

the PRACTICAL FARMER

SPRING 2021



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WHAT WE DO

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

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

OUR VALUES

Welcoming everyone

Farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge

Curiosity, creativity, collaboration and community

Resilient farms now and for future generations

Stewardship of land and resources

THE PRACTICAL FARMER

the Practical Farmer is published quarterly as a benefit of membership to help keep farmers and friends of farmers in touch with one another through informative articles on relevant farming topics, current on-farm research, upcoming events and other news of interest.

Magazine Editor: Tamsyn Jones

Back issues are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, articles may be reprinted or adapted if credit is given. Clippings and notice are appreciated.



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Connecting From Home

Late last summer, PFI's creative communications team mused on ways we could bring people together meaningfully and help them feel connected – virtually – during our biggest event, our annual conference. Typically, this event provides a reunion for returning attendees and a warm welcome for first-timers. How could we emulate these feelings when not together in person? The communications team decided to emphasize the homey, welcoming atmosphere of PFI, along with the benefits of attending a conference from the coziness of home. Thus, "Coming Home" was born.

During this conference, we hoped to help people feel at home with their PFI community. And with your participation, the conference certainly did deliver. Our first full-length movie, "Livestock on the Land," showed people how important livestock is to sustaining farms and communities across Iowa. Sessions helped us learn how to improve our farms, and showcased your homes, including Donna Prizgintas and Lonna Nachtigal cooking delicious animal "extras" into homemade delicacies. Happy hours that lasted later than scheduled let many of us catch up and talk about life's biggest challenges and opportunities. Our keynote speaker, Sarah Smarsh, helped us put into perspective how alike we are, regardless of whether the place we call home is rural, urban, familiar or new. And the storytelling that capped the event with moving, thought-provoking and humorous homespun tales captured our full attention.

The result was magical. People created genuine connections with each other, and we were able to see people who wouldn't have been able to make it to an in-person event, such as Tim Welsh who joined from Thailand. We also got to catch up with Tomoko Ogawa, a former PFI staff member and a good friend of many PFI members, who joined from Switzerland with her husband, Simon, and son, Takeo. Thanks to all of you who joined in to make this conference the homecoming it was. If you missed it, we missed you, but I have good news – abridged stories from the capstone conference storytellers can be found on pages 17-28 of this magazine. Additionally, recordings of conference sessions, "Livestock on the Land," the keynote and the storytelling feature are all available on our YouTube channel.

During the conference, we also honored Paul Ackley and his late wife, Nancy Ackley, who received Practical Farmers' 2021 Sustainable



Gathering virtually for our 2021 annual conference PFI members, staff, speakers and others made meaningful connections, expanded their networks and continued the spirit of learning that is a hallmark of our premier annual gathering.

In this view, staff, board members, PFI's AmeriCorps crew and PFI members – including Paul Ackley (second row, second from the right), who received PFI's 2021 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award with his late wife, Nancy – attend the business meeting on Jan. 22, 2021.

Agriculture Achievement Award. In his acceptance speech, Paul delivered a powerful ode to his home:

"Rural Iowa has been the place I wanted to call home as far back as I can remember. I knew it was when I was a student at Iowa State, and nearly two years in the United States Army reinforced that desire. In February 1969, as my planeload of returning service men from the Vietnam conflict approached the runway at Oakland Army Terminal, Oakland, California, not a human sound was audible in the cabin. No talking, no shuffling noises and no one reached into overhead luggage racks. All eyes were looking out the windows to get a look, or just a glimpse, of home ground, even if it was just an airport runway. Coming home."

You can hear Paul's full acceptance speech on YouTube, and can read about his and Nancy's many inspiring accomplishments on our website.

Whether via "Live from the Farm," or "Catching Up," I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Written cozily from home,

Sally Worley

The Journey to an On-Farm Research Project: *A Student's Tale*

By Gina Nichols



Prologue

Have you ever watched a piñata party? A line of people, waiting blindfolded to sightlessly swing a stick at a cardboard animal filled with candy. There are lots of swinging styles. Some run towards it, wielding the stick overhead. Some do exploratory taps before committing to a swing. A few take three half-hearted swings then pass the stick, their party obligations fulfilled. Others whack with zeal, undeterred by their blindness. All of these approaches have merit, and it's never clear which will actually break the piñata.

The Quest for a PFI Research Project

The path to crafting a meaningful on-farm research project can sometimes feel like a piñata party: a hazy endpoint, unsure of the shape or strategy. In January 2018, I left my home in Colorado to start a doctoral program at Iowa State University. I arrived in Ames to a week of sub-zero temperatures. I had gotten a master's degree in sustainable agriculture at ISU a few years before, so I wasn't fazed by Iowa's winter welcome. The program I had done, fondly called Susag, is an ISU subculture.

And like any subculture, it has its own heroes, including the Leopold Center; Practical Farmers of Iowa; potlucks; and SARE grants awarded by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, a funding body that distributes federal money for

research and education. SARE is one of the few places graduate students can apply for funding to support a project of their own design. When I started my doctoral program that snowy January, I still held these idolatries in my head. I had a goal of getting a SARE grant to work with PFI. I wanted those badges of honor to adorn my sustainable agriculture sash. The problem was I didn't have a good idea of what to propose I should actually do with PFI. I went to the annual PFI conference a week after I arrived, hoping for ideas – and was quickly overwhelmed. Over the next few months, I wrote draft after draft of proposal ideas, but none seemed right. I was doing some exploratory taps, looking for the piñata, but wasn't connecting.

In Pursuit of the Soil Sponge

As late March neared, and with it the deadline for the SARE proposal, I panicked. I

started thinking through the lens of services I could offer farmers, rather than focusing on a research question I could answer. About the same time, I received a price quote for a full soil nutrient analysis on my doctoral research plots – it was scandalously expensive. The prohibitive cost led me to wonder if there was a particularly expensive, but useful, test I could do for PFI farmers.

I searched and found an analysis that is such a pain, and is so time-consuming, few researchers even do it: the soil-water retention curve. This test measures how much water your soil holds at a range of pressures. If you imagine your soil as a sponge, this measurement tells you how much water that sponge will hold. The results can help predict a soil's ability to store water and supply it to plants. The more water a soil can hold, the better buffered a crop is against

drought. Additionally, the shape of the curve reflects the soil structure and can tell you if your soil has large or small pores. These are both eminently useful insights that can guide management practices. The catch is, measuring the soil-water retention curve can take weeks to complete.

I scoured the internet and found just one study that had measured the soil-water retention curve in a corn-soybean rotation with and without a winter rye cover crop. Had I found a way to both contribute to science and work with Practical Farmers of Iowa? I broached the idea with Stefan Gailans, PFI's research and field crops director, and he thought it was doable. I set about writing a proposal to measure the sponginess of the soil for PFI farmers. I was taking a full swing at the piñata, albeit blindfolded. To my delight, the project was funded! I'd busted the piñata and had a SARE grant to collaborate with PFI farmers. The next hurdle, however, was finding some of those farmers.

A Fork in the Road

In December 2018, nearly a year after I had first arrived in Ames, I attended the PFI Cooperators' Meeting, hoping to connect with some farmers. As I sat and listened, I heard all sorts of questions. None were about soil-water. There was no proverbial candy coming out of the piñata. I did, however, notice there were a lot of questions about weeds. At one point in the meeting, someone said, to no one in particular, "Is there any way we can get a graduate student to do some weed measurements? That sure would be nice."

I now had two realities to reconcile – what the farmers wanted, and what I had thought would be valuable and had financial support to do. With some careful planning and a push from Sarah Carlson, PFI's strategic initiatives director, I designed a double project. Both soil sponges and measurements of weed seeds require soil, so I would just sample soil for both questions. Rob Stout of Washington, Iowa, Jim Funcke of Jamaica, Iowa, and some U.S. Department of Agriculture folks had cover crop strip trials that were rounding their 10th year (20th year in the case of the USDA). Long-term trials are the perfect places to measure both weed seed banks and soil properties. I had nicked the piñata. With a little direction from the party crowd, I was able to crack that sucker open.

The Joy of Discovery

I commenced the execution phase of the project. I had an incredible support team that included Mickala Stallman and Wyatt Westfall, two undergraduate students who



helped me without complaint. My advisor, Matt Liebman, and his lab were likewise always ready to help. Visiting the farms to get samples was a joy. One reason I love agricultural research is that it can take you into the depths of the countryside, where there are, without fail, treasures. Rob and Jean Stout's house is near a massive collection of gas station signs. Jean fed me and my helper ham sandwiches and raisins, and we got pecan rolls from a bakery nearby.

The USDA plots are the oldest cover crop experiments in the Midwest; a niche tourist attraction, admittedly, but deserving of a visit. Jim Funcke's field had a teetering pile of turkey manure, reminding me of the legend that the highest point in Iowa is on top of a manure pile. Jim may have been eligible to claim that honor that year.

My support team and I spent a lot of the summer watering weed seedlings, and I spent a few weekend evenings literally watching soil dry. It was a blast (I write that without irony). I found that the plots that had been cover-cropped for 10-plus years had less waterhemp seeds – exciting, as waterhemp is resistant to many common herbicides. I also found the soil 10 centimeters deep wasn't affected by cover cropping. This is also important information, as it helps us have realistic expectations for what cover cropping can provide.

Epilogue

So what is the moral of this double-project? My takeaways are as follows: (1) If you worry excessively about asking the perfect question, you will never ask anything. Someone needs to take a swing at that piñata, no matter how ugly that swing might be. (2) Simply accumulating experience is valuable. I'm a better scientist for having done both projects. Every swing contributes, hit or miss. I would venture that many PFI members have had an instance where they, like me, felt like they had swung at, but completely missed, the piñata. But the wait I see it, just by swinging you're contributing to the party. Moreover, I think swinging is the fun part. ■

Learn More

- Read more about the soil-water project results on the PFI blog at practicalfarmers.org/does-cover-cropping-change-the-sponginess-of-the-soil.
- Read more about the weed project at frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fagro.2020.591091/full, and hear about it in the PFI farinar from Feb. 11, 2020 titled "Cereal Rye for Weed Management: A New Tool in the Toolbox?" (practicalfarmers.org/2020-winter-farinar-series).

Reflecting on History to Create Resilient Paths Forward

Members are increasingly acknowledging original Indigenous occupants

Often when people talk about the land they farm, they refer to the generations of their family that farmed before them. But you may have noticed that, in recent years, more people are starting to reflect farther back to recognize the Indigenous peoples who stewarded the land first. Here are some examples of land acknowledgements that have occurred at PFI events or by PFI members this past year.

Peg Bouska

In October 2020, sisters Peg Bouska, Carol Bouska, Sally McCoy and Ann Novak were awarded PFI's Farmland Owner Legacy Award for the work they've done creating and progressing towards shared goals for their farmland near Protivin, Iowa, including efforts to improve conservation, community vitality and healthy food. In her acceptance speech, Peg said: "We want to recognize our great privilege to own this land, and that the first people to live on it were displaced. This includes the Sac and Fox Tribe, the Meskwaki Nation, who still live in Iowa. This legacy process has led us to grapple with that fact."

According to Northwestern University's Native American and Indigenous Initiatives, a land acknowledgement recognizes and respects Indigenous people as traditional stewards of the land and the enduring relationships that exist between Indigenous people and their native lands. Peg, who lives in Iowa City, Iowa, first heard a land acknowledgement at a PFI beginner farmer field day several years ago. "It was really cool to hear a couple just starting out acknowledge the history of their land," she says. Hearing others acknowledge that history planted a seed for Peg.

A renewed focus on the farmland that had been passed on to them inspired Peg to do a land acknowledgement on behalf of her and her sisters. "In the last year or so," she says, "my sisters and I have been much more focused on connecting to our land." She, Carol, Ann and Sally are transitioning



Above: According to the Office of the State Archaeologist, based at University of Iowa: "The 1837 loway Map (known sometimes as No Heart's map) was created by one or more unnamed loway Indians, for a meeting that took place on October 7, 1837 in Washington D.C."

"Illustrated on the map are villages and travel routes of the loway, plotted on lakes and rivers within an area of nearly a quarter of a million square miles of the Upper Midwest and eastern Great Plains. But the map also illustrates the movements of the loway throughout time, from their traditional place of origin at the estuary of Green Bay in present-day Wisconsin about 1600 AD through their journeys between the Wisconsin woodlands and the plains of eastern Nebraska for the next 237 years." (Map source: *National Archives and Records Administration*)

Opposite: The sun rises over the land Wendy Johnson and her family farm near Charles City, Iowa, which for centuries before the arrival of Europeans was inhabited by the loway and other Indigenous peoples.

the farmland they are stewarding to more regenerative, soil-building practices. To do this, they need to better understand the shape every acre is in. Working with consultant Ecological Design and with Climate Land Leaders – a group that works with farmland owners to help them transform their land with conservation practices – Peg and Carol, who lives in Minneapolis, conducted a land walk.

"The Native peoples who used to live here were pushed off the land directly or lost access to it because of the Homestead Act. Our family has benefitted for more than 100 years financially, plus we were able to grow up with the benefits of life on the farm . . . Acknowledging what happened is the starting point for healing." – PEG BOUSKA

"We walked all of our acres and were able to see and feel the nature of ecology and the geological history," Peg says. "Along with this, you feel the human history. I have always been interested in Native history, and am feeling this connection really intently right now. The Native peoples who used to live here were pushed off the land directly or lost access to it because of the Homestead Act. Our family has benefited for more than 100 years financially, plus we were able to grow up with the benefits of life on the farm. That is at the expense of people who previously had that life here, which was taken from them. Acknowledging what happened is the starting point for healing."

Wendy Johnson

Wendy Johnson, who farms near Charles City, Iowa, has been giving this land acknowledgement in presentations recently: "The land we steward is located in what is now Floyd County, Iowa, land of the loway peoples for centuries. When the loway were pushed south and westward, it became neutral territory of the Oceti Sakowin, the Wahpeton Dakota and the Sauk and Meskwaki, and later yet the Ho-Chunk peoples." For the past few years, Wendy has been doing research on Iowa's Indigenous tribes and historical landscape – and she emphasizes a land acknowledgement is not "a pat-yourself-on-the-back kind of thing, but the beginning of a long, hard journey to mend relations and honor the people here before us that were removed from the land that we now call our home and farm."

"For me," she adds, "it is a spiritual journey. I'm learning what Iowa used to look like, and could look like again. As a farmer and land steward, Mother Nature is my teacher. I'm promoting grasslands, grazing and attempting to mimic what bison did. When I'm walking this land and I see wildlife diversity return, soils alive and a synchronicity happening, it gives me hope that I am moving in the right direction, a constant reminder of the people, communities and ecosystems that were here before me."

This past year, due to the pandemic, Wendy has been able to attend conferences on her bucket list that she has not been able to attend in the past, including those organized by Bioneers, the Biodynamic Association and EcoAg, as well as the collaborative "Regenerate" conference held annually by Quivira Coalition. "Most sessions began with land acknowledgements from attendees wherever they were from across the nation and world, as well as storytelling and viewpoints shared from Indigenous people," Wendy says. "It was powerful and inspiring to listen to, and gave me the courage to say out loud what I was feeling."

Meghan Filbert and Omar de Kok-Mercado

PFI's livestock program manager, Meghan Filbert, and her husband, Omar de Kok-Mercado, are also beginning graziers. In December 2020, they hosted a central Iowa grazing group get-together near Pilot Mound, Iowa. As guests gathered, Meghan and Omar explained what they know of the history of the land they graze, pointing out that the farmhouse was built in 1862 as a stagecoach inn during the Civil War and sharing what they have learned about the Ioway and Sioux tribes that once occupied the land up and down the Des Moines River. They also noted the two nearby Native American burial mounds that sit on a ridge above the Des Moines River and are currently covered in native prairie grasses, most notably big bluestem and milkweed.

"We look at Iowa's natural heritage of prairies and savannas as relics of an Indigenous farming legacy," Omar says. He and Meghan aim to honor the land and its past peoples by working to reconstruct the oak savanna as a silvopasture, using goats and sheep as their primary vegetation management tool to control an understory of invasive plants. Meghan adds, "We're keeping our understanding of Indigenous land stewardship close to mind as we plan next season's grazing and fire management."

"We look at Iowa's natural heritage of prairies and savannas as relics of an Indigenous farming legacy."

- OMAR DE KOK-MERCADO

John Gilbert

In John Gilbert's storytelling at our annual conference, he speaks of people who have inhabited the land he farms near Iowa Falls, Iowa, before him, from his ancestors to Indigenous predecessors. He talks about how their spirits "are around the structures they left behind, the trees they planted, even the shape of the landscape."

"Our challenge," he says, "is to recognize their presence, their contributions." Read John's full story on pages 20-21 of this magazine.

Steve Gabriel

Many PFI members attended a webinar on silvopasture presented by Steve Gabriel, co-founder of the nonprofit Wellspring Forest Farm in Trumansburg, New York, that PFI sponsored in fall 2020. Here are excerpts from Steve's land acknowledgement:

"I think it's really important to presence the Indigenous lands that we're on. The Gayogohó:nq' is the name for the Cayuga people . . . We're building relationships and learning about a really challenging slice of what it means to own land in New York State . . . We honor these lands and recognize that we're on Indigenous land. These people are presently here and have a future here as well." Steve acknowledges that the farm wrestles with the concept of land ownership.

What's Next

Wendy, Peg and Meghan all said that land acknowledgements were just a first step for them. They are thinking about what comes next as far as land stewardship and how they can play a part in remedying damage done to Indigenous peoples. They don't know what that looks like, but realize awareness is the first step, and they have started this journey.

Should others do land acknowledgements? "There is no right or wrong answer," Wendy says. "It is a personal choice. We as farmers need to begin somewhere in our journeys toward being good stewards of the land, and a land acknowledgement can be that starting point. We need to think in wholes to move forward. I do not view land acknowledgments as a divisive or a political act." ■

Learn More

- To learn more about the Indigenous people who came before you, the website [Native Land \(native-land.ca\)](http://NativeLand(native-land.ca)) is a good starting point. You can enter your location and find who inhabited the land you live or farm on before colonization.
- The Iowa Historic Indian Location Database, a project of the Office of the State Archaeologist, is using overlooked historical sources to map Native American sites in Iowa from the era of the earliest European explorers to the modern period: iowahild.com
- To learn more about Iowa's Indigenous history, read "The Indians of Iowa" by Lance Foster, a member of the Ioway Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska.



Vision and Action: Our New Strategic Plan

Nelson Mandela said, “Action without vision is only passing time. Vision without action is merely day dreaming. But vision with action can change the world.”

In 2020, Practical Farmers of Iowa worked to create a good dose of vision paired with action in our most recent strategic plan, which runs from 2021 through 2023. As a member-based organization, it is crucial that we listen to our members as we create our strategy. Members contributed in myriad ways, from our behemoth member survey to visioning sessions, one-on-one interviews and board representation.

When asked on the member survey what PFI could do differently, members provided some valuable specific ideas we are acting on. However, the most common response was, “Keep up the good work!” It became clear that members value much about PFI’s current farmer-led approach and program offerings. With this in mind, we approached our strategic planning knowing we would remain committed to our core work while focusing on how we could improve and broaden our impact.

Grounding Architecture

As we embarked on this round of strategic planning, we found that our existing mission, vision, values and guiding principles were still relevant, so we kept them the same. These are familiar to many of you, but their importance makes them worthy of including here.

Mission: *Our mission describes why we exist.*

Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.

Vision: *Our vision describes the ideal future we’re working toward.*

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

Values: *Our values articulate our attitudes and behaviors.*

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

Guiding principles: *Our guiding principles provide a framework for how we do our work.*

Farmers lead our programming.
We focus on providing extensive opportunities for members and others to network
(such as field days, pasture walks, farminars, conferences, workshops, etc.).
We secure extensive media featuring farmers and our projects.
On-farm research and demonstration is a core part of our programming.
We partner with agencies, organizations and universities that can effectively help us achieve our goals.

Planning for Growth

With a strong message and guiding architecture to steer most of our everyday work, we focused our strategic planning on ways we could build on our strengths and explore new areas of growth. This strategic plan comprises two main components: a practical vision and strategic directions.

The practical vision differs from our organizational vision, which encapsulates the long-term change we aspire to make, by operating on a shorter timescale. In contrast to our master vision, which has no specific endpoint, we aim to realize this practical vision in three years. Results we want to see include:

- Many voices driving Iowa's agriculture narrative
- Effective leaders creating positive change for our food and farm systems
- PFI well-positioned for success, impact and growth
- Robust markets for a diversity of farm products
- Healthy environments stemming from responsible land stewardship
- Thriving rural communities filled with resilient and profitable farms
- Farming as a desirable occupation, and new farmers are equipped to succeed
- A diverse and inclusive PFI network



"If we are serious about mutual respect in a big tent, we can't NOT include diverse voices representing a multitude of ethnicities, enterprises, farm sizes and more. This makes us better at what we do."

- Gayle Olson

J & G Farms, Winfield, Iowa, from board and staff strategic planning session

Strategic directions are practical, substantial actions that draw on our strengths and remove barriers as we work to achieve our practical vision. With these, we want to:

- Equip a deep bench of leaders to inspire change towards a diverse and vibrant landscape
- Strengthen our network to foster deeper connections, a sense of shared community and partnerships that help spread PFI's vision
- Drive the food and farming narrative and amplify diverse viewpoints
- Pave a path to prosperity for regional food and farm businesses
- Grow organizational capacity for long-term impact



"Farmers want to do better things but are leery of changing practices they use because their margins are tight and they don't want to risk lowering yields. Having another farmer talk to them about their experience really does move the needle on creating positive change."

- Michael Malik

Long Lane Orchards, Solon, Iowa, from member survey

Preserving Flexibility for Action

If you compare our practical vision and strategic directions to our previous strategic plan, you will find that our current plan lacks specific metrics. This is by design. The board of directors approved this plan to describe the overall direction we want to go and actions we want to take to get there. From there, staff created a corresponding implementation plan that details specifics. This approach gives us more flexibility to keep the plan relevant and actionable.

Hopefully this short-term vision resonates with you, and you see pieces that excite you to participate in. If you do, that means we captured your feedback well for how we can work together to make a better Iowa.

If you would like to learn more about our practical vision, strategic directions or implementation planning, please contact me at sally@practicalfarmers.org and I'll be happy to share more details with you. I would also love to hear your thoughts and questions. We are excited to dig in and get to work with all of you to bring change for the better to Iowa and beyond. ■

A Promising Partnership

State funding for farm-to-school efforts can build vital markets for locally grown food while benefiting farmers, schools and children

Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has vividly illustrated the importance of locally grown food. Facing unprecedented disruption in food supply logistics along with sharp increases in demand, many groceries and markets struggled to maintain adequate supply, and consumers turned to local, direct-to-consumer farms to fill the gaps.

Schools, in particular, struggled as they sought to continue providing meals to students who needed them over the summer, and then to those learning remotely once the school year resumed. In late summer 2020, using a portion of the money it received from the federal CARES Act, the state of Iowa announced a new grant program designed to help educational institutions gain better access to locally grown food. This Local Produce and Protein Program (LPPP) provided grants to producers, food hubs and schools to build capacity and infrastructure and, in the case of schools, actually purchase local foods.

Why Farm-to-School Matters

Farm-to-school refers to the sale and consumption of locally grown foods in educational institutions, usually encompassing pre-K through 12th grade and centers of higher education. In Iowa, many vulnerable and low-income families lack access to healthy local food. Childhood obesity and malnutrition are growing problems – Iowa currently ranks 13th in the nation in childhood obesity, according to data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and many rural communities lack a local grocery store.

The Iowa Farmers Union's Local Food, Healthy Kids initiative reports that only 63% of census tracts in the state have access to a "healthy food retailer," 9% below the national average. Against this backdrop, schools provide a unique opportunity to get healthy and nutritious food to the children who need it most. Locally sourced food also tends to be more diverse than standard lunchroom fare.

Jason Grimm is a PFI member, farmer and executive director of the Iowa Valley RC&D (Resource Conservation & Development). He

also co-leads the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group. Jason worked with food hubs and schools to pursue LPPP grants to increase their ability to purchase local food. He also received an LPPP grant for his own operation that enabled him to better meet rising school demand for locally grown produce. "It's important to improve the diversity of the lunchroom," Jason says. "Not just russet potatoes, but purple potatoes. Not just canned beans, but dry beans."

... LPPP grant funds enabled schools that had never before purchased local food to take the proverbial plunge and work with local food for the first time.

Farm-to-school initiatives are also good for farmers. Jason explains that for many specialty crop producers, schools can be a valuable market with consistent and significant demand. For farmers growing a diversity of crops, he says schools can buy a lot of different products at different times throughout the year. They can also provide steady demand throughout the year for bulk crops like potatoes. "I can sell potatoes three or four times each fall," Jason says. "It's also a great way to get my name and my brand out there by building those relationships with the schools."

Food hubs can also play a critical role in farm-to-school efforts. These are organizations that serve as buyers and aggregators of local, traceable farm product, and they can help farmers find or develop markets for products, as well as offer logistical support to farmers and food buyers. Jason says that food hub-to-school partnerships

can benefit both sides. Because schools might not know what product is available or how to get it, food hubs can help with procuring product and the logistics involved. On the flip side, schools can be a source of steady markets and income in both the spring and fall seasons for food hubs and the farmers they serve.

Local Produce and Protein Program

To help spur greater farm-to-school connections, the state of Iowa introduced the Local Produce and Protein Program (LPPP) in 2020. The program provided equipment and infrastructure grants to farmers, food hubs and schools to expand capacity to grow, sell, distribute, prepare or serve local food. The program also provided funds to schools for the direct purchase of local food. The grant program was relatively small – just a few hundred thousand dollars split among farmers, food hubs and schools. But its impacts are swiftly becoming clear.

"Even with the relatively small scale," Jason says, "purchase and infrastructure grants were used by school districts to purchase local food for the first time."

Most schools lack funding to purchase local food. Jason says the data that Iowa Valley RC&D and the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group are collecting from schools makes it clear that the LPPP grant funds enabled schools that had never before purchased local food to take the proverbial plunge and work with local food for the first time. The long-term impacts are less clear, but the theory is that once schools have made their first local foods purchase, they are more likely to continue purchasing local food. Anecdotal evidence backs that up.

"One food hub worked with six new schools that had no idea that food hubs existed or how to go about purchasing local foods," Jason says. "That's a whole new set of relationships that's going to continue."

For farmers, the effects were likely much less immediate. Jason points out that, due to the timing of the grants, growers weren't really



Left: Clear Creek–Amana district food director Debbie Klein (left) and Amana Elementary School’s kitchen manager, Rebecca Berstler (right), with locally grown apples.
Right: Jason Grimm farms near Williamsburg, Iowa, and is executive director of Iowa Valley RC&D.

able to use the additional funds to make purchases that increased their capacity for the 2020 growing season. However, he says the grant he received and used to purchase new equipment did help offset the risk of a new investment.

“Going forward, having the new equipment is going to allow us to scale up and do more beans and different varieties of beans,” he says. “That should lead to more opportunities for selling to schools and food hubs.”

Next Steps and Challenges for Farm-to-School

Despite the LPPP’s boost to local food in schools, challenges to building effective farm-to-school relationships remain. For example, Jason says more work needs to be done to help schools offset infrastructure and equipment costs. Because preparing and serving fresh, local food requires certain infrastructure and equipment, a lack of funds to upgrade is often a persistent barrier preventing schools from buying local food.

There’s also an education component that needs to be addressed. Jason says that schools sometimes don’t know how to effectively prepare new product. “I’ve worked

with local school districts to develop new recipes for different products, like legumes. In particular, I’ve helped one local school district learn how to prepare dry beans. It’s a way to introduce a new product to a school district and build that relationship.”

Food hubs also face major infrastructure barriers that keep them from effectively aggregating and distributing larger amounts of product. If school demand for local food continues to grow, food hubs will need additional resources to fulfill their mission.

Farmers, too, will need additional support to offset risks and expand production to meet increased demand from schools. Although schools have the potential to be major markets for local food, farmers usually need to make production decisions well in advance of school purchasing decisions. This mismatch in timing complicates efforts to simultaneously scaling up supply and demand that government programs, like LPPP, could help offset.

State officials seem to recognize the need for state programs benefiting farm-to-school initiatives, and the opportunities they can bring. During the 2021 legislative session, both Governor Kim Reynolds’s proposed

budget and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship’s budget request included more permanent funding for a program very similar to LPPP.

For farmers interested in building relationships with their local schools, Jason says a good place to start is with a local food hub. But for those who don’t have access to a food hub, or who are interested in building a personal relationship with the local school, Jason says it’s best to start relatively small, not push too hard and start the conversation as early as possible.

“My recommendation is to contact the school food director with a one-page document detailing the items you grow, sooner rather than later,” he says. “You can’t really start too early. I also wouldn’t start off talking about prices. Talk about quantities, talk about times of year when product would be available and make sure the school knows how to get a hold of you.” ■

The Savings Incentive Program

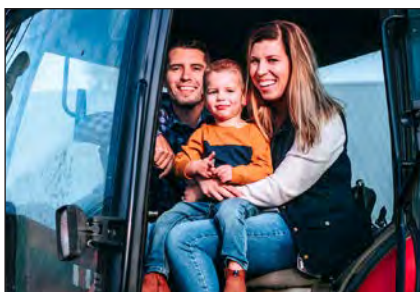
Class of 2022



Join us in getting to know the Savings Incentive Program Class of 2022!

The Savings Incentive Program is a two-year program that pairs beginning and aspiring farmers with experienced farmer mentors; provides targeted learning and peer networking opportunities; and offers business planning support and guidance. After successfully completing the program, Practical Farmers of Iowa matches their savings dollar for dollar, up to \$2,400, to use toward the purchase of a farm asset.

For information on the program and to learn more about the farmers, visit our website at practicalfarmers.org/savings-incentive-program.



Anthony & Mary Battazzi, Stratford, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

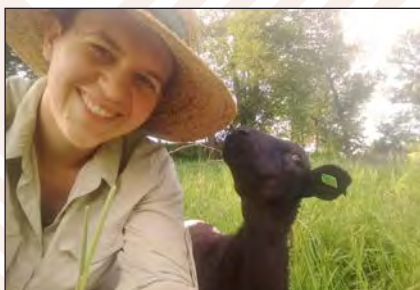
We want to farm to continue the family legacy. We would like to improve sustainability on the farm and grow better crops each year while diversifying the crop rotation.



Jared Dressman, Fort Calhoun, Nebraska

Why do you want to farm?

Farming has been in my family history and I have a deep desire to farm. Growing trees has been something I have really enjoyed doing since moving onto an acreage. I would like to provide the surrounding community with quality fruit and nut trees.



Heidi Eger, Spring Grove, Minnesota

Why do you want to farm?

I want to farm because I find joy in being outside, building trust with sheep, working to improve the health of the ecosystem and connecting with people over food.



Ndayahundwa Evance & Shwirima Ezinoel, Des Moines, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

We love farming and this is something we have both done since a young age. We know that when we farm, we can always support ourselves with food production and provide our families with chemical-free, healthy food throughout the whole year. We can also help our family financially by making money from our gardens. We love being able to produce and provide this food for our community as well, and providing this food to others that have the same values and making them happy.



Gavin Johnston, Council Bluffs, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I want to farm to heal the land and myself. I love working outside, I love working with nature and animals.



Joseph Klingelutz, Iowa City, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I want to farm because it fascinates me and makes me want to continually learn and try new things. Farming allows me to see the world through a different lens and to appreciate the natural world.



Bailey Lutz, Spring Grove, Minnesota

Why do you want to farm?

Most simply, because farming is a means of developing a deep relationship with land and place.



Lara Mangialardi & Jacob McGreal, Strawberry Point, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

Farming bridges gaps between the individual, the family and the community. Our desire to farm has come from connecting our love for being outdoors, creating, problem-solving, spending time with family and connecting others around us to food that we are proud of and excited to share. Jake is from the country and I am from an urban area, but we both have families that enjoy getting together, cooking, sharing stories and traditions and value the work we do.

(Continued on page 16 →)



Dustin Potter, Council Bluffs, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I started my farm for a lot of reasons not related to farming. I continue to farm because of the challenge each season brings. I love the community a farm creates and being able to provide fresh, local produce to that community. I enjoy being my own boss and I have a lot of pride in the business I am building.



Jeremy and Amber Prochnow, Glenwood, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

We want to farm to improve access to chemical-free and healthy foods for our surrounding communities and family, as well as to improve soil, air and water quality.



Natasha Wilson, West Chester, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

I care deeply about producing good food, practicing good land stewardship, treating animals well and improving food access in our community. I also believe everyone has a right to high-quality, nourishing food. Combining these values and wanting to honor the legacy of my parents and grandparents drives me to farm. My partners both farm on the land I am now on, and build on their good work to serve our community for many years to come. I want to teach my daughter to know how to grow her own food and to care for the Earth and animals.



Margaret & Brad Wolter, Chelsea, Iowa

Why do you want to farm?

We recently moved to 25 acres of Margaret's family's heritage farm in Chelsea, which we bought from her relatives. Brad's mother was raised on what is now a century farm, so you can say farming is in our blood. Margaret's family farm was quite diverse and productive for generations, but no one has been living there for many years. We plan to fix it up and breathe new life into it, growing healthy food for ourselves and others. As a child, this is where Margaret developed her sense of wonder, and now it's where she finds her greatest sense of place.

Thank you to all those who have generously supported this savings match program. If you are interested in supporting this program or want to participate, contact Greg Padgett, next generation director, at greg@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661. The next round of applications will open in fall 2021.

Farmer Stories

On the evening of Saturday, Jan. 23, a crowd of expectant guests tuned in from couches, kitchen tables and other cozy nooks across multiple time zones to hear six PFI members share their personal stories live during the concluding event of “Coming Home,” PFI’s 2021 virtual annual conference.

Sharing experiences and lessons learned with one another is part of PFI’s culture. At events, the side stories and moments of personal connection are just as valuable as any field demonstration. As last year’s virtual field day season wound down and we began thinking about the annual conference, we realized how much we missed those treasured interactions, and we had a hunch that you might, too.

We recruited six members – Jill Beebout, John Gilbert, Lorna Wilson, Darla Eeten, Michael Eeten and Jathan Chicoine – to tell tales of farming, connection and remembrance. Hosted by PFI member Wade Dooley framed snugly by a warm fire, these farmers channeled their singular experiences into 90 minutes of memorable, heartwarming, humorous and powerful stories about starting to farm, connection to land, raising children on the farm, picking green beans and learning from the lifeways of bison.

Connection flowed as the online audience chimed in with expressions of shared relief; affirmations of “so beautiful” and “wonderful story”; collective remembrances of snow caves and blizzards; shared jokes; and plenty of digital applause. For those who were unable to attend, or wish to experience these powerful and delightful stories again, we are sharing them on the following pages. The stories are largely preserved as orally presented, with light edits for style and clarity.



Jill Beebout



John Gilbert



Lorna Wilson



Michael & Darla Eeten



Jathan Chicoine

(Continued on page 18 →)

Jill Beebout

Auger Augury



My husband, Sean Skeehan, and I moved to the farm on April Fool's Day 2005, and if that isn't an augury of things to come in the birth of a farm, I don't know what is!

Now, we already look like the punchline to a farming joke. Sean is six-and-a-half feet tall, more than a foot taller than I am. He walks at about half the speed that I do and is far more intellectual and considered in his speech and actions. To add to the irony, neither of us grew up on a farm. We both have theater degrees and spent years working at theaters around the country, which surely prepared us to start a farm – we just went from the non-profit world to the no-profit world. But at least we can act like we know what we're doing.

So we moved to farmland owned by my family, and acted like we had a plan. What could possibly go amiss? The trial by tiller, the dump wagon debacle, the hay rack wreck. And those were just the poetic examples. What we did was make every silly beginner mistake possible. Luckily, we all survived that first season.

Season number two: Now can really act like farmers! Among other things, we were determined to build our first high tunnel. There was a lot of ground prep, here in hilly southern Iowa. Luckily, we had a dad with equipment and real skills. But when the day came to auger holes, Dad wasn't available and rain was coming late the next day. As he left the farm, Dad rolled down his window and said, "no worries, you can do it!"

So we gathered up our collective courage between the two of us and marched down the hill towards the skid steer, anxiety mounting but both of us acting like we knew what we were doing. I scooted into the driver's seat and started her up. I hooked onto the auger without an issue, but Sean couldn't get the locking levers down. He climbed onto the arms to try to step them down, but his ginormous size 13 boots were too big to fit on the levers. He nearly got stuck, big albatross arms wheeling around. Well, this wasn't getting us anywhere. So I scampered out and he slowly folded himself into the driver's seat. A couple of quick jumps on the levers. Success!

Then there were the hydraulic connections. They're in an awkward position and nothing we did could get them to seat. There was no thoughtful language now, just snarling, swearing, grunting and snapping.

"Just push it!"

"I am pushing it!"

"No, here, grab it here. No here, RIGHT HERE!"

Then a phone call to Dad, whose typical unruffled response of "yeah, that connection can be a bummer" was a little bit of a balm on our newbie nerves. And a second call to Dad, who replied, "Oh, I should have told you to try releasing the hydraulic pressure. That should do it."

So we tried to do as suggested. The hydraulic fluid oozing out made everything go more "smoothly." At least our conversation was well lubricated: those words just slid right out, words I can't repeat here. I bet we fought with that crazy thing for half an hour before we heard the magic "click." Then there was the second connection, which only required a little more lubricated language. And then, YES!! We were triumphant, and we hadn't even done anything yet.

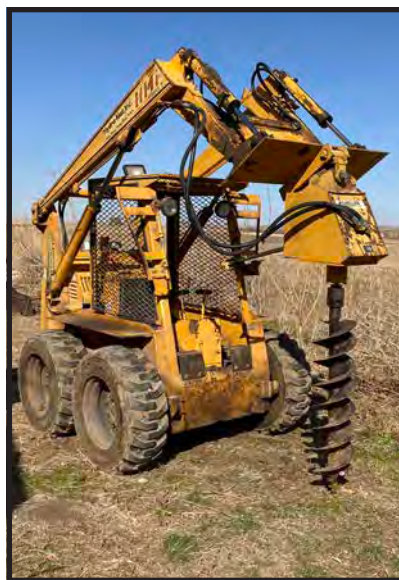


Photo courtesy of Bruce Vander Wal.



Sean and Jill work on a barn quilt from their roof awning.

Finally connected, Sean slowly rolled up the hill to the high tunnel site, with the auger sticking out front like some growling, single-horned beast creeping across the farm. I would say like a unicorn, but there was nothing sparkly or magical about that day, just a slowly building wave of apprehension. I scurried after him with an armful of tape measures, level, shovel, jobbers and who knows what else. We were going to do this! We were determined, and still we were clueless.

As I juggled up to the site with my load of tools, Sean had carefully lined up to the first post location and was raising the boom on the skid steer. If you've never seen or used a skid steer auger, it is different than a post hole digger on a tractor. It mounts on the attachment plate on the boom arms in front of you, then the boom is raised up and the plate tilted down so that the auger is hanging straight up and down. Ours is a 5-foot-tall auger, so the boom has to be raised well above my head for the auger to have space to hang clear to move into position.

So the boom slowly rose – and almost as though it was connected, so did my anxiety level. Somehow, that didn't happen when my dad was driving. But we were going to do this!

Then the auger started to tilt down, slowly, until the plate was nearly parallel to the ground, and then SLAM! The entire auger dropped like a 300-pound metal spear, the point striking the frame of the skid steer, right between Sean's knees. Everything stopped. I froze, watching the auger balance there on its tip, hanging from the hydraulic hoses. Sean was dead still, his mouth and eyes wide open. Everything stopped. The birds quit singing, the wind stopped blowing, my heart stopped beating. "Holy hel ... lo! Are you ok?" I asked when I could breathe again. Silence. Then he closed his mouth and blinked his eyes. Cautiously, he replied, "Fine. It didn't even touch me." But now what do we do? If he lowers the boom, it will change the angle of the auger, causing it to slide towards him. But if he raises it to allow it to swing back out, the hoses may fail and the whole thing could fall on him. I had never been so scared in my life.

There was no one else on the farm and we were stuck. After studying the problem from his precarious seat, Sean finally decided all we could do was risk lifting it up. I scurried down to the barn and brought back a length of rope that I tied to the auger. Hopefully, this would act as a guide and I got ready to yank that thing for all I was worth if it started to fall. I'm sure my 130 pounds would have been a very effective counterweight had it been necessary. Luckily, it wasn't. The boom lifted slightly, the auger swung free and Sean gently lowered the boom with just a couple gentle nudges of his toe on the control pedal. All the while, I was hauling on that rope for all I was worth to keep the whole rig from binding up.



Lesson number 12 of the day: It's good to be the equipment driver. But it was down, he was safe and one of us was breathless with the effort. What followed was another snarling, swearing, grunting and snapping session as we pried and strong armed the auger back into place on the mounting plate. This time, as we lifted it slightly to engage the locking levers, Sean looked under the mounting plate from his seat and spotted the locking pins attached to those levers. Ah, now we knew! But we still hadn't drilled a single hole and it was starting to get late.

Need overcame fear, and we bulled through those holes as though we actually knew what we were doing. We finished the last hole long after dark by the headlights on the skid steer with no further incidents. Sean drove it back down the hill while I trundled along behind with my armload of tools. We put the equipment away and dragged ourselves back towards the house surrounded by a gentle breeze and the late-summer songs of frogs and locusts. "Well, we got it done," I said to Sean, who followed behind me. There was a long pause and then he replied thoughtfully, "Yeah, maybe we don't need to tell anyone how we got it done." I laughed: "Agreed."

The next day, the posts were set ahead of the rain and our first high tunnel was underway. We learned so much during that process, and throughout all the years since. But even though we seemed mismatched, both for each other and as farmers, we learned that if we did it together, we could "get it done."

And that high tunnel stood firm and true, serving us well until May 2008, when we were hit by our first tornado. But that's another story. ■

Jill runs Blue Gate Farm with her husband, Sean Skeehan. They steward 40 acres of family land in southern Marion County, Iowa, where they raise Certified Naturally Grown produce, laying hens, hay and alpacas, marketing through CSA and the Downtown Farmers' Market in Des Moines.

John Gilbert

Guided by the Spirits of the Land

Do you have ghosts at your place? Are you sure? We do.

Sometimes I'll catch a glimpse. There are times when I think I feel them ... but maybe it's just my arthritis. Mostly, I know they're here by signs they leave and things they do. I've always thought they're the spirits of people who've gone before – those who've belonged to this farm, belonged to this land in their time. My ancestors, people who've worked here and maybe even our Indigenous predecessors.

There have even been times when I'm feeding our Brown Swiss calves and something about the way one looks at me, a quirk in her personality or a peculiarity in her behavior makes me feel sure that her great-grandmother, or maybe it's her great-great-grandmother, is letting me know she's here. Often, the spirits are more prevalent around the structures they left behind, the trees they planted, sometimes even the shape of the landscape.

I've had the extreme good fortune to farm on the Hardin County dairy of my childhood, land that has been in the family almost 125 years. I grew up with five brothers, helped take care of Brown Swiss cows and calves, helped raise the pigs that every farm had then, fed and rode a handful of horses and helped farm with the propane-powered Minneapolis Moline tractors favored by my late father. My wife, Beverly, returned to the farm to raise our family, just in time for the farm crisis, which eventually led us to PFI. But that's another story.



I've spent most of my farming career working with Brown Swiss dairy, raising pigs to sell to Niman Ranch for more than 20 years and farming with some of the same yellow tractors – as well as their grey and silver descendants. It's probably not surprising we have ghosts; it would be more surprising, maybe, if we didn't. Just because we aren't aware doesn't mean they aren't here. The real challenge is to recognize not only their presence, but their contributions – like when that old, rickety soft maple went over in the wind gust last summer and landed in the one place where it did the least damage. It's tempting to think we got lucky. But is that what it really was?

Or there are the times I've been caught on the road in snowstorms and can't see over the hood, can't keep the windshield clear, can't even see the side of the road, and somehow I get to my destination. It's vainly tempting to think there was some skill involved. But was that really it at all?

And there have been untold careless and reckless shortcuts I've taken over the years – near misses, close-calls. It was always tempting to foolishly think I was cheating the fates. But was that really it?

Now, I know what you're thinking. This guy has been in the magic mushrooms again; or he must really think we're gullible; or if this is an allegory, he's stretching the limits of his literary license. And I'd agree with you, if there hadn't been times when the presence of an unseen force or an invisible helping hand was actually a more acceptable explanation than any of the others.

For instance, I used to like to keep the combine running as late as possible at night. There were times when, between the steady hum and rumble of the old Massey and the hypnotic flash of the stalks in the lights as they disappeared through the corn head, I'd start across the field and the next thing I knew, I'd snap alert just before I got to the other end, still on the row. Did I mention this was well before auto-steer? It

was somehow comforting to think that, maybe, there was a co-pilot looking out for me.

And then there was the Mother's Day night some years back when, as was my habit, I went to check one more time on a cow before I turned in. It was after the 10 o'clock TV news. Our dog Rose and I jumped in the old grey Dakota, windows down, for the mile-and-a-half trip up to the dairy farm, enjoying the night air. I parked by the milk house, slipped by the end of the bunk and picked my way gingerly across the 100 feet or so of concrete lot to the door of the cavernous dairy barn.

Now, I really should say a word or two about the barns on this farm. Dad had them built after we lost the original one in the 1960s. They are a testament to the way he thought things should be done. Four-foot-high solid concrete walls form the foundations; sizable, salvaged and long native-cut timbers provide the supports. There have been many times when I've been working in these barns and have caught myself looking up, almost like they are cathedrals; looking and remembering the amount of work that went in, and always amazed by the design, the craftsmanship, and remembering all the people involved in getting them built.

But on this particular spring night, those thoughts were furthest from my mind. But maybe they shouldn't have been. I flipped on the light, ducked into the maternity pen and quickly realized the cow's water had broken and she was in labor. I darted back to the milk house to grab the tools of the trade: a sleeve, obstetrical chains and hot water, thinking to myself, "with a little luck, this calf just needs some encouragement and I can get it born and nursing and make it to bed by a little after midnight."

My hopes were quickly dashed when I began my exam, because all I felt was a tail. Now, if you've never had the privilege of helping deliver a calf, normal presentation is front feet first, with the head – nose first – cradled on the legs. Breach deliveries are not common, but the back feet have to come first. This calf had its legs underneath like it was laying down. That meant the calf had to be pushed back into the uterus out of the birth canal far enough so I could work the legs up one at a time.

As I reached in for the first leg, my "Oh shoot!" situation became "Oh (expletive deleted)!" because there were too many legs, too many feet. There was more than one calf. We had twins.

A whole bunch of mental calculations quickly went through my mind. Time is always of the essence with a calf delivery, doubly so with twins. In a difficult situation like this, time was even more critical. This was before the days of the ubiquitous cell phone, and I knew it would take 10 minutes to get to the milk house to get hold of the vet, and it would be another half-hour before he got here. I couldn't wait for him, so I decided to go ahead and see, for a few minutes anyway, if I could do anything on my own.

Did I mention that helping deliver a calf has to be done one-handed? Oh, and it's all by feel ... and there's no place for the word "tidy." This is the kind of "gonna need clean clothes in the morning" kind of messy. In this case, I was pushing the breach forward, trying to pull a leg up before momma pushed him back, or the twin tried to sneak by. About the only description is one-armed juggling, (providing you're doing it while up to your shoulder in the back of a cow).



The first leg was the hardest to get, but once the legs were up, the breach delivery came quite uneventfully. When the calf was in the straw, snorting and shaking his head to clear his airways, I quickly made sure the twin was delivered without issue. I don't remember what time it was when I got headed home but I was relieved. I was thankful. And I remember thinking, "That's two

more souls among the living;"

In the hard light of morning, the relief of that reality and my gratitude met the gravity of the situation. This time it worked out, but that's no guarantee about next time – because we know there will always be a next time. In a situation like this, when you've had some real accomplishment, it's hard not to feel a little more confidence for the next time. But as I thought it over, I really had to wonder: Was I alone? I realized I probably didn't save those calves alone. It was like with the combine: I had some help.

If there is a moral to this story, it probably has to be that we're all never really alone if we're open to the spirits around us – and that may have to be enough, for now, to always be open to the spirits because you never know when you may have to one-arm juggle. ■

John Gilbert farms with his wife, Beverly, and their family at Gibraltar Farm, a 480-acre diversified operation near Iowa Falls, Iowa. The family raises Brown Swiss dairy cattle and pasture-farrowed pigs, along with corn, soybean, small grains and hay.

Lorna Wilson

A Child in Winter

As a family, we read books out loud often to the kids. A favorite series was “Little House on the Prairie” by Laura Ingalls Wilder. When this story happened about 20 years ago, we were reading “The Long Winter.” Many of you have probably read those, and if you remember, they almost starved or died during the many blizzards. They even twisted hay together to burn to keep warm.

What impact it had on me, or us, I don't know. But we'd had a snowstorm that filled our Iowa prairie farm with drifts and lots of snow. Most of our farm was flat with very little to stop the snow, but we had a three- or four-row grove on the north and west sides. Our farm was not very diverse back then. We farrowed-to-finished hogs, so we had to let sows out of their pens to eat each morning and night. We had a few sheep and chickens.

The barn was usually filled with hay, and many times that became the place to play for the kids. They created swings and tunnels that made me a bit anxious, but oh what fun they had.

We had five kids by then: since we homeschooled, they were together a lot. I'm not a worrywart mom. I always sort of knew where they were, and sometimes I'd be out there with them. We had three daughters and two sons. Our son Torray was the oldest son, and he was fairly even-tempered, an easy-going kid.

With three older sisters, he was watched over – kept from trouble and told what to do. It wasn't like him to be off by himself.

Like Torray, I too grew up on an Iowa farm. As a child, my three sisters and I were thrilled to get out in the snow to play. We made snow forts and snowmen, snowballs, laughing and giggling. My dad, a dairy farmer, would build huge piles of snow – we called them snow mountains – and he enjoyed watching us play. We would play outside until our faces were speckled with lots of freckles.

When you are a child, what does cold mean? Not much. After all, we had a black potbelly stove in our dining room growing up where Mom and Dad would burn coal and cobs to keep us warm. I remember Mom carrying out the ashes to the driveway. My own mom was not a worrier either, and she had several sayings, like, “It will all come out in the wash,” or “There

will be a better day a-coming.” I'm always glad when I can remain calm. She just passed away in February 2020 at age 91. Thanks Mom.

My dairy farmer dad had little time to play, but he helped us make toboggan slides down those “snow mountains.” We used scoop shovels for sleds – just hook your feet on the neck and down you'd go.

Later, as I grew up, winters meant freezing cold and scooping snow until your arms hurt. Not quite so much fun. It was the end of the day of chores and subzero cold. So cold that your spit would freeze – although I never tried that. Your skin would freeze in seconds due to the windchill.

Whoever would want to be out there for very long? No one.

Like most farm homes at the end of the day, everyone would gather back inside to a warm, cozy kitchen and supper. Seven of us – five chattering, noisy kids. And so I assumed we were all in the house.

But soon we realized that Torray was not in the house. I tend not to worry, so just got busy making supper. A while passed and still no Torray. Where was he? My logical mind said, oh he'll turn up soon.



I asked the other kids, but none of them knew where he was. Not at all like them to not know what he was doing last or tell him where they were going. I just thought he'd show up hungry.

But he didn't.

This is when you really become an anxious parent. My anxiety was building. "Okay," I said. "We have to go find him."

Donning all our winter clothes again – scarves, mittens, boots and hats – we all became a search party.

Someone looked in the hay mound. He wasn't there. Someone looked in the hog barn; he wasn't there either. Someone even looked in the chicken house, because I had had a daughter get locked in there once. He wasn't there either. We called out his name several times, listening carefully. No answer.

We even loudly rang the generational farm bell that came from Norway, gonging several times. This bell usually got everyone's attention and you could probably hear it from miles away. The winter sky was gray and becoming increasingly dark, and the thermometer was dropping. A slight breeze was blowing. I didn't want to be out there either. I don't remember if we used flashlights, so we probably didn't. No cell phone either.

It was becoming a huge puzzlement and frustration. This was not a joke or funny now.

Where would a 10-year-old boy go? How could he just disappear? Was he lost? Was he lying somewhere injured? Your fears and imagination can kick in and go wild. I could almost see frozen fingers and skin.

It was one of those situations where you are almost holding your breath, and when the crisis is over, you let it out. Ever been there? Our eyes were straining in the dusk of the light, just trying to find some sign. Maybe a footprint or snow moved, or something.

Finally, after about what seemed like an endless search, older sister Robin shouted, "We found him!" Everyone hurried to the spot to be assured he was alive.

Our previous snowstorm had created a hug drift in the grove. He had scooped out a snow cave deep enough that he had not heard us or been aware of the darkness. The wind was making swishing noises that muffled our voices and the bell. He was snug as a bug in a rug in his cave, not even aware he was missing.

He had been right under our noses or feet.

I remember being in the snow caves. I remember bringing our dolls into those caves with not a bit of concern about being frozen.



I guess I had forgotten how insulating snow was when you are deep inside a snow drift. I never even thought he would be in a snow drift. What a wonderful feeling of relief it was to have a so-called crisis resolved. Dan and I both let out our held breath.

Needless to say, we were relieved and hurried inside to a warm kitchen and supper.

We all laughed about it while we were eating supper, but I think Torray knew we had been a bit afraid of frozen fingers and toes. I wasn't really mad, just amazed at how deep he had made the cave. He had been so bent on his project, so absorbed by it, that the world outside didn't exist. The power of creativity had captured him.

Just like in "The Long Winter," we all survived. No one was lost in a snowstorm that year. No one froze to death or starved. We almost wanted to pick up the fiddle, like Pa when the train finally got the supplies through. But neither Dan nor I played the fiddle. As a mom, I was blessed to have a creative and safe son. I still do.

I believe we all have guardian angels, whether we believe in them or not. And we all have loving families that will go out in the cold to search for us. ■

Lorna Wilson farms near Paullina, Iowa, with her husband Dan and five adult children. The Wilsons raise organic corn, soybeans, hay and a variety of small grains on 660 acres at Seven W Farm. The operation also includes an organic dairy, a grass-fed beef herd, a sheep flock, pasture-raised broilers and laying hens and farrow-to-finish hogs.

Michael & Darla Eeten



Green Bean Grievance

Michael: I used to describe myself as an old bachelor who pounded nails for a living, but my joy in life was my U-pick strawberry farm out in the middle of nowhere. So when a couple young gals moved into the neighborhood, I hired them to pick strawberries and take them to market to sell.

One day, they both turned towards me and said, “Michael, you need to meet our mommy.” They told me about her gardening skills and said, “You really need to go over to her farm and see her gardens.” They were right: She had rows and rows of vegetables, and all of her gardens were surrounded by beautiful flowers. I could see that this was a woman who loved gardening as much as I enjoyed raising strawberries!

Darla: I come from a long line of gardeners. My grandparents on both sides of my family were fantastic gardeners. We never bought vegetables in the store, but we grew and harvested our own. I raised my five children on my garden produce. It just came naturally, so I assumed everyone knew how to grow and harvest vegetables, including my husband, Michael.

Michael: In 2010, we decided to get married. I started ripping strawberries out of beds, and Darla started planting vegetables ... things I’d never heard of, let alone eaten. Well, we blended our talents together – Darla’s two green thumbs and my sleepless nights of searching YouTube, trying to find ways to better improve our soil. And slowly, our dreams started to come true.

Darla: It’s the end of a very successful growing season – we’re evaluating how we did, the things that went well and the things we want to change for next year, the things that made money and the things that didn’t. Tomatoes are our best seller, but green beans are close behind. In fact, we sell every green bean we take to market. We could even sell more, if we had them.

Michael: Darla, we need to raise more green beans!

Darla: What!? I’m the one that does the green bean picking! He’s not thinking about all the work that goes into picking green beans. I pretty much love everything there is about gardening, except for two things – one is picking weeds out of carrots and the other is picking green beans. But I do them both.

When it’s time to pick green beans, it’s usually the middle of July, 95 degrees in the shade, not a whisper of a breeze. You can just see the heat waves shimmering on the horizon, and you can smell the sun baking the prairie grasses beside the

garden. The sweat is running into and stinging my eyes, the mosquitoes are buzzing around my ears and the gnats are crawling up my nose.

The bean leaves itch my arms, not to mention the endless back-breaking bending over. “Absolutely not, Michael!” I declare. “I don’t care how many green beans you can sell at market, I draw the line there. I cannot pick any more green beans!”

Michael: Being the dreamer that I am, I was lost in thoughts of doubling our profits on green beans, so I missed that little part about the hard work. “Darla, I have the answer to the problem,” I exclaim. “Next season, I will help you pick those extra green beans!”

Darla: I am really doubtful, but I go along with his plan. It’s the next summer. Middle of July, 95 degrees in the shade, not a whisper of a breeze. You can see the heat waves shimmering on the horizon. Guess what? Time to pick green beans!

I gather up some 5-gallon buckets, and then I go looking for Michael. “Time to pick green beans, Michael,” I say. He looks confused, but then a light comes on. I’m sure he was hoping I’d



forget about his offer to help me pick green beans, but he meekly follows me out to the garden – specifically, that extra 70-foot double row of green beans that he wanted us to plant. I grab a bucket and give one to Michael. The sooner we get started, the sooner this job will be over. But hey, it shouldn't be so bad this time with Michael's help.

I bend down and start picking at the end of one row, and Michael starts on the row right beside me. The sweat that was on my forehead is now running into my eyes and blurring my vision, the mosquitoes are buzzing around my ears and the gnats are starting to crawl up my nose. The fuzz on the bean leaves is itching my arms and my back is starting to moan. We work in silence. All you can hear is the steady plunk, plunk, plunk of beans in the bucket. You can't hear the sweat that's now dripping off my chin as it hits the dirt. Plunk, plunk, plunk.

Wait a minute. Suddenly, it dawns on me: I'm only hearing that plunking coming from my bucket. I look over at Michael. While I'm several feet down the row, he's still at the beginning of his. There must be some explanation for this! He's the brains of this operation – it's not rocket science. Just grab the beans and throw them in the bucket. The faster we go, the sooner this job is over. "How're you doing, Michael?" I ask.

Michael: Darla just took off down the row. Didn't bother to explain how to size the beans. So I'm down on my hands and knees, looking at each one and trying to decide whether it's big enough to pick. I sigh and think, "Wow. I didn't know it could be this much work!" Strawberries are a lot easier to pick. You know the green ones aren't ready, and the ones turning orange will be another day or two and those red ones, they're ripe right now. And the ones that squish in your fingers, you throw them into the air and Hershey, our chocolate Lab, would always catch them. I sigh again: She's halfway down the row already. She must not be finding many beans either. "Darla, you know what? I don't think I've ever picked beans before."

Darla: I knew it! It was just too good to be true. He does all this research, all this studying, and he doesn't know how to pick green beans. I continue down my 70-foot row, trying to

ignore the mosquito stings on my arms and my now-screaming back. I get one bucket full and reach for my second. I glance over at Michael: He's still only a few feet down his row. I grumble with each breath of hot summer air. I can smell the sun baking the prairie grasses beside the garden. It smells like fresh bread, but I'm not hungry – only really thirsty. But if I go in for a tall glass of cold ice water now, I'm not going to want to come back out. So I keep on going, down my 70-foot row. Plunk, plunk, plunk.

I get to the end, do a 180 and start down Michael's row. I am resigning myself to this bean-picking fate. I get my second bucket full and I'm only a few feet away from Michael. I look over in his first bucket: It's only half full. I shake my head and say, "I'll finish picking beans, Michael, go ahead. You can do something else." Whoa! He was up and out of there in no time. He can sure move fast now! I take his bucket and go over the part of the row that he'd supposedly picked. I end up finding enough green beans that he left to fill the bucket. I don't think he's going to offer to help me pick green beans again!

I am just going to have to figure out how to pick them more efficiently, and let Michael keep doing all those other things he does so much better than me. We still do make a pretty good team!

Michael: From this experience, one might see how well we work together. You know, we're not two peas in a pod; we are not even two pods on the same bush. Actually, she's the green bean and I'm the plump strawberry, and somehow we ended up on the same farm. Even though it sounds kind of funny, we end up making it work. I dream of tomorrow and Darla carries us through the day. ■

Darla and Michael Eeten began GoodEetens Produce Farm in 2009. They grow fruits and vegetables at their two farm locations, which include 12 acres near Everly, Iowa, and another 1.5 acres near Boyden, Iowa. Darla and Michael sell their produce through a CSA and at farmers markets.



Jathan Chicoine

Learning From the Spirit of Bison



I want to tell you a story, but I'm not sure where the story begins when everything I see is a circle. The human experience is continually flowing rather than having concrete beginnings and endings. Yet perhaps there are defining moments in our lives that are natural places to begin when sharing our stories. Imagine, it had probably been 140 years since a bison calf was born on our property as part of a family herd, and it was not at all what I expected.

Perhaps the story began following high school when I left for the U.S. Navy, following in the footsteps of my father and my brother. After military service, I traveled the world, pursued my higher education and continued to experience other cultures and other ways of knowing that were very different from the culture in which I was raised. Seventeen years later, I returned to Iowa to the home and culture where I grew up.

Today, I feel fortunate to be able to help restore native prairie, oak savanna and other native ecosystems on our 180-acre farm just northeast of Ames, Iowa. Ultimately, we are working to create an ecosystem as rich and biodiverse as possible with the management of a bison family herd.

I'm not entirely certain where the idea of raising bison came from. I think back to an early part of my childhood and a fascination with the keystone species; maybe that my father raised bison for a short period of time; or even spending time deep in the Amazon rainforest in South America, where I worked with a traditional healer who was restoring native plants for his healing center, which was inspiring to me.

Spending time with traditional healers in Peru sharpened my senses about Indigenous ways of knowing and the relationship to our environment. Through relations made in South Dakota among Native American people, I gained a deeper understanding of bison and their role within the ecosystems of the northern Plains. My relatives helped relocate the bison herd to our farm: We made prayers and sang them in with traditional songs. Today, I cannot see the bison as separate from the land – they are essential to our restoration efforts on our farm.

Imprinted on the land

It must have been early spring because there was a morning chill in the air. I remember clearly movement, changes in the season that bring a smell of the earth and new growth. The bison had only arrived at our farm a few months earlier, so they were still in the winter holding area, which is about a 12-acre closed-off area.

Normally, bison would have roamed thousands of acres, and they can even survive some of the most extreme winter months on their own. It's the reason they have that big hump above their shoulders, that muscle for moving the deep snow out of the way to access grasses. I once slept outside under a bison robe in the middle of a South Dakota winter on top of Spirit Mound. But even in the summer heat, they are so well adapted they don't need to hang out in the waterways to cool off, like other livestock.

Even though I believe bison are remarkable and self-sustainable, we have limited pasture available. So we roll out bales of hay for them during the winter months or until we release them to the pasture. We try to do things as naturally as possible, but recognize we have limitations.

As I shared at the start of this story, it was meaningful to see what I thought was the first bison calf of the season, an emergence of new life and unfolding of something bigger than ourselves. It was exciting. I imagined the last time this land had seen a bison calf being born in this way; that the calf would be imprinted on the land. I took it all in. I watched it with its mother and how the members of the herd interacted with the newborn.

I realize now how much I've learned and what a profound privilege it has been to experience the bison, and how, in such a short period of time, they have already begun to change our landscape for the better. The way they rub on the young cedar trees, helping to open up the prairies; or the way they wallow, creating potholes for birds and other native animals to drink after a rain. The bison have taught us so much over the years, but I didn't really have much experience with them early on – and certainly, raising them in the way that we have, the bison themselves have been our best teachers.

Born of the earth

I had rolled the bale of hay on the far side of the winter holding area down a hill and returned home to grab my camera so that I could document the moment. As I was making my way back out to the far part of the holding area on the four-wheeler, I was surprised to see four bison on their own. It seemed a little bit out of place and I wondered to myself why they weren't with the main herd. It's not uncommon to see a bull group break off from the main herd. Realizing that wasn't the case, I approached them and nudged them to move along.

Bison make this low guttural grunt at times when calling to each other, but I hadn't been around bison long enough to identify the meaning of their sounds. I heard a "grunt, grunt." I nudged them a little more and encouraged them to move along. We never like to pressure the bison, so I took my time. After a little coaxing, all of them left – with the exception of one. For whatever reason, he did not want to leave. I later came to understand this was a younger bull, most likely an uncle. After one last push, the last one finally left to join the main herd. It was just curious to me and made me pause. I looked around the area.

(Continued on page 28 →)



Courtesy of Jaccquelyn's Photography

There's about 6 inches of space between the bottom of the woven wire fence and the ground. On the other side was a 12-inch hole where a telephone pole must have been. I'm not really certain I can describe what I was feeling. Something just wasn't right; maybe it was intuition. I climbed over the fence and looked inside the hole – there was a calf just staring up at me.

Its head was just perfectly below the level of the ground. I mean, if I wasn't looking directly over it, there's no way I would have seen it. And the image is still incredible for me to think about. There's this head and it's just emerging from within this perfectly round hole, new life emerging from the earth. It blew my mind that I could have so easily missed that calf.



Photo courtesy of Jathan Chicoine

Bonded by the family unit

I immediately telephoned my father. Not knowing how to explain this situation over the phone, I simply gave him my location and told him, “I need your help with a calf as soon as you can get here.” It didn't surprise me that it took him very little time to get to me – but before he arrived, the image of that bison calf was so deeply powerful, I snapped a quick photo.

Coming from the military, members of my family are often quick to assess difficult situations and problem-solve. Beyond that, I've certainly learned a lot from my father, and really none of this would have even been possible without his belief in my vision and, ultimately, a desire to leave a legacy for future generations. But I can remember in the moment, when we were getting ready to pull the calf from the hole, he said, “Jathan, you're going to need to bottle-feed it because it has been separated from its mother.”

I wasn't certain what the outcome would be, but we raise our bison differently than a typical cow-calf operation, and we place high value on the family unit. I would later come to understand that even though the mother had moved along, that young uncle refused to leave his nephew. It was enough to let me know something wasn't right.

“I just need your help to get the calf out of the hole,” I told my father. “We don't know what will happen. That herd instinct is strong.” I also recognize this sort of tension between my father and me about how best to care for the bison – or maybe it's my desire to create space to allow things to unfold more naturally.

I remember an argument with my father when putting in fence line. I recall him being so set on putting in a single gate, while I was leaning towards multiple gates. My father is wise and I imagine he was basing his decision on experience, and perhaps even costs. But he also mentioned that having one gate would train the bison to use it. But I didn't want to train the bison, so we eventually put in two gates and allow the bison the freedom to choose.

United in a circle of life

I climbed back over the fence and my father helped me slip the calf back under the woven wire. Bison calves are strong when they are born, but the calf didn't fight me. I carried it in my arms – this heavy, muscular, orange-colored, beautiful animal – up towards where I had rolled out a bale of hay. The bison were just on the other side of the hill, so they couldn't see me and I couldn't see them. I called to them and one came in view just over the hill.

I put down the calf and backed away. I was hopeful, not knowing what I'd do if it didn't work. It took a moment, but then I heard some grunts and that mother came over the hill and ran up to her calf. Bison have a remarkable sense of smell, and she nudged it with her nose. The calf followed its mother back to the main herd. The bison calf survived, but it was more than that to me.

It was a validation that the way in which we were raising them was meaningful. And the experience has framed our understanding of our farm from the beginning. In fact, the image of the bison emerging from the earth within a circle became our logo for Native Prairie Bison. But importantly, it became a metaphor of something bigger than ourselves.

It's certainly not always easy to do things differently, but we trust in the bison. By remaining committed to cooperating with the native species on our farm, we continue to learn in unexpected ways. The story of the calf in the hole is one we've kept returning to – the idea that we can learn from and trust in the bison; and when we provide them the freedom and space to be bison, like other native species, new life emerges. ■

Jathan Chicoine, his wife, Racheal Ruble, and family own and operate Native Prairie Bison in Story County, Iowa, where they raise 100% grass-fed bison and work to restore native Iowa ecosystems. Jathan is also a program manager at Home Base Iowa, a public-private partnership supporting veterans, military personnel and family members in Iowa.

Review of: “In the Shadow of Green Man: My Journey from Poverty and Hunger to Food Security and Hope”

For Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, who goes by the name Regi, hunger meant more than wondering if he could make it to dinner without a snack break. In his book “In the Shadow of Green Man: My Journey from Poverty and Hunger to Food Security and Hope,” written with Per Andreassen, readers learn about Regi’s lifetime of hunger for food, education and personal safety.

Born to poor, struggling Guatemalan parents, Regi – who became an agronomist and founder of the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, along with other sustainability-focused initiatives (he’s also featured in PFI’s film “Livestock on the Land”) – weaves his narrative about growing up amid the challenges of living on his family’s farm in the Guatemalan rainforest with lessons learned from the “Green Man.”

Regi’s parents instilled in him values of sustainable living, and his father taught him the principles of crop rotation, soil health and appropriate fertilizer use on their land. Regi also learned what so many of us strive for: that to be a good steward of the land, you must live in communion with the earth. PFI readers will see in Regi a man with a hunger to think outside the box. For Regi, it’s how he’s lived his life.

That approach, and his hunger to better himself, give this book credibility. The desire for an education fuels Regi’s dedication to learning so he can pursue higher education – which included studying for two years to pass entrance exams to Guatemala’s competitive national school of agriculture – and takes him away from home to challenging places and situations.



Regi works hard at his studies while working extra jobs to bring in money for school and living – though he also at one point describes how he received manure as payment, which helped him achieve better soil health for his cilantro plants. What he discovers in his studies will give readers an insight into just how much Regi wanted an education so he could make a difference in the world.

His personal safety in an unstable country is painful at times to take in. For instance, Regi recounts how he encountered the military just by riding a bus and going from one community to another – a reality this reader found uncomfortable. Learning to survive when you don’t have the freedoms we take for granted in our country is a core facet of resiliency.

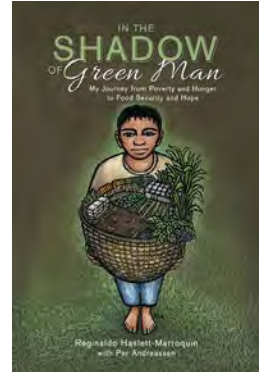
Although much of this book centers on his life growing up, it also includes Regi’s introduction to pesticide use on the farm during his time at school. Learning about chemical use on agricultural land – something his parents did not believe in – challenges his thought process and all he was taught from home about rotations and soil health. This part of the book provided some levity for this reader.

So, who is the Green Man? Interspersed throughout the book are stories featuring the Green Man, who Regi explains is believed to symbolize the cycle of life, death and rebirth. The reader will be treated to delightful stories about the Green Man that weave through Regi’s own life story.

I’m not willing to give out any more of the book. It’s just that good. But readers, Google Regi’s name and you’ll see that he has made a difference with his life. He lives now in Northfield, Minnesota, and if you’ve ever enjoyed “Peace Coffee,” you’ll learn that Regi was instrumental in starting that company.

And what he and his wife are doing with their lives will make you cheer. The tales of the Green Man made an impression on Regi and his dream for making this world a better place. The book is a fascinating and quick read. Check your library for its availability, or donate one so others may enjoy it! ■

Maria Vakulskas Rosmann and her family raise certified organic grains and livestock at Rosmann Family Farms near Harlan, Iowa. The 700-acre farm is home to four generations of Rosmanns and their families who are dedicated to sustainable agriculture, and serves as a model for community-based food systems and agroecological diversity.



Author: Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, with Per Andreassen

208 pages

Published: 2016

Synopsis: Join the wonderfully colorful and poetic Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, or Regi, as he weaves together stories from his upbringing in revolution-torn Guatemala, the vision of a regenerative form of farming which uplifts people and the wandering fable of the Green Man. The result is an immensely readable, enjoyable journey that informs as it entertains and enlightens.

Witnessing first-hand the human suffering caused by unjust and environmentally destructive farming practices set Regi on a path of helping people lift themselves through, of all things, tapping the natural behaviors of the lowly chicken. With the mind of an engineer, the passion of a minister and the depth of a philosopher the author has created not only a wonderful yarn, but a book for our generation asking the questions and providing many of the answers needed by millions.

Farming for the Long Haul

A commitment to soil health and mentoring others has defined the farming ethos of Paul Ackley and his late wife, Nancy

In January, Paul Ackley, a diversified crop and livestock farmer from Bedford, Iowa, and his late wife, Nancy, were honored with PFI's 2021 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award.

The award has been granted each year since 1990 to an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food. The award ceremony took place on Jan. 22, during PFI's 2021 virtual annual conference, "Coming Home."

Paul operates a diversified farm in southwestern Iowa, raising corn, soybeans, hay, winter wheat and a diverse mix of cover crops, as well as hair sheep and cattle, on about 800 acres. Until her death in December, Nancy was a vital part of the farm operation over the couple's more than 50 years of farming together, managing the farm's accounting system; helping to sort hogs, move cattle and plant crops; and attending farm conferences and events with Paul to help take notes and brainstorm ideas for their farm.

"Nancy liked to see things grow and be part of creating something of value," Paul says. "She could drill soybeans as well as anybody, and rake hay like a champ."

The Ackleys have been members of PFI for more than 15 years – but they have served as sustainable agriculture leaders for decades, modeling thoughtful soil stewardship and regenerative farming practices, and serving as inspiration and mentors to countless farmers over the years. In addition to using cover crops on all their crop acres, they have been completely no-till for 30 years and practice rotational grazing to help nurture soil health. They have also installed terraces, wetlands, grassed waterways and riparian buffers to minimize erosion and provide wildlife habitat.

"Paul was a long-time soil health and regenerative agriculture advocate well before it was a hot topic," says Colten Catterton of Green Cover Seed, who presented the award to Paul during the virtual award ceremony. "He's a modest man that never boasts and doesn't claim to know

everything, but rather has an insatiable thirst for knowledge that is contagious."

A Lifelong Focus on Soil Health

While Paul's farming practices and philosophies have evolved over time, his concern for soil health is deeply rooted – and has always been a key barometer driving change on the farm. As an only child growing up, he recalls his parents sharing their memories of the devastating effects of the Dust Bowl, and their awareness of the perils to the soil of focusing too heavily on

"I don't think just stopping erosion is enough. We need more life in the soil We need to re-store some of the wealth, the organic matter we've pulled out."

– PAUL ACKLEY

one crop. "My mother would talk about the sky being red with dust, and Dad kept as much ground seeded as possible, because he was very aware of what rainfall could do," says Paul, who also serves as soil commissioner for the Taylor County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Three months after graduating from Iowa State University in 1967 with a degree in farm operations, he was drafted into the Army, married Nancy and relocated to Kentucky for six months while in the service. But he always knew he wanted to farm, and in 1969, he and Nancy returned home to

Bedford. Having grown up on a diversified farm that included small grains and hay, Paul says he and Nancy felt they needed a crop rotation with perennials in it. But he also came of age at a time in the 1950s and '60s when many farmers in his community were getting out of farming. The stream of farm sales over the years left an imprint, pitting financial survival against Paul's instincts to let the condition of his soil guide his actions.

"I remember seeing so many closing-out farm sales during the winter in our local paper from the mid-1950s, when I started reading it, until 1963 when I graduated from high school," Paul says. "I wanted to be a 'stayer,' and so profit and financial survival rose to the top instead of being equal to the other two pillars of farming – that it does no harm to our neighbors, and restores and regenerates our soil resource."

This initial concern of getting started in farming – and, most importantly, surviving as a farmer for the long-term – led Paul and Nancy to drop perennials from their crop rotation, experiment with continuous corn and start using herbicides and insecticides. But the health of the soil was never far from Paul's mind, and he carefully observed how the soil responded to the profit-centered changes introduced on the farm. "When we started to drop perennials, I wondered how it was going to work," Paul says. "It worked all right for a while, and then the soil lost its structure and ability to take rainfall rather quickly. It just didn't have any life in it."

These observations would start the process of leading Paul back to the path of holistic soil stewardship – and to a realization that healthy soil was as important to being a "stayer" as making a profit.

Beyond Erosion Control

In 1972, Paul and Nancy seeded a rye cover crop as bedding for their pastured hogs, and they continued experimenting with a cover crop over the next few years after seeing how "the hills didn't look right bare after corn was taken off." In the mid-1980s,

they added wheat to their rotation to have straw for their hogs – around the same time they purchased their first no-till planter – and by the late 1980s, they started tinkering again with rye on some of their crop acres.

By 1990, Paul and Nancy had stopped tillage completely, believing it would put an end to erosion. But Paul says that, to his disappointment, he still saw a lot of erosion on his rolling southwest Iowa fields and noticed a lag in how quickly the crops took off in the no-till ground. The big turning point in his understanding of soil health came when he was running a tiling machine through his fields.

“I’d left some grass strips around the hill – cool-season grass perennials,” Paul recalls. “We looked at the top 6-8 inches of soil [in the no-till areas] and saw it looked like cake batter compared to the soil structure in grass strips. There was no pore space, and I understood why – we needed cover crops and roots in the soil to hold that soil in place and get pore space if we didn’t have diversified crop rotations.”

This epiphany led Paul and Nancy to pursue cover crops with a newfound sense of purpose, expanding their cover crop acreage and eventually putting covers on all their crop acres. It also led to a shift in Paul’s understanding of what soil stewardship – and sustainable agriculture – really mean. “I don’t think just stopping erosion is enough,” Paul says. “We need more life in the soil. It’s really 90% biology, but back when I was in college, we were told soil biology was of minimal importance. We need to re-store some of the wealth, the organic matter, we’ve pulled out. I think there’s value to be gained from regenerating the soil, not just accepting a degraded resource.”

In 2010, he and Nancy added wheat back into their crop rotation to keep the soil covered in the winter and spring, and offer a window after wheat harvest in the summer to plant a diverse cover crop mix that adds nutrients back to the soil. The cover crops also supply extra forage for their cattle and sheep, which Paul grazes together and contribute additional fertility to his pastures – and its underlying soil, which Paul sees as his most valuable resource.

“The wealth of our nation is really in the soil, and the wealth of my farm,” he says. “It’s not in how many bushels we can ship to Taiwan or China.”



Helping Others, One Mind at a Time

For Paul, the changes he and Nancy have witnessed on their farm – improved soil health, and a regenerative system of farming practices buttressing it – represent the direction he feels agriculture needs to go. But he also believes small changes can lead to outsized benefits. “If we look at the four ecosystem processes – the water cycle, energy flow from sun capture by plants, the nutrient cycle and the community dynamics of plants – they change over time,” Paul says. “But the good thing is, when you begin to work on one of them, it usually has a positive effect on the other three. So you start to become more than just sustainable.”

This is one of the many nuggets of knowledge acquired from their decades in farming that Paul and Nancy have freely shared with other farmers through field days, grazing groups, on-farm research and an enduring spirit of openness to mentoring others.

“Paul and Nancy are both students as well as teachers,” says Mike McDonald, a farmer from Palmyra, Nebraska, who has worked with Paul and Nancy over the years. “They foster a rippling effect as neighbors, including myself, deepening our learning. I am indebted to their help, but more importantly their friendship. They are deserving of this noteworthy award by PFI and we appreciate the opportunity to recognize them.”

Knowing he and Nancy have given a lift to other farmers is a source of great satisfaction for Paul, who thrives on connecting with “one mind at a time” – as is the knowledge that their dedication to soil health over the years helped them stay in farming for the long-haul.

“Nancy knew we were headed in the right direction,” Paul says. “We’d drive around after a rain and controlled erosion with plant roots, and that was very rewarding for her to see.” ■

Butchery Start-Ups Respond to Demand

Two new meat processing plants showcase innovation and provide critical services

A year after the COVID-19 pandemic began, farmers are still struggling to find harvest appointments at local lockers – which shouldn't come as a surprise, as lack of small- to mid-sized meat processing facilities has been an issue for decades. The pandemic, however, revealed just how dire the situation had become, and it has proved to be the catalyst Iowa needed to start tackling the problem.

In the pandemic's wake, we are now seeing new meat processing facilities open their doors and existing facilities work to expand. This renewed focus on addressing our state's lack of meat processing capacity is a silver lining amid a year of challenge, sacrifice and uncertainty. According to Janis Hochstetler and Kathryn Polking with the Iowa Meat and Poultry Inspection Bureau, 24 new custom-exempt facilities are slated to open in 2021. These businesses will help alleviate some of the processing backlog and need – but it's only a first step. To fully serve the needs of Iowa farmers, we need even more custom-exempt, state inspected facilities, as well as additional federally inspected facilities, to meet the demand.

Securing the finances to put up a new plant is a massive challenge. A new small-scale brick-and-mortar facility can cost anywhere from \$700,000 to \$2 million (or more) to build. Two plants in Iowa, both custom-exempt, found innovative ways to start their businesses by using existing infrastructure to minimize prohibitive costs.

Old Parlor Meat Company – Rock Valley

Curtis Van Grouw operates Iowa's second mobile slaughter unit for red meat, which opened in February 2021, exactly one year after he started working with Iowa's Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to make his facility an official establishment processing pigs, cows, sheep and goats. Serving a 30-mile radius around Rock Valley in northwestern Iowa, Curtis offers on-farm slaughter. Animals are dressed on the farm, then loaded into a reefer truck (an old frozen pizza delivery truck) to be taken to his family's farm where carcass cooling, cutting, wrapping and freezing take place.

Curtis was raised on his family's dairy farm that stopped operating as a dairy in 2011. The old milk parlor and milk house provided the infrastructure shell needed for meat processing: washable walls, cement floors and drains. Curtis retrofitted the facility with better insulation and improved walls, but the structure provided a solid starting point – plus inspiration for the Old Parlor name. "I wouldn't have chosen this business if I didn't already have the infrastructure to start with," Curtis says. "We had a 100% leg up because we had a dairy." This begs the question: Could other empty parlors and milk houses in Iowa be used similarly?

“There could probably be a few more operations in my county alone and I wouldn't see much of an effect on my business because the need for processing is so high right now.”

– CURTIS VAN GROUW

The Department of Natural Resources helped advise Curtis on installing a wastewater tank, and he was able to use an existing leach tank that was used for the dairy operation. He transports full tanks of wastewater to a local water treatment center for proper disposal. Offal, like guts and hides, can be left on the farm where the animal is slaughtered, and a local rendering company picks up trim and bones from his facility.

Curtis chose to operate a custom-exempt plant instead of state-inspected plant for a variety of reasons. "I have no desire to sell retail meat, mainly because our facility is on our family farm and we have young kids running around, so we don't want retail traffic," he explains. "Also, custom-exempt was the easiest way to get up and going

and required the lowest level of paperwork." He adds that he has been staying plenty busy with just the custom slaughter work. "I am saying no to people more than I am saying yes. There could probably be a few more operations in my county alone [Sioux County] and I wouldn't see much of an effect on my business because the need for processing is so high right now."

The fee for slaughter is \$75 per animal, which includes transport of the carcass back to Curtis' cut-and-wrap facility. Animals destined for slaughter need to be contained to a small pen. On-site electricity is nice to have, but not a necessity since Curtis has a generator in his truck. He also has water in a tank on the truck, and farmers are not required to have a drain. Curtis provides a cradle to elevate carcasses off the ground, then hoists them for dressing, followed by hanging them on the rail in his truck cooler.

Back at his farm, where the cut-and-wrap facility is located, beef is aged for 14 to 21 days; pork, lamb and goat are aged for one week. Curtis then breaks the meat down into various meat cuts – known as fabrication – freezes it and calls the farmer to come pick it up. He keeps his cut sheet simple and offers bratwursts and sausages. At this time, Curtis doesn't offer smoking or curing so he can move as many animals as possible.

Reflecting back on why he chose mobile over stationary slaughter, Curtis says: "During the process of getting started, there were many times I thought this would be easier as a stationary facility. But as the pandemic unfolded, I just wanted to be up and running, which the truck allowed for. If I wanted to intake animals at the home facility, it would take more renovation."

One drawback to mobile slaughter is that he can't take the truck out in frigid cold temperatures or blizzard conditions. But the mobile unit lets Curtis get out to farms, which he enjoys, while enabling farmers to watch the process. "I look forward to talking to farmers about the animals and providing



(Left): Old Parlor Meat Company, operated by Curtis and Emily Van Grouw, opened in February 2021 and provides on-farm slaughter for beef, pork, lamb and goat.

(Right): Ed Williams' 1950s era corn crib was converted into meat processing facility for Black Diamond Halal Meats, operated by El Sadiq and Barbiker. The facility received its license to operate in December 2020 and offers custom halal slaughter of sheep and goats.

a low- to zero-stress slaughter situation for both the animals and the farmers.”

To fund this endeavor, Curtis brought the idea to his local community bank, where he has a personal account. The bank saw the potential and opportunity in his idea and offered Curtis a loan, which he called a painless process. Within the next five years, Curtis hopes to grow from being a one-man show to hiring part-time help. He attended Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa, and would like to set up an internship program with the agriculture department to teach the art and science of butchery to the next generation.

Black Diamond Halal Meats - Iowa City

West of Iowa City, Iowa, in Johnson County, is Black Diamond Halal Meats, located inside an old corn crib. Owned and operated by El Sadiq and Barbiker, this plant received its IDALS license to operate in December 2020 and provides custom-exempt slaughter for sheep and goats. Ed Williams owns the corn crib and farm it is located on, and rents the facility to El Sadiq and Barbiker to operate their business. Before the plant could be approved for operation, many pieces had to be put in place, including amending county ordinances to allow for this operation to be located in Johnson County. Ed worked

closely with the Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability team on this effort.

The facility primarily serves the Sudanese community in Iowa City, but is open to any farmer needing sheep and goat custom slaughter services. Customers have two unique options: They can either pick out and purchase a live lamb in the pasture next to the facility, or bring live sheep or goats to the facility to be harvested. Slaughter is scheduled by appointment, and the animals are killed using the halal method and fabricated while the customer waits. Meat goes home fresh with the customer. This model caters to traditional Sudanese culinary customs.

The 1950s-era corn crib, with wooden walls and concrete floor, was built to store ear corn, then retrofitted to store shelled corn. Eventually it was converted into a showroom for Ed's pellet burning stove business. Now, it is a slaughter facility with a simple interior. The corn crib is 50 feet by 30 feet, and the slaughtering area takes up half that space.

The interior consists of washable walls, erected along the main driveway where wagons used to drive in, stainless steel tables and a meat saw. There are no coolers or freezers in the facility because El Sadiq

and Barbiker only produce fresh meat. The meat is cut into 2- to 3-pound pieces, bagged and given to the customer. All of the organs and the stomach (after being thoroughly cleaned) are included.

The facility is approved to process 500 or fewer small ruminants per year. Eventually, if El Sadiq and Barbiker want to grow beyond that number or become state-inspected, they will have to go through a re-zoning process.

“El Sadiq and Barbiker are currently making plans to add chicken processing to their services, which requires a separate room,” Ed says. “They also would like to add another facility in central Iowa to serve Sudanese and other Muslim communities near Des Moines.” ■

Learn More

- Old Parlor Meat Company can be found on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or contacted by email at oldparlormeatto@gmail.com.
- Contact Black Diamond Halal Meats at (206) 571-3299
- Ed Williams can be contacted by email at harvestheat@gmail.com.

Cooperators' Program Unveils Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles

Over the summer of 2020, as part of an effort to more formally express the ethos that has guided on-farm research at Practical Farmers since our founding, PFI's Cooperators' Program staff worked on crafting a mission, vision and guiding principles for PFI's on-farm research program. The text was unveiled at the 2020 virtual Cooperators' Meeting in December. While the work of on-farm research will not change, the text offers a valuable framework to communicate what on-farm research means at PFI, and will help ensure we remain focused on this mission and vision into the future.

Mission

To empower farmers to generate and share knowledge through timely and relevant farmer-led research.

Vision

A community of curious and creative farmers taking a scientific approach to improving their farms. These farmers are leaders among their farming peers whose work contributes to the field of agricultural research, resulting in more profitable, diverse and environmentally sound farms.

Guiding Principles

Practical Farmers and the Cooperators' Program are always seeking to grow our network and our members' impact. We proactively and passionately seek out creative ideas and flexible funding in order to support farmer-led research. These guiding principles define common characteristics of the Cooperators' Program and, in an effort to make the most of finite resources, serve as a filter for our work.

The Cooperators' Program is...

- **Farmer-Led.** We believe that farmers should lead both the creation and exchange of knowledge. Farmers set our research goals and priorities. We also help farmers inform academic agricultural research that affects their farms by connecting researchers and farmers in meaningful dialogue and promoting the exchange of ideas.
- **On-Farm.** We believe that real-world, applied research on farms is critical for building a better agriculture in Iowa and beyond. We prioritize research conducted on-farm by farmers, but recognize the limitations and understand not all topics can sufficiently be addressed with this approach.
- **Collaborative.** We believe in working together. Research that is collaborative facilitates the sharing of knowledge and, ultimately, builds community. We prioritize multi-farm projects as well as single-farm trials that have broad support within the cooperator community or could yield important insights for other farmers. We occasionally collaborate with university researchers and other partners who have gained the trust and confidence of farmers through their work, research and extension activities.
- **Relevant.** We believe that research should answer questions individual farmers have about their farms. This often involves supporting proof-of-concept investigation, ground-truthing new ideas and products and helping farmers design research that can satisfy their curiosity about their farms. Our farmer-researchers and partners are on the cutting edge of innovation in agriculture, and the Cooperators' Program supports their efforts.
- **Accessible.** We believe the knowledge, experience and findings generated by the Cooperators' Program should be available to the public. Farmers are our primary audience; we present results using farmer voices while also adhering to standards of scientific reporting. The products of the Cooperators' Program are used by farmers to make more informed decisions.
- **Empowering.** We believe that farmers are capable of conducting experiments on their own farms and carrying out the process from beginning to end. As the experts on their farming systems, we believe the role of PFI staff is to support farmers' inherent curiosity. Being at the helm of the on-farm research process builds on this curiosity by boosting farmers' scientific skills and confidence while generating powerful questions and advancing farmer-ownership of research conclusions and created knowledge.
- **Science-Based.** We believe the scientific method and good experimental design are necessary tools for farmers. The work of PFI farmers who conduct on-farm research is highly valued and trusted by both the broader PFI membership and non-members, including farmers, academic researchers and the general public.
- **Committed.** We believe in following through. Cooperators and PFI staff are eager to participate, engage and complete on-farm projects. We reward cooperator efforts and commitments to on-farm research by providing modest honoraria and showcasing their contributions. ■

Learn More

Learn more about PFI's Cooperators' Program and view results of on-farm research projects at practicalfarmers.org/cooperators-program.

Jacqueline Venner Senske Joins PFI Staff as New Horticulture Coordinator

Jacqueline Venner Senske joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa staff in February. As horticulture coordinator, she works with PFI staff, farmers and members to host farmer-led educational events and develop networks in the PFI community for farmers growing horticulture crops, including fruits and vegetables, nuts, cut flowers, berries and orchard crops.

Raised on a breeding beef farm in west-central Iowa, Jacqueline developed a deep love of the land and an appreciation of what makes rural culture and production agriculture special. After completing a bachelor's degree in horticulture at Iowa State University, she went on to the Longwood Graduate Program at the University of Delaware, earning a Master of Science in public horticulture administration and completing a thesis titled "Developing Ornamental Horticulture at Living History Farms in Urbandale, Iowa."

Though her path has been winding, Jacqueline's career has common themes: community, education, sometimes food and horticulture. This reflects her passion for facilitating experiences that enable people to connect with one another in beautiful places, particularly through work with public gardens.

Her work has included roles with Zingermen's Delicatessen, Matthaei Botanical Garden and Nichols Arboretum, Old House Gardens Heirloom Bulbs and Project Grow Community Gardens, all in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, the 7th Street Public Market and a range of small, local, food-based businesses in the Charlotte, North Carolina, area; and, most recently, Reiman Gardens in Ames, Iowa.

When she can, Jacqueline loves to travel (her country list so far includes Ukraine, Canada, England, Greece, France, Scotland



and Brazil); find, prepare and consume local foods; explore and share nature; haunt secondhand and vintage shops; and reconnect on her family's farm. She enjoys small-town life with her husband, three kids and two cats. ■

Lara Schenck is PFI's New Strategic Initiatives Manager

Lara Schenck joined the PFI staff in March as the strategic initiatives manager. She supports the strategic initiatives team by leading grant management and reporting, and managing small grains and cover crop programs, budgets and staff. She also provides guidance to farmers through articles, blog posts, newsletters and public presentations.

Lara graduated from Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri, in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in agronomy. Her interest in soils and environmental science led her to pursue a master's degree in soil science at Iowa State University, which she obtained in 2015. Lara worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service as a soil conservationist and resource conservationist in Iowa and Nebraska, helping farmers adopt and expand sustainable conservation practices.



Lara grew up in southwest Iowa on her 440-acre family farm, which she co-manages with her brother. In her free time, she enjoys horseback riding, traveling, reading and painting. ■

Get Ready for (Modified) Field Days!

We've all shared in the past year's long, strange and challenging journey of isolation, distance and sacrifice, with gatherings postponed, rituals upended and connection confined to screens.

As we start to see light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, PFI is planning a series of small, energizing, in-person "Catching Up" gatherings on farms across Iowa this summer. The line-up will expand on a rolling basis throughout the summer as more pop-up, local events are organized.

To keep these gatherings small (and safe, with COVID-19 still around!) – and to help connect people to the events and topics they're most interested in – attendance is by invitation only.

Learn more about how this modified field day season will work, and let us know your interests by filling out the form at practicalfarmers.org/events/catching-up. ■

Welcome, New Members!

DISTRICT 1 – NORTHWEST

- Josh Werner – Alta
- Kaitlin Dahl – Coon Rapids
- Amberly Van Hulzen – Sac City
- Tate Carlson – Storm Lake
- Bruce Richardson – Storm Lake
- Jessica Blackford – Westside

DISTRICT 2 – NORTH-CENTRAL

- Jeff Hibbs – Albion
- Joshua Manske – Algona
- Sharon Badilla Aria – Ames
- Abby Dubisar – Ames
- Shaun Hoffman – Ames
- Marci Snow-Perry – Ames
- Wallace Teagarden – Ames
- David Zimmerman – Ames
- Scott Radke – Boone
- Diana Wright – Boone
- Matt Searle – Marshalltown
- Dee Pickard – Melbourne
- Collin Witte – Rockwell
- Amber Gable – Stratford
- Johnathan Buffalo – Tama

DISTRICT 3 – NORTHEAST

- Keri Byrum – Cedar Falls
- Feed Iowa First, Carter Oswood – Cedar Rapids
- Doug Kelley – Central City
- Tim Welsh – Dorchester

DISTRICT 4 – SOUTHWEST

- Virginia Atwell – Ankeny
- Ben Ritter – Centerville
- Isaac Hirschy – Chariton
- Carl Varley – Clive
- Matthew Brown – Creston
- John Reburn – Cumming
- Ben Offenburger – Dallas
- Lynn Boyle – Dexter
- David Morford – Earlham
- Frank Jones – Grand River
- Lyman Ag Supply Inc., Lee Saathoff – Griswold
- Heath Blomquist – Guthrie Center
- Mike Genereux – Honey Creek
- Joshua Rossell – Lewis
- Anthony Sinclair – Melrose
- Michael Fritch – Mitchellville
- Paul and Jean Grobe – Newton
- Lee Wollenhaupt – Red Oak

- Andrew Miller – Silver City
- Tracy Kroeger – Van Meter
- Tim Deal – Walnut

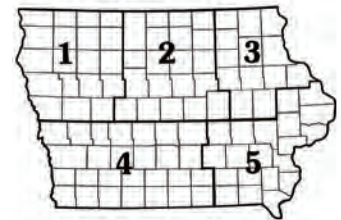
DISTRICT 5 – SOUTHEAST

- Iowa Valley RC & D, Jason Grimm – Amana
- Andrew Pelzer – Atalissa
- Terry Starr – Bloomfield
- Molly and Karson Smith – DeWitt
- Greg Paustian – Dixon
- Patrick Hermiston – Donahue
- David Allen – Fort Madison
- John Clayton – Grinnell
- Valerie Vetter – Grinnell
- Bryce Millikin – Hedrick
- Stacey Huffstutler – Iowa City
- Santos Lopez – Iowa City
- Susan Walsh – Iowa City
- Ross McCaw – Marengo
- John Rohloff – Oskaloosa
- Dennis Antsey – Ottumwa
- Jamie Norman – Searsboro
- Mark Norman – Searsboro
- Marc and Brandi Janssen – Solon
- Amy Huber – West Point

DISTRICT 6 – OUT OF STATE

- Mad Agriculture, Brandon Welch – Boulder, CO
- Dale Enersen – Greenwood Village, CO
- John Dailey – Alexis, IL
- Josh Ifft – Anchor, IL
- Ken Balsters – Bethalto, IL
- Aaron Miller – Brownstown, IL
- David Sanson – Carlinville, IL
- Jeff Clark – Chandlerville, IL
- Dan Wolf – Geneseo, IL
- Tim Roth – Gibson City, IL
- Brad Orr – Gilman, IL
- Roy Jacobs, Jr. – Golden Eagle, IL
- Harold Kallal – Jerseyville, IL
- Clint Kallal – Jerseyville, IL
- Richard Robinson – Joy, IL
- David Scharfenberg – Maquon, IL
- David Andris – Milford, IL
- Jason Suslee – Nokomis, IL
- Mark Cole – Palmyra, IL
- Todd Megginson – Pawnee, IL
- Ben Hortenstin – Ramsey, IL
- Wesley Anderson – Shabbona, IL

- Adam Braun – Vandalia, IL
- Andy Mansfield – White Hall, IL
- Chris Mckee – Woodstock, IL
- c. Richard Connell – West Lafayette, IN
- Pedro Leite – Republic, KS
- Fred Mikesell – Scandia, KS
- Jackie Keller – Topeka, KS
- Melissa Bayer – Crittenden, KY
- Allan Dittmer – Louisville, KY
- Ruth Hazzard – Amherst, MA
- Mark Vollmar – Caro, MI
- Melissa Holahan – Northville, MI
- 7 Elements, LLC, Troy Benjegerdes – Minneapolis, MN
- Karen and Barbara Lunde – Minneapolis, MN
- Vanessa Van Alstine – Minneapolis, MN
- Doug Voss – Paynesville, MN
- Zachary Knutson – Pine Island, MN
- Tony Welti – Plainview, MN
- Matt Tiffany – Redwood Falls, MN
- Robert Barbeau – Saint Paul, MN
- Fred Braulick – Sleepy Eye, MN
- Trista Boe – Stillwater, MN
- Craig Witteveen – Norborne, MO
- Dean Houghton – Polo, MO
- Greg Pankau – Rock Port, MO
- Tom Valasek – Blair, NE
- Steve Langemeier – Hooper, NE
- Cody Lambrecht – Kennard, NE



- Greg Johnson – Oakland, NE
- Sara Strattan – Omaha, NE
- Randy Warner – Waverly, NE
- Kevin Uhing – West Point, NE
- Peter Schiltz – North Lawrence, NY
- Timothy Schacht – Marysville, OH
- Len Kirian – New Riegel, OH
- Rachel Saum – Sioux Falls, SD
- Debra Meade-Erickson – Dallas, TX
- Ricardo Nava – El Paso, TX
- Michael Snow – Post Mills, VT
- Ed Breuer – La Farge, WI
- Jason Bardole – Wauwatosa, WI

Thank you

to our newest lifetime members!

**Dan and Bonnie
Beard**
Decorah, IA

David Kennis
Ames, IA

Tony Thompson
Elkhart, IA

Laurel and Joe

Monty Douglas
Lenox, IA

Tuggle Lacina
Grinnell, 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.

Other Events

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

APRIL

APRIL 22: Growing Hops in Iowa

7-8 p.m. | Online | Learn more at www.aep.iastate.edu/hops

APRIL 24: A Year in the Life of a Diversified Farm: Monthly Workshops for Veterans

2-5 p.m. | Online | Learn more at cfra.org/year-life-diversified-farm-monthly-workshops-veterans-online

APRIL 27: Bale Grazing: An Alternative Strategy for Overwintering Beef Cattle

1 p.m. | Online | Learn more at conservationwebinars.net/upcoming-webinars-1

APRIL 27: What's That Bug? How to Identify Insects

1:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at extension.illinois.edu/global/four-seasons-gardening-webinar-series

APRIL 29: Vegetable & Container Gardening Class

6-7 p.m. | Grundy Center, IA | Contact Shari Sell-Bakker: (319) 824-6979 or sellbakk@iastate.edu

APRIL 30: Listening Session: What's Next for Small Meat Processors?

11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at pasafarming.org/event/listening-session-whats-next-for-small-meat-processors

MAY

MAY 1: Preserve the Taste of Summer: Jams and Dehydrating

8 a.m.-12 p.m. | Adel, IA | Learn more at extension.iastate.edu/calendar>ShowList.asp

MAY 6: Supporting Pollinators Over Time: How to Maintain Wildflower Diversity

12-1:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at xerces.org/events/oregon/supporting-pollinators-over-time-how-to-maintain-wildflower-diversity

MAY 6: Hydrology, Geology, and Biology of Springs

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

MAY 6: Cuadrando Las Cuentas

6-8 p.m. | En línea | Aprende más aquí cfra.org/cuadrando-las-cuentas-virtual-espanol

MAY 10: Introduction to Produce Safety

3-5 p.m. | Online | Learn more at growinggrowers.org/workshops.html

MAY 13: Comercialización Empresarial: Promover sus Productos es Posible. ¿Como?

6-8 p.m. | En línea | Aprende más aquí cfra.org/comercializacion-empresarial-promover-sus-productos-es-posible-como-virtual-espanol

MAY 27: Farm Stress Webinar: Navigating the Unknown Together

3 p.m. | Online | Learn more at extension.illinois.edu/global/commercial-ag-webinars

MAY 29: Introduction to Growing Hemp

2-3:30 p.m. | East Troy, WI | Learn more at michaelfields.org/michael-fields-calendar/introduction-to-growing-hemp/

JUNE

JUNE 9: Research Update - Soil Health and Water Quality in the Watershed Impact Trial

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-soil-health-and-water-quality-watershed-impact-trial

JUNE 10: Protect Water Quality from the Comfort of Your Home

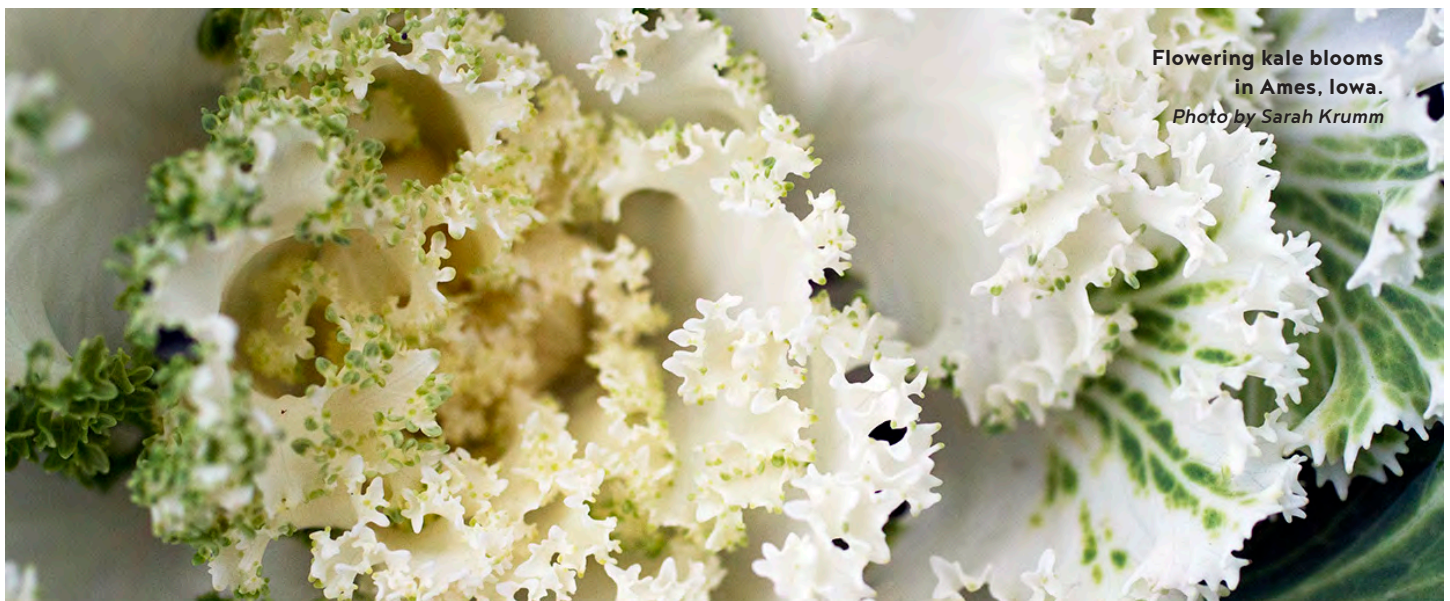
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | Online | Learn more at savannainstitute.org/events

JUNE 14-18: Agricultural Safety and Health: The Core Course

Online | Learn more at gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/agricultural-safety-and-health-the-core-course

JUNE 17: Ownership Pathways in Agroforestry

1-2 p.m. | Online | Learn more at rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-soil-health-and-water-quality-watershed-impact-trial



Flowering kale blooms in Ames, Iowa.
Photo by Sarah Krumm

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

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

MEMBER INFORMATION

Contact Name(s)*: _____

Farm or Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____ Email 2: _____

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

JOIN OR RENEW

1. THIS ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP IS A:

- New Membership
- Renewal

2. I AM JOINING AT THE LEVEL OF:

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

3. I AM JOINING OR RENEWING AS:

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

4. HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT PFI?

EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUP SIGN-UP

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

- Announcements
- Perspectives
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DONATION

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

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

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

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

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

PAYMENT

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

Additional Donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

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

Name on card _____ Number _____

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

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



A late-season prairie burn at Native Prairie Bison, operated by Jathan Chicoine and his family near Story City, Iowa, at the end of last year helps revitalize the prairie and maintain a more diverse plant community. Read more about Jathan's views of land, bison and his connection to them on pages 26-28. *Photo courtesy of Jathan Chicoine*

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

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Ames, IA 50010

Non-Profit
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Waterloo, IA
Permit No. 901

Springtime in Iowa

Greenhouses bring so much color and joy to springtime after a long, cold winter. Pictured is Salama Greenhouse & Floral in Boone, Iowa.

