Cover Crop Specialist Call**

Online | 9-10 a.m. | Learn more at [ilsustainableag.org/event/cover-crop-specialist-calls/2022-10-26](https://ilsustainableag.org/event/cover-crop-specialist-calls/2022-10-26)

### NOVEMBER

**NOV. 2: ISU Sustainable Agriculture Colloquium Series Featuring Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin**

3-5:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [susag.iastate.edu/events](https://susag.iastate.edu/events)

**NOV. 2: Webinar: Holistic Considerations of Water Utilization in Organic and Regenerative Farming Systems**

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-holistic-considerations-of-water-utilization-in-organic-and-regenerative-farming-systems](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-holistic-considerations-of-water-utilization-in-organic-and-regenerative-farming-systems)

**NOV. 10: Iowa Egg Industry Symposium**

8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. | Ames, IA | Learn more at [extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/2022-iowa-high-tunnel-short-course](https://extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/2022-iowa-high-tunnel-short-course)

**NOV. 12-13: 17th Annual Emerging Farmers Conference**

Shoreview, MN | Learn more at [emergingfarmers.org](https://emergingfarmers.org)

**NOV. 14: 2022 Iowa High Tunnel Short Course**

8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. | Ames, IA | Learn more at [extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/2022-iowa-high-tunnel-short-course](https://extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/2022-iowa-high-tunnel-short-course)

**NOV. 16: Webinar: How Can Cover Crops Improve Soil Health?**

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-how-can-cover-crops-improve-soil-health](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-how-can-cover-crops-improve-soil-health)

**NOV. 16: ISU Sustainable Agriculture Colloquium Series Featuring Hannah Lewis**

3-5:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [susag.iastate.edu/events](https://susag.iastate.edu/events)

**NOV. 16-17: Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health Conference**

Cedar Rapids, IA | Learn more at [gpcch.health.uiowa.edu/mrash-3](https://gpcch.health.uiowa.edu/mrash-3)

**NOV. 16-17: North Central Soil Fertility Conference**

Des Moines, IA | Learn more at [northcentralfertility.com](https://northcentralfertility.com)

**NOV. 17: Planning to Transfer the Farm Workshop Series – Part 2**

8:30-11:30 a.m. | Online | Learn more at [oeffa.org/events](https://oeffa.org/events)

**NOV. 18: Finances, Farmworkers & Foundations**

9-11:30 a.m. | Naperville, IL | Learn more at [learnrowconnect.org/craft-event-registration](https://learnrowconnect.org/craft-event-registration)

**NOV. 29-30: 5th Annual Women in Ag Leadership Conference**

Ames, IA | Learn more at [www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/womeninag](https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/womeninag)

**NOV. 30: ISU Sustainable Agriculture Colloquium Series Featuring Sarah Hunt & Dr. Mary Damm**

3-5:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [susag.iastate.edu/events](https://susag.iastate.edu/events)

### DECEMBER

**DEC. 5-6: The Big Soil Health Event**

Cedar Falls, IA | Learn more at [agsoilregen.com/bigsoilhealth](https://agsoilregen.com/bigsoilhealth)

**DEC. 5-8: ACRES 2022 Eco-Ag Conference & Tradeshow**

Covington, KY | Learn more at [ecoag.acresusa.com](https://ecoag.acresusa.com)

**DEC. 7: Webinar: Updates on the Vegetable Systems Trial Soil Health and Vegetable Nutrient Quality**

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at [rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-updates-on-the-vegetable-systems-trial-soil-health-and-vegetable-nutrient-quality](https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-updates-on-the-vegetable-systems-trial-soil-health-and-vegetable-nutrient-quality)

**DEC. 8: Planning to Transfer the Farm Workshop Series – Part 3**

8:30-11:30 a.m. | Online | Learn more at [oeffa.org/events](https://oeffa.org/events)

## PFI FIELD DAYS

*in October*

**Regenerative Grazing With Mobile Infrastructure and Livestock Guardian Dogs**

Oct. 5 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Wilton, IA

Host: JR Jenkins

**Creating a Diverse Silvopasture Farm on Former Row Crop Ground**

Oct. 8 | 2-4 p.m.

Clemons, IA

Host: Tim Swinton

Join PFI

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

Want to join or renew online? Visit [practicalfarmers.org/join-or-renew](http://practicalfarmers.org/join-or-renew).

### MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Farm or Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\* For Farm or Household membership, please list names of all persons included. For Organization membership, you may list up to three contact persons.

### JOIN OR RENEW

#### 1. I am joining at the level of:

- Access – \$25
- Individual – \$50
- Farm or Household – \$60
- Organization – \$110
- Lifetime Member\* – \$1,200  
\* See details at [bit.ly/PFI-lifetime](http://bit.ly/PFI-lifetime)

#### 3. How many years of farming experience do you have?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11 or more

#### 2. Which category best describes you? (choose one)

- Farmer or farm operator
- Not farming yet, but would like to
- Farmland owner who does not actively farm myself
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. How did you hear about PFI?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBER BENEFITS

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

#### Please add my farm to PFI's:

- Local Foods Directory
- Business Directory (Organization members only)

### 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:

- \$1,200
- \$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 ..... = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

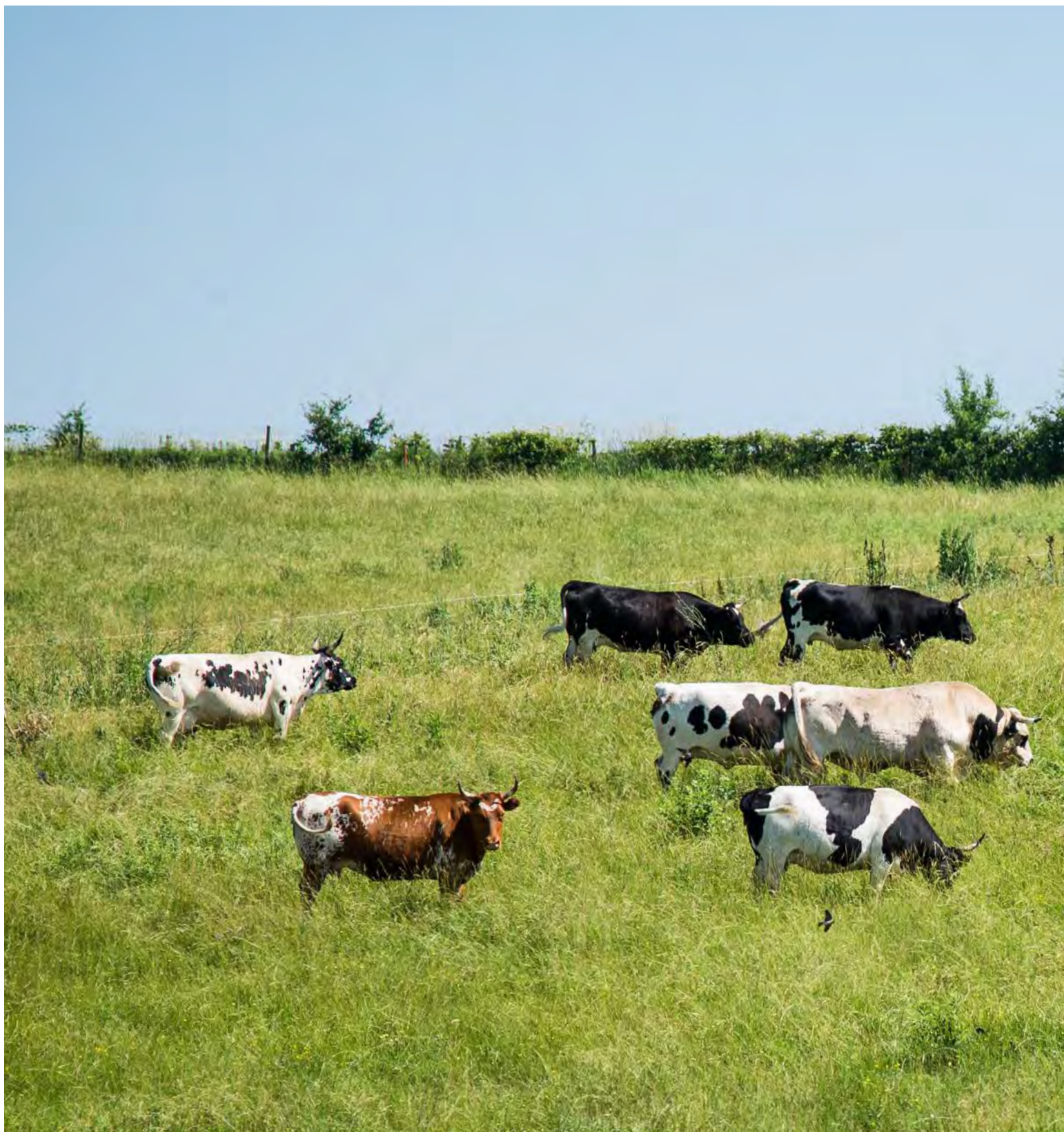
TOTAL AMOUNT ..... = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- 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 \_\_\_\_\_



Chad and Katie Hensley's Pineywoods cattle graze on pastures at their farm, Big Creek Farms, near Lamoni, Iowa. A new meat processor that just opened in Lamoni in May will mean a more tranquil journey for the cattle and a lot less stress for the Hensleys. Read more on pages 26-27 about how new Iowa meat processors are helping address a shortage in the state's meat processing capacity.



# PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

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Ames, IA 50010

Non-Profit  
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Waterloo, IA  
Permit No. 901

## A Connection Between Local Farms and Businesses

Berenice and Daisy Valderrabano stand inside their taqueria, Mr. Burrito, located in Ames, Iowa. The sisters started sourcing peppers from a local farm to use in their restaurant. Read their story on page 8.

