

the PRACTICAL FARMER

SUMMER 2023



In This Issue:

**Nurturing Rural
Communities**

Covering Cover Crops

Farming for Wildlife







FEATURES

- 6 FIELD DAYS**
2023 Field Day Season Is Here
If you're not already excited for the return of our full schedule of field days, this promo should motivate (and amuse) you.
- 8 LIVESTOCK**
In the Shade of Giants
What oak savannas, and those who care for them, have taught Amos Johnson about the work of restoration.
- 10 FIELD CROPS**
Covering Cover Crops
Tapping into cost-share programs has helped the Van Arkle family fund cover crops, and connect with PFI's community.
- 12 PFI LEADERS**
Giving as an Act of Trust
PFI set big growth goals in its most recent strategic plan. As a member-driven network, we heard your strong message that we needed to reach more people.
- 16 HABITAT**
Restoring Habitat on Farms
Before the shift to a two-crop system, Iowa farms were pockets of diversity that hosted many wildlife species. A range of practices, big and small, can create spaces for them to return.
- 18 HORTICULTURE**
Nurturing Rural Communities
By contributing to her local food system, Stephanie Meyers is growing her family and her rural communities.
- 22 MEMBERSHIP**
Local Leaders
Local food distributors and food hubs in PFI's network are supporting individual producers and consumers.
- 24 ORGANIZATIONAL**
Partnering to Expand Local Foods
When unprecedented federal funds opened for states to build local food systems, PFI and other partners rallied to bring pivotal programs to Iowa.

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTE**
- 25 MEMBER BOOK REVIEW**
"The Land Remains"
by Neil D. Hamilton
- Reviewed by
Larry A. Stone
- 26 MEMBER PHOTOS**
- 28 PFI NEWS**
- 30 NEW MEMBERS**
- 31 CALENDAR**
- 34 JOIN PFI**
- 35 THE FINAL WORD**

A Dickcissel sings a song over the Iowa pastures and prairies in which it thrives. Read more about farming for wildlife on page 16. Photo courtesy of Jorgen Rose.



ON THE COVER:

Stephanie and Austin Meyers stand proudly in the greenhouse on their farm near Hubbard, Iowa. Find out on page 18 how they started farming for their family and became passionate about bringing local food to the surrounding communities.



WHAT WE DO

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

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

OUR VALUES

Welcoming everyone

Farmers leading the exchange of experience and knowledge

Curiosity, creativity, collaboration and community

Resilient farms now and for future generations

Stewardship of land and resources

THE PRACTICAL FARMER

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

Magazine Editor: Tamsyn Jones

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



BOARD MEMBERS & STAFF

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

For general info and staff extensions, call (515) 232-5661. For staff email addresses, visit practicalfarmers.org/staff. To mail board members: Please send correspondence to the PFI office and we will forward to that board member.

DISTRICT 1 (NORTHWEST)

Nathan Anderson – President

Bobolink Prairie Farm
(515) 708-5199
n8andy@gmail.com

DISTRICT 2 (NORTH CENTRAL)

Jack Boyer

J Boyer Farms, Inc.
(319) 240-2619
jboyerfarms@gmail.com

DISTRICT 3 (NORTHEAST)

Shaffer Ridgeway

Southern Goods
(319) 830-7470
southerngoodsia@gmail.com

DISTRICT 4 (SOUTHWEST)

Jon Bakehouse – Treasurer

Maple Edge Farm, Inc.
(712) 370-3629
mapleedgefarm@gmail.com

DISTRICT 5 (SOUTHEAST)

Gayle Olson

J & G Olson Farms, Inc.
(319) 931-1351
olsongayle@gmail.com

AT-LARGE FARMERS

Carmen Black – Secretary

Sundog Farm
(319) 331-3957
localharvestcsa@gmail.com

Anna Hankins

Over the Moon Farm and Flowers
(774) 345-0975
hankinsanna13@gmail.com

Vic Madsen

Madsen Stock Farm
(712) 254-3057
vcmadsen@iowatelecom.net

Mark Quee

Scattergood Friends Farm
(319) 530-3782
farm@scattergood.org

David Rosmann – Vice President

Rosmann Family Farms
(612) 219-7396
davidrosmann@hotmail.com

AT-LARGE FRIENDS OF FARMERS

Kristine Lang

(515) 825-7525
kmlang2017@gmail.com

Matt Liebman

(515) 233-8768
mliebman@iastate.edu

CO-FOUNDERS

Larry Kallem

(515) 337-1272

The late Dick & Sharon Thompson

Boone, IA

PFI STAFF

Megan Bark

Senior Cost-Share Administrator

Debra Boekholder

Membership & Office Assistant

Alisha Bower

Senior Operations Director

Kasey Bunce

Finance Director

Rachel Burke

Beginning Farmer Engagement Coordinator

Valeria Cano Camacho

Latino Engagement Coordinator

Sarah Carlson

Senior Programs & Member Engagement Director

Steve Carlson

Membership & Office Manager

Margaret Chamas

Livestock Viability Manager

Rebecca Clay

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Rachel Deutmeyer

Senior Video Coordinator

Lydia English

Field Crops Viability Manager

Chelsea Ferrie

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Stefan Gailans

Senior Research Manager

Taylor Hintch

Field Crops Education Coordinator

Morgan Jennings

Field Crops Viability Coordinator

Amos Johnson

Livestock Education Coordinator

Miranda Johnson

Senior Human Resources Coordinator

Tamsyn Jones

Senior Editor & Magazine Coordinator

Kayla Koether

Senior Farm Viability Manager

Liz Kolbe

Senior Farmer-Led Education Manager

Sarah Krumm

Senior Graphic Design & Photography Coordinator

Emma Liddle

Membership & Events Coordinator

Emma Link

Senior Research Coordinator

Martha McFarland

Farmland Viability Coordinator

Kyleigh Meyeres

Office Assistant

Vanya North

Habitat Education Coordinator

Nick Ohde

Marketing & Communications Director

Solveig Orngard

Field Crops Education Coordinator

Mike Roelf

Information Systems Manager

Lara Schenck

Grants Manager

Chastity Schonhorst

Bookkeeper

Jacqueline Venner Senske

Senior Horticulture Education Coordinator

Elizabeth Wilhelm

Media Relations Coordinator

Brad Woodson

Habitat Viability Manager

Sally Worley

Executive Director

Emily Yaddof

Senior Digital Marketing Coordinator

Grace Yi

Habitat Viability Coordinator

Carly Zierke

Digital Content Coordinator

Christine Zrostlik

Senior Marketing & Communications Manager

AMERICORPS MEMBER

Erin Carpenter

AmeriCorps Member

CONTACT US

Practical Farmers of Iowa

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

facebook.com/practicalfarmers

twitter.com/practicalfarmer

youtube.com/pfvideos

linkedin.com/company/practical-farmers-of-iowa

Many Paths to a Shared Goal

I'm an avid fiction reader. I love transporting to different worlds through reading. My family teases me for reading at literally every opportunity I can fit into a day. I've read fiction like it was water since childhood. As a result, my "to-be-read" pile of non-fiction is large. It includes "The River Knows," by Neil Hamilton; "Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With An Indian Elder" by Kent Nerburn, recommended to me by PFI board member Jon Bakehouse and lent to me by PFI board member Kristine Lang; and "Strategic Doing" by Edward Morrison et al, recommended by Brian Depew, executive director at Center for Rural Affairs.



Despite my fiction addiction, I have read several non-fiction books over this past year, many written by PFI members and supporters. The most recent one delved into is "Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future." This book is edited by PFI supporter Cornelia Mutel and contains contributions from 28 additional authors (several of whom are PFI members!).

I was drawn to the book by the plural "pathways" in the title, which immediately acknowledges the complex nature of creating a sustainable future. Contributing authors share diverse perspectives about the issues and solutions that will allow Iowa to continue producing crops in our fertile soil while rejuvenating our precious and often under-valued natural resources.

From Levi Lyle's chapter about why he chose to farm by his values, to Lisa Schulte Moore's chapter outlining a vision for an Iowa where nature and farming co-exist, the book is full of information and inspiration, and gives credence to the fact that we all have a unique role to play in healing Iowa's land. You can find this book on University of Iowa Press' website at uipress.uiowa.edu/books/tending-iowas-land. (And look forward to a full book review by PFI member Carol Smith in our autumn issue.)

Another place I've enjoyed reading the perspectives of PFI members is Mary Swander's website (maryswander.com). Mary and other PFI members have joined the Iowa Writers Collaborative, and Mary has published stories from authors in multiple channels, from the publication Emerging Voices to Blazing Star Literary Journal.

From reading about how Kate Edwards is creating memories for her daughter, Ada Marie, on her farm while revisiting memories from her childhood on her grandparents' farm, to reading Adam Janke weave together nature and humanity with

his beautiful scientific writing skills, I've learned a lot about PFI members and what drives them as they do their unique part to create a sustainable future.

PFI has a strategic goal that many voices drive Iowa's agricultural narrative. The above are just a few examples of the impactful ways PFI members are contributing diverse perspectives to Iowa's – and the nation's – agricultural conversation. Better understanding the complex facets that have led us to where we are helps all Iowans consider the paths to creating a sustainable future.

This magazine is another way PFI contributes to this goal. It has long shared the experiences of farmers and supporters who are striving to create resilient farms and communities. From reconstructing oak savanna ecosystems, to ramping up local food production, to expanding cover crop acres, PFI members are traveling many paths to build a sustainable future.

Do you have a story to share? Contact Tamsyn Jones if you'd like your story to be featured in the magazine. Your perspectives help convey the true complexity of our food, farming and natural systems. Have you had a story published somewhere? Contact Elizabeth Wilhelm so we can share it with others via Practical News, our weekly e-newsletter.

Thanks for being part of the many voices driving the agriculture narrative. Your voice, and your efforts, are vital to our future.

Sally Worley

P.S. Do you have books to recommend I add to my fiction or non-fiction to-be-read pile? I'd love your recommendations.

**PSST...
DID YOU HEAR?**



**IT'S
FIELD
DAY
SEASON!**



TIME TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE!



HOP OVER THE FENCE...



FROM OVER THE HILLS...



THROUGH THE PRAIRIES...



AND AROUND THE "LOBE"...



STICK OUT YOUR NECK...



CONSIDER NEW IDEAS...



AND LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF FELLOW FARMERS.

JOIN US AT A FIELD DAY!

Field days remain a foundation of PFI's mission to equip farmers to build resilient farms and communities. We invite you to attend field days similar to your own production, or to explore topics and farms new to you. This summer, PFI members are hosting 42 field days across 39 Iowa counties and four neighboring states.

All PFI field days are free for anyone to attend. RSVPs are appreciated, but show up anytime!

See the full line-up of field days, RSVP and learn more at practicalfarmers.org/field-days.

Want a PFI field day guide mailed to your house? Or a stack to share with others? Call us at (515) 232-5661 or email debra.boekholder@practicalfarmers.org.



In the Shade of Giants

What oak savannas, and those who care for them, have taught me about the work of restoration

By Amos Johnson

There is an oak at my family's century farm outside of Belle Plaine, Minnesota, that stands like a monument on the crest of a bluff overlooking the valley below.

On its face the initials "EM+CE" are carved. Etched in the living wood, the mark is an echo from the past. Shaded by the oak's great boughs, it tells of someone long ago who, spurred perhaps by a burst of joy or an ardor in their heart, sought to preserve the spirit of the moment. That wood-etched memory of love on a summer's day is tied inexorably to the solidity of this tree and the legacy of the land.

I came upon the carving as I worked clearing cedars that had grown as a dense thicket, impenetrable in places and crowding out the oak. What had once been open oak savanna was now a dark monoculture of cedars, the soil beneath them bare because no light could reach it. Sharp, grasping branches tried to scrape and claw as I cut through them, slowly making my way to the oak, whose crown was on the cusp of being subsumed in the sea of cedars.

I'd taken on the job of restoration three years ago with equal parts enthusiasm and naiveté. I had recently learned what oak savanna was, and that our farm held some of the last vestiges of what had been a vast ecosystem covering 50 million acres of the Midwest – and up to 10% of Minnesota. A landscape of tree-dappled grassland, oak savanna occupies a liminal space between forest and prairie. It's a terrain of giants – robust bur, white, red and other oak species – with sprawling limbs presiding over a carpet of grasses, forbs and other plants. Tree cover can range anywhere



The author, Amos Johnson, on his family's farm near Belle Plaine, Minnesota.

from 5% to 50%, and the confluence of habitats has resulted in immense species diversity – more than in prairie or woodlands alone.

This unique ecosystem sprang up in the wake of melting glaciers and was then shaped for millennia by grazing and fire, often intentionally set by Native Americans who actively managed the landscape for hunting and other benefits.

Following the arrival of European settlers, however, this fragile system quickly succumbed to the agrarian vision of the newcomers, who plowed the prairie for agriculture, built their homes under the shady groves, suppressed fires and removed trees deemed unnecessary. Surviving remnants largely exist in marginal land that was set aside for pasture. Today, only about 30,000 acres of oak savanna remain in the Midwest.

"Nature Is a Decision Now"

Over 200 miles from my family farm, I was walking land near Boone, Iowa, that

had been owned by Andrew Montgomery's family for generations. It was early in spring, and the grey ironwood trees clung resolutely to their bright orange leaves of last season, gently filling the air with raspy whispers while the bare branches of oaks clattered in the breeze. Omar de Kok-Mercado, Andrew's long-time friend who worked then for the Savanna Institute, joined us to teach me more about what savannas can look like as part of today's agricultural landscape. He and Andrew have been working together for the past decade to transform the land with fire – though the vision for the land's future is an ongoing discussion.

Originally, Andrew wanted to return his family land to a pre-settlement ecosystem, as wild as possible. Like me, he had a vendetta against invasive species. But over time, his animosity has tempered. Now, rather than trying to return to a specific moment in time, he views the project more as a goal of abundance. "I'm interested in species

diversity,” Andrew says. “If the invasives are detrimental to that, then that’s where the line gets drawn.”

I used to share a similar vague vision of returning my family land to a pre-settlement state. But as I’ve learned more, I’ve realized that’s an unachievable goal. Restoration is not about erasing all traces of the present back to a mythical past “natural” state. As I keep reminding myself, nature has never been static. What the land is now derives from what it once was. And what we do now determines what it will become. The best I can do with my remnant oak savanna is try to mimic those historical conditions by rotationally grazing livestock, reintroducing fire and restoring species.

Omar agrees that studying the historical record of the land is a good place to start. But he urges me to not be limited by that as I imagine the future of my family land. Humans are – and always have been – so integral to shaping our environment that, as Omar says, “nature is a decision now.”

“I don’t think about it as restoration back to a specific point in time,” he continues. “I think of it as reconstructing to what our objectives for the space are.”

Opening Space for Light

Inherent to any act of restoration is time, energy and money. As Omar watches his dogs race through the melting snow, he shares an insight the work has taught him over the years. “You can get to your destination really fast, or over a long period of time,” he says. “They both need the same amount of work. One is just all at once and the other is spread out. It’s a lot more pleasant to go slow and do it by hand, or with animals or fire, than it is to bulldoze the landscape.”

Logistics limit Andrew to using only fire in his work. It’s been effective and enjoyable but he concedes that progress is slow. In his 10 years of prescribed burning, large swaths remain untouched. But where he’s been able to focus, the results are encouraging.

Liz Garst and Darwin Pierce of Coon Rapids, Iowa, use prescribed burning on



Omar de Kok-Mercado (left), Armin Mesinovic (center) and Andrew Montgomery (right) on Andrew’s land.

“I don’t think about it as restoration back to a specific point in time. I think of it as reconstructing to what our objectives for the space are.”

– Omar de Kok-Mercado



Liz Garst and Darwin Pierce

their pastureland but also rotationally graze cattle to open up savanna and encourage biodiversity. Over the last 40 years, they have seen tremendous results. Studies show that when managed burning and grazing are paired together, the results exceed those of grazing or fire alone. Darwin echoes Omar in viewing land management as subjective and guided by your goals. He and Liz originally managed the land to benefit the cattle. Now, however, their priority is managing the cattle to benefit the land.

The cattle are integral to mimicking the area’s ecological past. But Liz has a second

reason for keeping them in the pasture: economic. To be effective and sustainable long-term, restoration needs money to fund the work. She sees potential for farmers to benefit economically from restoring the landscape. “Fundamentally, many forests in Iowa are overgrown savanna,” Liz says. “If we can thin the number of trees and get sunshine to ground, there is more grass. That’s great because if you have cows you can see more profit off your land.”

A Signature on the Land

By the end of the summer, I’d cleared the cedars away in Belle Plaine, opening the great oaken cathedral of canopy to the unimpeded sunlight and valley breezes. The fresh breath of wind stirred the branches, letting light once again illuminate the letters EM+CE. Cutting down the cedars was the first and most dramatic step. Soon, following Andrew’s advice, I’ll burn the explosion of growth that sprouts in the newly freed patches of light. When I move back and take over the farm, I’ll heed Liz and add livestock to graze and help offset the ongoing cost of conservation maintenance.

Why do we spend our lives in the Sisyphean struggle of restoration? In my conversations with Andrew, Omar, Liz and Darwin, I realized that it’s more than just affinity for savanna that drives us to do this work. It’s the knowledge that, for a short spell of time, we are stewarding this little spot on Earth. In tending the grasses, trees and animals we invite to return, we are connected to the lives of everyone who came before us – human and more-than-human, to use Robin Wall Kimmerer’s phrase. We have a moment to do what we can, and then we pass it on to the next caretaker. We focus both on what is in front of us now and, as Hamlet put it, on “what dreams may come.”

Aldo Leopold writes in his essay “Axe-in-Hand” that “a conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke [of his axe] he is writing his signature on the face of his land.” My initials aren’t carved into a tree, but my legacy will be tied to these oaks. ■

Covering Cover Crops

Tapping into cost-share programs has helped the Van Arkel family fund cover crops, and connect with PFI's community.

By Taylor Hintch

In Malcolm, Iowa, sits the Van Arkel family farm. Dave Van Arkel and his son, Zach, farm 2,000 acres of corn and soybeans, with additional land in the Conservation Reserve Program. They also have grass waterways, a conservation practice where grass is seeded in areas of concentrated water flow to conduct water off the landscape, using grass to protect the soil; a timber stand; and Zach has some of his own acres where he and his wife, Grace, raise sheep.

Preserving soil health has long been important to the family – both keeping soil in place and improving soil health overall. In the 1970s, Dave's father, Jim, built a terrace after fretting about soil erosion. The family has since added more terraces, and they work after harvest to lay their own tiling network. In line with their soil health goals, Dave and Zach have been steadily working towards full no-till, gradually adding more no-tilled acres when they can, and they cover crop with cereal rye ahead of soybeans.

"We started with cover crops in 2015 when I came back to the farm," Zach says, "and we now put covers on every acre going into beans."

Cost-share programs proved vital in helping the family get started with covers. They first used state funds – and then found more funding through Practical Farmers of Iowa. "I would have drug my feet a lot harder had it not been for the cost-share," Dave says. "Zach wanted to do cover crops and the cost-share really helped."

Connecting Through Cost-Share

The Van Arkels were first introduced to Practical Farmers in 2015 through a gift membership. But it was PFI's cover crop cost-share program that got them more involved – in 2018, Dave and Zach attended a PFI meeting to learn more about it, and while there, they decided to sign up. Though the family had started using covers three years earlier, they credit state and private cost-share programs like PFI's with helping make cover crops work financially as they further integrate covers on their farm.



Zach, Dave and James Van Arkel during harvest in 2014.

The Van Arkels' positive experience with PFI's cost-share program led to further engagement. In 2022, Dave and Zach volunteered for shifts at PFI's Farm Progress Show booth to talk with farmers from around the country about cover crops. Zach says he enjoyed hearing other farmers' experiences. "I like farming because there isn't always a completely right answer," he says. "We are just trying to do the best with what we have."

Outside of PFI, Dave and Zach have these kinds of conversations with neighbors, and they pay attention to what farmers are saying about cover crops. They think the practice is gaining ground – more of their neighbors, for instance, are asking questions about their cover crops. But they admit barriers still remain to getting more covers on more acres.

"People don't seem ready to take the full risk," Zach says. "People will ask about [cover crops], and if they have livestock, they should definitely go for it. But economically, it is harder to convince just row crop people." He and his dad agree that landowners need to be engaged on cover crops and made aware of cost-share programs that can offset costs. They also think landowners need to be better equipped to engage in



Dave and grandson Henry in 2022.

"I like farming because there isn't always a completely right answer. We are just trying to do the best with what we have."

- Zach Van Arkel



Grace Van Arkel baling hay.

conversations with their tenants about incorporating cover crops.

Zach connects with landowners and farmers alike in the family's farm newsletter he shares twice a year. In addition to chronicling his return to the farm and the growth of their family and business, Zach includes a crop report and a section he calls the "conservation corner," where he addresses issues like how his family is experimenting with cover crops on the farm. Dozens of full-color photos help illustrate their efforts.

Pacing Cover Crop Progress

With their own sheep, Zach and Grace graze their flock of 100 ewes on the cereal rye cover crop whenever they get the chance. "Grazing [cover crops] makes a lot of sense if you have livestock," Zach says. "It helps us make cover crops work financially." However, the Van Arkels are still learning exactly how cover crops balance out financially on their row crop ground without cost-share incentives.

One challenge is that cover crops add another layer of management. So far, Dave and Zach have tried to keep things simple, which has allowed them to seed covers affordably and quickly. They typically broadcast their cover crop with fertilizer in the fall, which is a pass through the field they would've had to make anyway. "If someone wants to try cover crops, it is so simple to just go out and broadcast it," Dave says. "We are making the same number of herbicide

passes, so it doesn't really cost us outside of seed using this practice."

While they feel comfortable with cover crops before beans, seeding cover crops before corn hasn't worked out for them yet. But as they refine their experience, they plan to revisit that practice. First, though, they need to address the factors that currently make it too risky. To make cover crops before corn workable, Dave and Zach say they need more biomass, fewer input costs and less risk at planting.

"We're getting better weed control, water-holding capacity and erosion control ahead of beans," Zach says. He and Dave hope that if they experiment with drilling rye in the fall ahead of corn, as opposed to broadcasting it, they might be able to get enough growth from the cover to make the soil health benefits outweigh the risk. "We've adapted," Dave says. "We are planting more cover crops. We started slow and

now we are really gung-ho. We have every acre covered going to beans and now we want to try getting started on bean ground headed to corn."

As they work toward that goal, they are assessing their options, looking at different cover crop species ahead of corn and talking with people about different cover crop mixes "Right now, we are happy with rye and we are confident in rye," Zach says. "We are entertaining what might be beneficial in another situation."

As they head into their eighth year using cover crops, Dave and Zach have no doubts about the conservation benefits of cover crops. They've learned a lot, and are committed to doing what it takes to make cover crops work as seamlessly with their financial goals as with their farm's conservation goals. "We are looking for ways to diversify," Zach says. "Just adding the cover is a way to diversify. We are looking at opportunities with livestock for better return per acre, and small grains."

Diversification spreads out risk, and cost-share programs have offered Dave and Zach an important safety net to further reduce that financial risk. Freed from the burden of figuring out how to make cover crops profitable from the get-go, the programs have ultimately allowed them to dedicate time – the most elusive resource of all – to experimenting, pacing their progress and figuring out what works for them on their farm. ■



PFI's privately funded cover crop cost-share can be stacked on top of any federal and state-funded programs. For the first time in 2023, PFI is offering cost-share payments on unlimited acres paid at one rate (\$10 per acre).

Giving as an Act of Trust

By Sally Worley

Practical Farmers of Iowa set big growth goals in its most recent strategic plan. As a member-driven network, we heard your strong message that we needed to reach more people. This is because those engaged in PFI's network have the support to **make changes** as they work toward their short- and long-term goals. For example, 72% of last year's field day attendees intend to make changes to their operations as a result of attending.

With growth comes more programs, members, staff and a bigger budget. **Donations we receive from individuals constitute our most important funding.** These dollars allow us to respond quickly to our network's needs and help us fill in the gaps between grant funding, as grant funding is tied to specific deliverables.

Three examples from last year:

1

These donations helped us better connect with target audiences through specific messaging, so that we can continue to grow our network.

2

These donations supported board meetings, which are integral to getting good guidance and strategy for our work.

3

These donations supported annual conference and field day speakers not covered by grants.



In fiscal year 2022 (Oct. 1, 2021–Sept. 30, 2022) Practical Farmers received \$4.4 million in revenue. This is an increase of about \$700,000 from fiscal year 2021. Of this revenue, **\$140,513 came from donations above membership from 365 individual donors.**

If you are one of these supporters,
THANK YOU.

If you would like to join this list of generous people and organizations, please contact me: sally.worley@practicalfarmers.org.

In addition, **27 PFI members** purchased gift memberships for others, both supporting PFI and bringing more people into our network. We also received funding from **51 grants** and **27 contracts** with private companies.

Multiple Ways to Give

Some members provide cash donations on an annual or bi-annual basis. Others provide donations through their donor-advised fund, via a gift of grain, stocks, land and real estate, in their wills and more. Some members donate monthly to make donations easier on cash flow.

Lifetime members Steve and June Weis of Osage have been PFI members since 1989. They joined when they were actively farming and have stayed active in PFI even after they transitioned out of farming. Steve and June have been active members throughout their membership, from participating in research to serving on committees and staying connected with PFI members. Steve says, “Through PFI, I have made lifelong friends I can call on at any time.”

Steve and June have been regular donors since they became involved with PFI. They have recently switched to recurring monthly donations. Reflecting on why they have remained committed donors, they say:

“Why would non-farmers like us support PFI? The fact is that PFI is close to our heart. PFI has some of the friendliest people we know. They share not only their successes but, just as importantly, their failures. Their values of regenerative farming strengthen their farms and the communities they live in. Every time we go to a PFI event, we come back invigorated with a positive energy that is infectious.

“We love the ease of giving monthly and having it taken right from our bank account. It is so simple to budget our giving.”



Donations Are a Tribute to Good Work

Nonprofits and charities worldwide are doing really good work. And we all depend on donations to make our budget goals. But sometimes, as donors, it's overwhelming to sort through all the donation requests and decide where to invest your hard-earned money.

Jim Moseley is someone who is inundated by donation requests. His name may be familiar to some of you; Jim served as the deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He has also served as an agricultural advisor to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and has contributed to a lot of meaningful agricultural and policy work over his career. Practical Farmers is fortunate to be one of the nonprofits Jim donates to.

Why did Jim choose to support Practical Farmers out of all the organizations that reach out to him? “PFI is the leading organization in putting regenerative ag on the ground in the U.S.,” he says, emphatically.

Donations to PFI send a strong message that you value PFI's work and trust that we will put your money to good use. The act of donating is so meaningful to those on the receiving end, as it's a compliment and vote of confidence for the work being done.

Thanks, Jim, and all of our supporters, for this important funding!

(Continued on page 14 →)

Donations Above Membership in Fiscal Year 2022

Planned Givers – Legacy Society

Jill Beebout and Sean Skeeahan
Tom and Irene Frantzen
Helen Gunderson
Larry and Ruth Nepl
Tom Neuberger
Teresa Opheim and Rich Schuler
Rich Pirog
Ann Robinson

\$5,000 and Above

Diane Horn
Fred and Charlotte Hubbell
Schnieders Family Foundation
T. Rowe Price Charitable
The Hope Foundation

\$1,000 – \$4,999

Albert Lea Seed House
Jon and Tina Bakehouse
Barilla America
Maren and Tom Beard
Carol Bouska
Jay and Beverly Davidson
Sondra Feldstein
Robert and Susan Fleming
Liz Garst
Sarah Garst
Helen Gunderson
Gail Hickenbottom
Kyle & Sharon Krause Family
Foundation
Mark and Melanie Peterson
Lisa Schulte-Moore and Peter Moore
Carol Sherman
Dick and Diana Sloan
Stonebridge Ltd.
Ryan Story
Steve and June Weis
James and Mary West
Donald Whittaker

\$500 – \$999

Paul Ackley
Claire Andreasen and Steve Pecenka
Sarah Bull Delati
Michael Draper
Mike and Barbara Henning
Winifred Hoffman
Paul Hoffman
Kevin and Susan Kolbe
Beth and Randy Larabee
Mark and Deb Lassise
Vic and Cindy Madsen
Jim Moseley
Clark Porter
Kelly and Angie Tagtow
Roger and Barbara Thompson
Jill and Cal Werner
Sally and Chris Worley

\$250 – \$499

Nathan and Sarah Anderson
Linda Appelgate
Mike Arnold
Duncan Campbell
Ann and Chris Cromwell
Ortrude Dial
Nancy and Michael Forrest
Richard Francisco
Tom and Irene Frantzen
Eric and Ann Franzenburg
Richard Groux
Matthew and Michele Hackwell
Glen and Jeanine Halva-Neubauer
Shalese Huang
Glen Kadelbach
Lois and David Kail
Tom Kaspar

Erwin Klaas
Krumm Family Foundation
Kristine and Bret Lang
Matt Liebman and Laura Merrick
Monte Marti
Dennis McLaughlin
Kent and Kathy Morris
Jeff and Gayle Olson
Teresa Opheim and Rich Schuler
Jeremy and Jodi Peake
Eric Rademacher
Elizabeth and Jane Richards
Riley Family Fund
David Rosmann and Becky Tompkins-
Rosmann
SWCD, Winneshiek County
Tim Swinton
Dave and Tracy Van Arkel
Robert Waterman
Karin Wentz
Tom and Sue Wind

\$100 – \$249

Nathan Aaberg
Fred and Vicki Abels
Marilyn Adam and Ralph Tauke
Jane Allen
Aaron Alons
Jonathan Andelson
Alice and Kendall Atkinson
Ron and Mary Barber
Marilyn Barnes
Sam and Danielle Bennett
Vaughn and Julie Borchart
Daryl Bosma
Deanna Burke
Lee and Lori Burras
Robert Busch
Mike Callon and Roger Williams
Bruce and Connie Carney
Dennis Carney
Melanie Clark
Greg Clites
Kay Connelly
Tim and Maureen Daley
Tim Daly
Mary Damm
Jerry DeWitt and Kathy Beery
James Dyreby
Erik Eastman
Katherine and Herb Eckhouse
Kamyar Enshayan and Laura Jackson
Rob and Tammy Faux
Jim and Martha Fifield
Ana Fochesatto
James and Amanda Frantzen
Wayne and Ruth Fredericks
Gary and Carol Gadbury
Michael and Martha Galecki
David Gerber
Don Getting
John C. and Sarah Gilbert
Gil and Ardyth Gillespie
Steve and Jean Gingerich
Jim Grant
John Graves
Julie Hegmann
Helene Hembreiker
Marc Hemmes
Tom Hertz
Joshua Hiemstra
David and Pat Hogan
Clara and Harold Hoover
Jamie Hostetler
Whilden Hughes
Jeff Hughes and Lori Christensen
Cathy Irvine
Dennis Jennings
Wendy Johnson and John Rafkin

Frances Johnson and Michael Schultz
Larry and Donna Kallem
Dennis and Karen Kasparbauer
Jeff Klinge and Deb Tidwell
Aaron Kliniski
Don and Marilyn Kolbe
Mark Konrad
Ted Krauskopf
Matthew Kroul
Laura Krouse
Robert and Beth Kundert
Bryan Lee
Pete Marshall
Sandy McAntire
Ross McCaw
Mike and Janet McDonald
Bill Michael
Ron Miller
Amber Mohr and Jeremy Hall
Patrick and Mari Jo Murken
Connie and Robert Mutel
Dave and Courtney Myers
Joanne Nelson
Larry and Ruth Nepl
Dana Norby
John and Jackie Norris
Joseph and Judy Olsen
Miriam Patterson
Nolan Patterson
Thomas Pyfferoen
Jack and Diane Robertson
Jon Robertson
Bev and Dwight Rutter
Louis Sajovec
Michael Salama
George Schaefer and Anne Bulat
Schaefer
Kate Schaust
Tom Sibbersen and Diane Rasmussen
Tim and Ethel Sieren
Dean Sponheim
Kim Steele-Blair and Tim Blair
Mark Stokes
Ronald Stone
Rob and Jean Stout
SWCD, Fayette County
John and Angela Tedesco
The Benevity Community Impact Fund
The Wallace Centers of Iowa
Jan Thompson
Graham Thompson
Jeff Topel
Anne Topp
Sue Topp
Jerry Waller
Kevin and Elsie Walsh
Linda Wegner
Noah Wendt
Bill and Christy Whitley
Mary and Glenn Wiedenhoeft
Bruce Williams
Wayne Wilson

\$50 – \$99

Craig and Debbie Aldrich
Joyce and Conner Allender
Carmen and Maja Black
Brad Blackman
Diane Blas
Jack and Marion Boyer
David Brandt
Susan Brehm
Del Brockshus
Lydia Brown
Steve Carlson
Jean Caspers-Simmet
Stephen and Janet Cornelius
Kathryn Coronas
Chris Danner

Rob Davis
Andrea Dittmer
Kelley Donham
Martha Dorow
Brian Dougherty
Joe Eichelberger
Steve Einhaus
Irma Eis
Bob Ferguson
Peter and Eileen Fisher
Edward Franzen
Anne Galer
Ron and Diane Gasteiger
Alan Gaul
Kate Gilbert
Ken and Mark Gingerich
Helen Grunewald and Thomas Millward
Catherine Hall
Dennis Harkrader
Robert and Ruth Harvey
Vance and Bonnie Haugen
Steve and Mary Holmes
Iowa Interfaith Power & Light
Deborah Jacobi
Janice Johnston-Jones
Tamsyn Jones and Chris Witte
Tim Kelley
Chuck Kelly
Andy Kiefer
Zachary Kimberling
Fred Kirschenmann
Star Ann Klobberdan
Kathy Koether
Harris Kuiper
Roger and Joanne Lane
Kyle Larson
Emma Liddle
Lori Long
Nick Ludwig
Evan Lynam
Brandee Marckmann
William and Robin Matthews
Merle McCallister
Sally McCoy
Matthew Miller
Mary Mohr
Jill Mortensen
Gina Nichols
Larry Nilson
Emily and Kyle Nordyke
Joyce Otto
Caitie and Jim Palmer
Jim Patton
Sara and Bob Pearson
Jo Porter
Melanie Rainbow-Harel
Lois and Jack Reichert
Jack Reif
Mike and Janine Robertson
Gabrielle Roesch McNally
Justin and Jeff Rooney
Billy Sammons and Joanna Hunter
Jane Shey
Steve Shivers
Sharon Tinker
Arvin Vander Wilt
Ronald Vogel
Michael Walsh and Marcia Toft
Doug and Tanya Webster
Robert and Kim Wemer
Jerry Wendt
Joanne Wilson
Danielle and Don Wirth
Danny Wittrock
Lee Wollenhaupt
Joel and Jan Wormley
Linda Wormley
Wendell Zimmerman

Under \$50

Wesley Anderson
Jerry Avise-Rouse
Linda Avraamides
Ken Balsters
Nelda Bartels
Abby Barten
Tyler Bartley
Ted and Donna Bauer
Neil and Renate Bernstein
Lynn Bohn
Victor Bohuslavsky
Jacob Bolson
Nancy and John Brannaman
Dan and Katie Capecchi
Laurna Czajka
Simone Delaty
Sean Dengler
Sean Dolan
Tim Doyle
Arthur and Colette Dunham
Sam Egli and Siobhan Danres
Susan Frye
Ellen and Ivars Gailans
Kathy Getting
Sydney Giacalone
William Gilbert
Global Food Project
Rodney Graham
Thomas Gust

Gary and Nancy Guthrie
Jeanne and Jay Hansen
Jim Hanson
Ann and Jay Hardy
Dianne Harms
Linda Head and Bill Kathol
Randy Hilleman
Michael Hromanik
Gary Huber and Penny Brown Huber
Levania Jelson
Jim Johnson
Ruth Jovaag-Ofstedal
David Kennis
Bill and Betty Kimble
Jim Knopik
Philip and Erin Kramer
Tracey Kuehl
Doug Little
Judy Lumb
Sherman Lundy
Charleen Lyon
Martha McFarland
Patricia McKee
Adam Montri
Shami Morse and Tom Lundahl
Todd Muller
Network for Good
Larry Harris and Denise O'Brien
Kent Olson
John Paule
Andrew Payton

Marvin Peters
Mark Preston
Shaffer Ridgeway
Geneva and Xavier Rosmann
Mary Sackett
Tomie Sasaki-Hesslink
Leon Schwartz
Erik Sessions and Sara Peterson
Charles Shirley
Jerry Sindt
Raymond Stockdale
Larry and Margaret Stone
Verlyn Strellner
Kenneth and Leanne Sutter
Lee Tesdell
Virginia Tunnicliff
Caroline Van Schaik
Terry Ward
Ward Laboratories Inc.
Teresa and Rodne Wendt
Chuck White
Jim Wichmann
Ed Williams
Natasha, Brian and Nancy Wilson
Bob and Carole Winkleblack
Stacy Wistock
Beverly Wood
Tyler Youngers
Kevin Zihlman and Kim Andersen
Julie and Rick Zrostlik

Donors of Gift Memberships

Marilyn Barnes
Carmen and Maja Black
Lydia Brown
Jean Caspers-Simmet
Andrea Dittmer
Helen Gunderson
Gary and Nancy Guthrie
Robert and Ruth Harvey
Mike and Barbara Henning
The Wallace Centers of Iowa
Janice Johnston-Jones
Tim Kelley
Zachary Kimberling
Evan Lynam
Gina Nichols
Jeff and Gayle Olson
Caite and Jim Palmer
Jo Porter
David Rosmann and Becky Tompkins-Rosmann
Stonebridge Ltd.
Jane Shey
Lee Wollenhaupt
Joel and Jan Wormley

Gift of Grain Donors

Ann and Chris Cromwell

Tribute Gifts - In Memory Of

Maren and Tom Beard
In memory of Paul Johnson
Brandt Household
In memory of Kendra Brandt
Greg Clites
In memory of Dennis Johnson
Mary Damm
In memory of Daniel Specht
Richard Francisco
In memory of Marsha Francisco
Tom and Irene Frantzen
In memory of Dick Thompson

Vance and Bonnie Haugen
In memory of Daniel Specht
Mike and Janet McDonald
In memory of Nancy Ackley
Patricia McKee
In memory of William L. Krieg
Mary Mohr
In memory of Darrell Mohr
Larry and Ruth Neppel
In memory of Dick Thompson
Larry and Ruth Neppel
In memory of Greg Schmadeke
Teresa Opheim and Rich Schuler
In memory of Wayne and Barbara Opheim

Nolan Patterson
In memory of Burton Patterson
Sue Topp
In memory of Raynold Topp
Danielle and Don Wirth
In memory of Winnie Bassman
Tribute Gifts - In Honor Of
Jon and Tina Bakehouse
In honor of Jon Bakehouse
Glen and Jeanine Halva-Neubauer
In honor of Liz Kolbe and Steve Carlson

Clara and Harold Hoover
In honor of Helen D. Gunderson
Sally McCoy
In honor of Peg Bouska
Mike and Janet McDonald
In honor of Paul Ackley
Melanie Rainbow-Harel
In honor of John Barns
Kevin and Elsie Walsh
In honor of Rosmann Family
Robert Waterman
In honor of Kerry and Angela Knuth
Robert Waterman
In honor of Heath Stolee

PFI received funding from 51 grants and 27 contracts with private companies.

Federal Funding Sources

Agriculture Marketing Service Farmers Market Promotion Program
Agriculture Marketing Service Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement
Agriculture Marketing Service Local Foods Promotion Program
Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico Program
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Specialty Crop Block Grant
National Institute of Food and Agriculture-Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program Sustainable Agricultural Systems (SAS)
National Institute of Food and Agriculture-Agriculture and Food Research Initiative-Critical Agricultural Research and Extension
National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
Natural Resources Conservation Service Collaborative Conservation Grant
Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Collaboration Grant
Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grant - On-Farm Trials
Natural Resources Conservation Service Federal Conservation Innovation Grant

Natural Resources Conservation Service Iowa Conservation Innovation Grant
Natural Resources Conservation Service Iowa Conservation Innovation Grant
Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program
North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Professional Development Program
North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Research & Education
Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (The 2501 Program)

Foundation Funding Sources

Cedar Tree Foundation
Ceres Trust
Clif Bar Foundation
Community Foundation of Johnson County Farm Aid
McKnight Foundation
Natasha and Dirk Ziff Foundation
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.
No-till On the Plains
Patagonia

The Schmidt Family Foundation
University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy and Environmental Education
W. K. Kellogg Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
Wildlife Conservation Society

State Funding Sources

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Water Quality Initiative

Private Funding Sources

ADM
Bunge
Cargill
HSBC
Keurig-Dr. Pepper
Lifeline
Oatly
PepsiCo
Seven Sundays
Smithfield Foods Inc
Unilever
Walmart

Restoring Habitat on Farms

By Vanya North



Cait Caughey (center) and her son, Catalpa, and daughter, Mira (behind Cait), at a native seed collection event near their home in the Loess Hills.

Photo courtesy of Cait Caughey

Before the shift to a two-crop system, Iowa farms were pockets of diversity that hosted many wildlife species. A range of practices, big and small, can create spaces for them to return.

When the first Europeans started settling in the land that would one day be called the state of Iowa, they encountered a rolling landscape dominated by a sea of tallgrass prairie and islands of woodlands.

Named for the Ioway – one of many Indigenous Peoples who had lived in and shaped the area for thousands of years – the land beckoned to the newcomers, who sought to build their prosperity from the land’s abundant wildlife, lush greenery and rich soils.

“Up until 150 years ago, Iowa was about 80% tallgrass prairie and supported a wide array of wildlife, some of whom are still here with us, and some that are not,” says Ryan Schmidt, the central Iowa land stewardship director for the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Today, however, more than 85% of Iowa’s land area is farmed, while only a fraction of a percent remains of the original prairie. With such dramatic ecological changes, how have Iowa’s native species survived in such an altered landscape?

Adam Janke, a wildlife specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, says historical farming practices, where diverse crop rotations and pastures were common, and where weedy or shrubby areas were left intact, created spaces where wildlife could find food and shelter.



Adam Janke

“We’ve gone from a diversity of crops to just a few crops . . . and that has coincided with population declines in farmland wildlife.”

– Adam Janke

“Because we had weedy areas where we grew chickens, or where we raised a single cow or small herd of cattle – or because we had fallow fields or diverse crop rotations – we found that generalist farmland wildlife species were able to exist on the margins of our farms quite well,” he says. “And they essentially set the soundtrack for Iowa’s rural environments.”

In the past few decades, however, this pastiche of on-farm diversity has measurably decreased. It’s not the expansion of production agriculture that’s the main culprit, Adam says, but rather the widespread shift to a two-crop system. “We’ve gone from a diversity of crops to just a few crops,” he

says. “We’ve seen intensification and homogenization, and that has coincided with population declines in farmland wildlife, broadly defined.”

Removing Invasives to Restore Habitat

First-generation farmer Cait Caughey is working to restore some of that landscape diversity at Mullein Hill Farm, the diverse 25-acre farm she operates in Mondamin, Iowa. While some portions of the farm are kept in row crops, Cait specializes in flowers, native seed mixes, field vegetables and herbs. She has been farming since 2010 and says it’s her love of nature and wildlife that brought her to farming.

“My dad was in parks and recreation, and we spent a lot of time outdoors,” Cait says. “Those foundational childhood moments really impacted me and gave me the mindset of coming back to the soil and working with land.”

That love of wildlife has translated into a range of efforts to create wildlife habitat on her farm, such as removing invasive species. With support from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and her local Natural Resources Conservation Service office, Cait began using prescribed burning to remove invasive species. She also created a forestry plan aimed at increasing habitat for larger wildlife species, such as owls, foxes, deer and nesting birds. “We removed so many cedar trees,” Cait says. “It started with me obsessively cataloging plants and

thinking, wow, this is amazing, there's something really special here.”

During restoration, Cait was ecstatic to discover that, apart from the invasive cedar, most of the grasses on her acreage were native. Many plants, such as purple coneflower and partridge pea, have been part of the native prairie ecosystem for thousands of years. Spurred on by these finds, Cait began restoring another 5-acre remnant prairie using the seeds from her discovery. “I’m proud of this restoration work, and I hope to do more acres in the future.”

But, she adds, there are other ways to create habitat. “We’re also focusing on the small areas, like around our barn, and the bases of trees that can serve as habitat.”

Preserving Microhabitat on Farms

Marlene Ehresman, cofounder and executive director of the Iowa Wildlife Center in Ames, Iowa, agrees. “Habitat restoration is great, and I say the more native habitat, the better. But there are lots of things landowners and operators can and are doing that create suitable spaces for wildlife. One of those is focusing on micro areas of the farm.”

Fencerows are one such area. Ground-nesting birds will use them for nesting, she says, while rabbits and skunks may use them like highways to hide from aerial predators when moving from one field to the next. Small rodents may find seed and food sources in the growth around fencerows, enticing foxes to patrol there in pursuit of the rodents. In essence, Marlene says, these untidy fencerows become mini ecosystems.

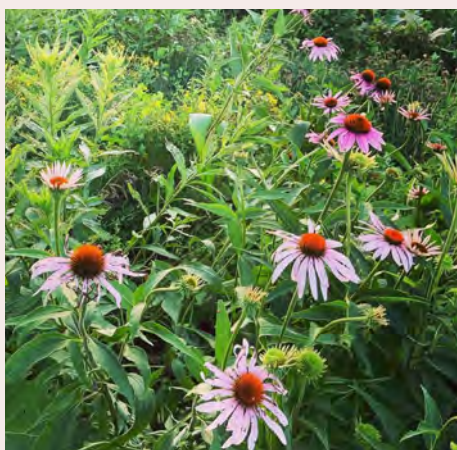
“Farmers who find cleaning up their fencerows to be tedious may find joy in discovering that leaving messy fence lines in place is, in fact, creating space for wildlife,” Marlene says. She encourages farmers to consider leaving clumps of grass alongside the barn or cattle feeder, and resisting raking leaf piles in the yard. “That all provides microhabitat. Brush piles are another



Marlene Ehresman

“Farmers who find cleaning up their fencerows to be tedious may find joy in discovering that leaving messy fence lines in place is, in fact, creating space for wildlife.”

– Marlene Ehresman



gold mine for wildlife, since they act as shelter and a quiet place.”

Diversifying at Bigger Scales

Farmers also have opportunities to restore on-farm diversity at a broader scale, using practices that can work with their existing farming enterprises – and that can make their farms more resilient. Some of these mutually beneficial efforts include practices like planting prairie strips, installing wetlands in less productive field areas, adding small-grain crops like oats and wheat to diversify crop rotations and planting cover crops – which the Midwest Row

Crop Collaborative says can provide valuable habitat for insects, pollinators and other wildlife.

Efforts like this are vital for Iowa’s native species to rebound and even thrive. Adam points to the value of prairie strips, which ISU’s long-running prairie strips project has shown to have many benefits with a relatively small footprint in crop fields. “Many species of greatest conservation need – like grasshopper sparrows, dickcissel, common yellowthroat, brown thrasher, Eastern kingbird, field sparrow and Eastern meadowlark – are using prairie strips for their reproduction,” he says.

These practices aren’t at odds with production agriculture either. Echoing Adam’s comment about how crop diversity creates spaces for wildlife, a 2019 U.S. Geological Survey report – “The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds” – notes how meadowlark abundance in Iowa “was positively correlated with large amounts of pasture, alfalfa hayland and herbaceous fencerow in the surrounding landscape and with moderate amounts of row crops.”

Pasture used to be common on Iowa farms when most farmers had livestock – and bringing livestock back can benefit farmers, and wildlife, in many ways. Rotationally grazing them can further benefit farmers, livestock and wildlife. “Many farmers are already using this practice to allow grazing grasses to recover,” Marlene says. “It’s just one more habitat-friendly practice that preserves that bit of the natural and original landscape.”

Ultimately, she says, restoring habitat on Iowa farms “comes down to knowing the natural history of that animal, and appreciating what they can do for your farm – and what your farm can do for them.” ■

Nurturing Rural Communities



By contributing to her local food system, Stephanie Meyers is growing her family and her rural communities

By Jacqueline Venner Senske

Stephanie and Austin Meyers and their children – Hallie, Janae and twins Nathaniel and Samuel – own and operate Sonshine Farms near Hubbard, Iowa. They homeschool their children on their 3.5-acre farm, where they raise vegetables, flowers, honey, eggs, broiler chickens and turkeys that they market through on-farm sales and at farmers markets in several area towns, stores and restaurants.



Stephanie is a small-town doer. She didn't set out to raise thousands of pounds of produce that she markets to multiple rural communities in her area. Yet today, she finds herself as the lynchpin in her very localized food system.

Building a Life

The path Stephanie and her family have taken is not the one she initially envisioned. In 2003, Stephanie graduated from Wartburg College with a degree in music education and music therapy. Following a six-month internship at a hospital in Arizona, she returned to her home state of Iowa and became engaged to Austin, her boyfriend of more than a year. The couple married and settled in State Center where Stephanie taught instrumental music at middle and high schools while Austin worked on a nearby farm.

But when the school district's music program didn't grow as quickly as expected, Stephanie's position was eliminated after her second year of teaching. The pressures compounded from there.

In May 2005, when Stephanie was seven months pregnant, Austin was involved in a serious farm accident that required amputating his right hand, with multiple follow-up surgeries and therapy. Hallie was born on July 18, 2005, two months nearly to the day after the accident. What happened next felt to Stephanie and Austin like divine intervention.

They were awarded a settlement through workman's compensation because of Austin's on-the-job injury, which enabled them to buy their present farm near Hubbard.

"The heirs of the previous owners of the acreage dropped the price such that we were able to pay cash for the property with the money from the settlement,"



Stephanie says, "That first winter and spring on the farm, we had some rough patches making it through. Our income went from over \$70,000 to about \$7,000 the next year."

Yet with resourcefulness, vision and ingenuity, Stephanie and Austin were able to pull together and make things work. When a greenhouse near Mason City was taken down in 2009, they bought some secondhand parts from it



The Meyers kids in 2012 from left to right: Nathaniel, Janae, Hallie and Samuel



The Meyers' daughter, Hallie, in 2007.



One of the first Roland farmers markets, 2015.



The Sonshine Farms booth at the Roland Farmers Market, 2022.

to erect a structure that got them started with growing more things on their farm. By 2013, they constructed a hoop house structure that they still use to start all their seeds.

"Austin is such a visionary," Stephanie says. "He pieced together the greenhouse and just wanted to grow things. It was great for his mental health." Stephanie describes planting and growing all these garden crops as therapy. The family's primary income came from Austin's off-farm job, which required overnight hours. As a result, garden management fell largely to Stephanie. In addition, by that time, their family had grown to include four children under four years old – two girls plus twin boys.

In those early days, the Meyers family gave away many of the plants and produce they grew to members of their church and community. "Austin wanted us to grow into selling at markets,"

Stephanie says, "but because of our small kids and Austin's work schedule, I resisted."

Then, in early 2015, they learned of plans for a farmers market in the nearby town of Roland. The couple decided to give it a try. They established their business, Sonshine Farms, and by July were selling at this weekly market every Thursday through September.

And that was just the beginning.

Growing as an Act of Service

By 2016, Sonshine Farms had multiple market streams. They sold at farmers markets in the towns of Hubbard, Roland and Jewell every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, respectively. They have also sold to local grocery stores, the Jewell Market and Hubbard Grocery, as well as a few local restaurants. The farmers market in Hubbard has since stopped running, but the others have grown over the years.

"It's not easy. There are many late nights and early mornings," Stephanie says. "Yet at the end of the season, it's amazing to see the amount of food we raise. Our choice is to serve these communities that don't have access to [local produce] otherwise."

Being present and reliable is a key part of how Stephanie has grown the business. "We have found that consistency is key," she says. "To build rapport and break into a bedroom-style community like Roland, where there is no grocery store, you must be there every week interacting with people, checking in with relationships, asking, 'How are you doing? How are things going?' And people tell us regularly how much they appreciate us being there." Her generous spirit and dedication contribute richly to these rural communities.

For the 2023 season, Stephanie is officially co-managing the Roland

(Continued on page 20 →)

"It's not easy. There are many late nights and early mornings," Stephanie says. "Yet at the end of the season, it's amazing to see the amount of food we raise. Our choice is to serve these communities that don't have access to [local produce] otherwise."

“This feels like the calling of my life to be able to meet people where they are and speak life to them,” Stephanie says. “To be able to encourage and see people means more to me than any of it; vegetables are the bonus.”

Farmers’ Market and hopes to take it to the next level. “We are trying to really build it up to support the town of Roland,” she says.

For Stephanie and Austin, growing food is a faith-driven act of service for these rural communities, and for their family. “I was trained to be public school teacher, and I planned that for my kids,” Stephanie says. “But facing the challenges through Austin’s accident and those early years of family life changed how we value our time together. Our business has been modeled around relationships. For us, our work is growing for the glory of God in service to others, and being able to pour all this into our kids makes such a difference.”

A Family Endeavor

When she first started selling at markets, her children were 4, 6 and 8 years old. To make attending the markets possible, she had to take them along. “We took the time to train them when they were young,” she says. “They would help carry things, and we would pack sack suppers of sandwiches and chips and special cookies, or whatnot. We would have a special activity bag and a blanket, and that was their area.”

The Meyers kids and the family business have grown up together. As the girls entered their teens, they identified activities of their own that they wanted to pursue, like mission trips. With the resourcefulness and ingenuity modeled from their parents, Hallie and Janae developed their own baking business – Bakery Girls – and sold bread and baked goods alongside the Sonshine Farms market stand to earn their own way.

“They knew they would have to work for the money, so they decided to take up baking,” Stephanie says. “My mother-in-law and father-in-law helped them bake for markets each week.”

Stephanie describes her children’s contributions with pride. “Exploring these opportunities has really helped them each find their skills and passions. Hallie, my 16-year-old, is very much motivated to be the face of the business. She is so organized and runs markets for me frequently. Janae, who is 14, loves to bake but does not love marketing or interacting with customers. Samuel, age 12, is the younger twin and is very gifted with mechanical work – oil changes and fixing things. Nathaniel is still looking for his motivation and skills, but the journey to that discovery is fun, and we can give him the grace and space to do that.”

With homeschooling lessons over in early April every year, the entire family looks forward to what they call the “skills-building” portion of their education. Stephanie says her goal this summer is to treat preparing for and staffing the farmers markets as a job training experience. “I give them hours, a list of tasks and a little guidance, and they do it on their own,” Stephanie says. The kids are paid for their work, she adds, but the first hour of their labor is always for free. “That’s how we balance being family members with contributing to the family business.”

Answering a Call

In early 2023, Austin secured a new position with the Hubbard-Radcliffe Community School District that led to big changes in their farm and home

operations. A more flexible work schedule with daytime hours, rather than the overnight schedule he worked for years, has dramatically increased his availability to support the farm.

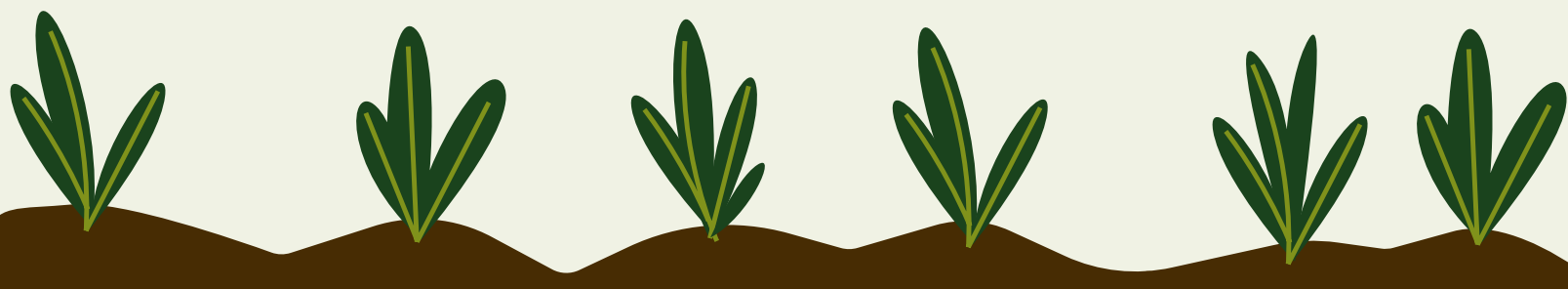
The new job has facilitated other changes in thinking as well. As the children grow and begin to plan next steps, Stephanie is starting to look toward what might come next for the farm – and she is excited about her vision for the future.

“We would love to be able to bring a lot of our business to our farm – to have a store where customers buy on our farm,” Stephanie says. She also dreams of offering classes and retreats “to teach people how to support themselves through a small garden plot or converting your yard to food production, or how to process their food.”

“I’m an educator at heart,” she adds. “I want to be able to offer classes and support people where they are.”

Stephanie’s commitment to service and the sense of connection she fosters are both elemental and essential to weaving the fabric of rural communities. Approaching the Meyers family’s farm stand means entering the warm glow they create around them through the children’s eager smiles, Stephanie’s genuine hospitality and the abundant food they grow and share with love.

“This feels like the calling of my life to be able to meet people where they are and speak life to them,” Stephanie says. “To be able to encourage and see people means more to me than any of it; vegetables are the bonus.” ■





LOCAL Leaders

Local food distributors and food hubs in PFI's network are supporting individual producers and consumers

By Emma Liddle

Expanding Local Food Access

For Tony Thompson of Prudent Produce, a food hub based in Elkhart, Iowa, the work week begins on Thursday. Tony and other staff meet to discuss and plan the week's inventory of produce and other items, then send their customers an email to pick from the week's lineup for their orders.

Box types range from small veggie bins for one person to large bins for larger families. One option is to receive produce that comes exclusively from Iowa producers. Orders are finalized on Sundays at 9 a.m., at which point Tony says it's "a mad rush to get orders out to farms and distributors." Prudent Produce aggregates all of the week's products through Monday morning, and then the distribution begins. "We have a team of three or four people that pack our famous blue or green bins with people's orders," Tony says, "and another team of three delivers them all around central and north-central Iowa." Thursday is the last delivery day, and then the week begins again.

As a food hub, Tony's business occupies a unique place in Iowa's local food system. Food hubs act as aggregators and distributors of local products from multiple sources. When done correctly, this service lets individual producers expand their customer base while allowing consumers to support a variety of Iowa growers.

Given Iowa's food statistics, this service is especially important: While around 72% of Iowa's land is dedicated to agriculture, 90% of the state's food is imported, due in part to the lack of distribution systems for local produce. PFI organizational members like Prudent Produce are helping to fill this void and make local food more available. These local food distributors also center PFI farmers in their procurement, boosting local food systems and improving health and rural vitality for Iowans.

When Angie Laverty founded Prudent Produce in 2010, her goal was to create an organic-only produce distribution business, connecting people with easy access to good food. As the business grew, she worked with Tony Thompson, who runs New Family Farm in Elkhart, to build a partnership between the organizations.

The merger between Prudent Produce and New Family Farm was a win for Tony. The move allowed Prudent Produce to drastically increase its emphasis on local foods while giving members of his CSA access to produce all year. Prudent



A box of goods from Prudent Produce

Photo courtesy of Mark Looney.

Produce officially relocated from a strip mall in Ankeny to New Family Farm in 2017. Now, the business works with more than 50 Iowa farmers and dozens of local businesses to serve hundreds of families in central and north-central Iowa.

Supporting Schools

Where Prudent Produce deals mainly in individual orders, Iowa Food Hub works with wholesalers like schools to provide local options. Its typical week involves delivering directly to schools, grocery stores and restaurants. "We currently have four delivery routes that operate weekly," says Peter Kraus, general manager of Iowa Food Hub, "and two routes that are seasonal that take us to Dubuque, Mason City, LaCrosse, Viroqua, Cedar Falls and Waterloo, Iowa City, Des Moines and lots of small towns along the way." During summer vacation, when produce is most plentiful, Iowa Food Hub helps connect local food with farm stands, special events, food pantries and partner food hubs.

The organization was founded to fill a gap between northeastern Iowa producers and area schools that needed a convenient way to order local products. The schools had plateaued in their purchasing of local foods, to around \$20,000 total for all K-12 schools in northeastern Iowa. In 2013, with three pallets in a grocery store cooler space, Iowa Food Hub stepped in as the aggregator and distributor. It then rode the wave of the local foods movement, growing its farm-to-institution work.

Unfortunately, Iowa Food Hub suffered a tumultuous period from 2018 to 2020. The loss of a delivery truck, combined with loss of funding and other issues, led the hub to temporarily

close. Thanks to the work of ISU extension specialists, and buoyed by Iowa's launch of the Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program in 2022 – a program PFI played a key role in helping to start – Peter says Iowa Food Hub was “resurrected ... from the ashes to support and continue its local food procurement work.”

The group took the pandemic in stride, creating an online farmers market for individual consumers that's still going. Today, Iowa Food Hub works with 110 farms and food producers, and it serves 120 customers – most of whom are K-12 schools and colleges.

Practical Farmers at the Center

As PFI organizational members, Prudent Produce and Iowa Food Hub both work with individual PFI farmer members to help them succeed. Tony joined PFI in 2013 after learning from long-time members and says he wants to support those who mentored him. “The PFI farmer network is the first place I look to when we need help sourcing products,” he says. “Those family-sized and diverse operations are the farms that we want to build up and help to sustain.”

PFI's farmer network also supports Iowa Food Hub, and vice versa. PFI members sell through the hub and help direct it by serving on the food hub's board of directors. PFI also plays an indirect role through its programming that supports northeastern Iowa farmers.

“We benefit because our local producers benefit in a variety of ways from PFI's work,” Peter says.



Peter Kraus

PFI organizational members are helping to fill a void and make local food more available.

Food hubs handle the challenging logistics of bridging the gap between producers and consumers, especially when it comes to setting fair prices. “Conversations with PFI members over the years have certainly shaped our understanding of what producers need to be operationally viable,” Tony says.

Hopes for an Iowa Food Future

Consumer momentum is growing to support food hubs and their producers. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted grocery supply chains, leading Iowans to buy from food hubs and directly from farmers. Tony says Prudent Produce's business tripled over the course of six weeks at the start of the pandemic. The momentum didn't fade and Tony wants to further fortify the food hub and its vendors. “The hope,” he says, “is that Prudent Produce can help be one significant and viable market to help local food producers get to a financially sustainable position.”

Iowa Food Hub, with the pandemic behind and the future ahead, is looking to use new funding from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Specialty Crop Block Grant program to connect all food hubs in Iowa. The project lifts both food hubs and producers, who gain access to markets statewide. “This project has

been incredibly impactful for food hubs in Iowa who can now source products across the state,” Peter says, “and it couldn't have come at a better time.” With the potential for more business, Iowa Food Hub wants to expand its processing capacity and infrastructure for vegetable, fruit and grain producers. “We want Iowa to be growing and eating more of its own food,” Peter says.

During her keynote speech at PFI's 2023 annual conference, Donna Pearson McClish, founder and CEO of Common Ground Mobile Market and Mobile Food in Wichita, Kansas, reminded the audience that what we plant today, we harvest tomorrow. Putting in the effort on the front end requires expanding our community of growers and producers, paying farmers equitable wages and making fresh, healthy food accessible for all citizens.

Creating such a dynamic local food system is an incremental process, and it requires mindset changes for consumers and producers alike – but the benefits are worth the effort for Iowa farmers and communities. Tony hopes that food hubs like Prudent Produce can help to influence consumer mindsets in this way. “That is when we can get to a level of purchasing from producers that helps them to be viable long-term.” ■



Find Local Food Near You

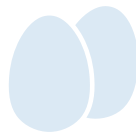
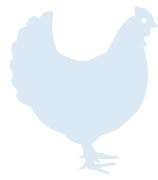
To find PFI member farms, food hubs or other local food distributors near you, visit practicalfarmers.org/directories.

Want your farm or business added?

Contact Emma at emma.liddle@practicalfarmers.org.



Iowa Local Food Day at Decorah Schools



Partnering to Expand Local Foods

When unprecedented federal funds opened for states to build local food systems, PFI and other partners rallied to bring pivotal programs to Iowa

By Kayla Koether

In June 2022, Iowa's local foods landscape received a significant boost from the federal government. Earlier in the year, the state had applied for, and received, \$2.7 million to establish a potentially transformative program: the Iowa Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program.

The money came from a new U.S. Department of Agriculture initiative, the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program, or LFPA. Iowa also received \$2.2 million from a sister USDA grant, the Local Foods for Schools program, which funded local food purchases for K-12 schools. Both programs offered an unprecedented pool of funds – \$400 million for LFPA and \$200 million for LFS – to help states strengthen local and regional food systems, support local and socially disadvantaged farmers and build partnerships with local food distributors.

They were also unique in directly funding food purchases. Aware of the rare opportunity, Practical Farmers and several partners – including Iowa Valley RC&D, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and others – teamed with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the state agency authorized to apply, in drafting Iowa's application and implementing the programs.

Partnering for Success

These partnerships were key to our success. To bring the LFPA to Iowa, we needed to convince the USDA that Iowa could procure, distribute and track all that food at a statewide scale. If funded, we'd then need to develop systems and protocols to manage this volume of product, ensure the funds flowed to *local foods* and build a database capable of tracking all that complexity.

The task seemed daunting, but we tackled it with resolve. The visioning

process started during our regular Food Hub Managers Working Group meetings, led by Iowa Valley RC&D. These meetings included Giselle Bruskwitz, program director for Iowa Valley RC&D; Teresa Wiemerslage, a local food specialist with ISU Extension and Outreach; myself for PFI; and representatives from Iowa food hubs. Soon, we were sharing those ideas with Tammy Stotts at IDALS. Collaboration grew as the Iowa Food Bank Association and the Meskwaki Nation joined the conversations.

A year later, we're all still working together on the programs. As the award recipient and fiscal agent, IDALS oversees the funding. Iowa Valley RC&D manages the program, which includes tracking purchases and supporting participants and distributors. Food hubs and food banks across the state help procure and distribute local foods raised in Iowa or counties that directly border it. The Meskwaki Nation distributes food to its community members. Iowa Department of Education also plays a key role in connecting schools to the LFS, while Teresa provides technical assistance to schools and food hubs.

PFI's Role and What's Next

For our part, PFI has been working to connect farmers to the program and ensure it centers producer needs. Last summer, we sought feedback from



Natasha Hegmann, left, of Turkey River Farm in Elkport, Iowa, poses with Paul Young. Natasha and her husband, Pete Kerns, partnered with Paul to grow squash for the food shelf through the Iowa Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program in fall 2022, and they are expanding production this year to sell through the program.

farmers across the state. That input led the partners to create fair pricing guidelines and more innovative ways to include farmers at different production scales. PFI also helped build the database and systems to manage farmer participants and track program outcomes.

In May, IDALS received an extra \$2.9 million from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation to extend Iowa's LFPA through May 2025. With the LFS funds factored in, the boost means \$7.8 million for local foods work in Iowa. While we're excited about that investment, we're also looking beyond 2025. Our hope is to build staying power for the new relationships and markets forged through these programs – we've already seen just how transformative they can be.

Kayla Koether is the senior farm viability manager for PFI. ■

Learn more about Iowa's LFPA and LFS programs, or register to be a local food vendor at iowalfpa.org/producers.

Review of Neil Hamilton's "The Land Remains"

By Larry Stone

Many of us baby boomer farm kids recall growing up in the 1950s and 60s walkin' beans, baling hay and having quail in the fencerows, along with "the back 40." But you don't need a time machine to recapture that era – and to ponder the future of Iowa agriculture. Just read "The Land Remains: A Midwestern Perspective on Our Past and Future" by Neil D. Hamilton.

Raised on an Adams County, Iowa, farm, Neil earned forestry and law degrees before becoming director of the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University in Des Moines. He recently retired after 36 years. His memoir traces his growing awareness of how our agricultural policies have shaped not only the land, but also the very fabric of our society.

At its essence, Neil writes, farming is "all about joy" – harnessing "sun, rain and seeds to create new wealth" or working with livestock "to bring forth new generations of animals." But he's troubled by Iowa's not-so-joyful transition from 200,000 small, diverse family farms to one-third that many industrial-scale operations. He offers a sobering analogy between Appalachia and Iowa.

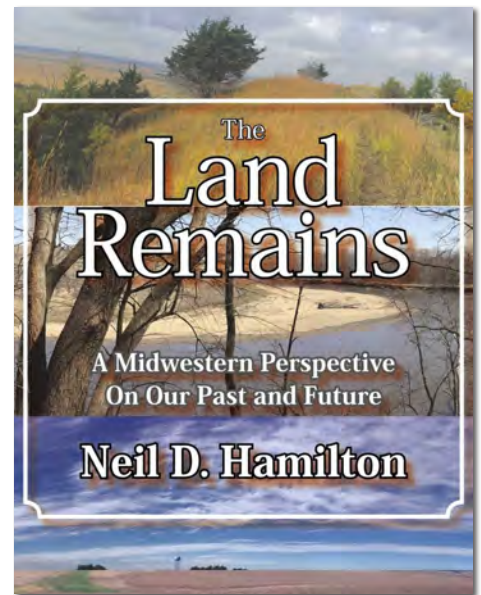
Appalachian farmers lost their autonomy to economic, social and environmental degradation brought on by the extractive coal and timber industries. Iowa's extractive industries are corn and pigs. "We are essentially mining our soil and water resources," he says, "extracting fertility and future productivity to raise crops used for industrial purposes or export."

Can we learn from history? Neil celebrates the conservation contributions of Iowans John F. Lacey, Aldo Leopold, Henry A. Wallace and J. N. "Ding" Darling. He admires Leopold's

"land ethic," which argues that humans have a moral duty to care for the land, including all of nature – and he returns often to that theme. He suggests that public policies in the 1930s and 40s acknowledged the importance of soil conservation; but that by the end of the 1950s, the vision and leadership of FDR's era were "largely abandoned, replaced by the economic determinism still haunting farm country today."

To be sure, farm organizations and the Iowa Legislature came to agree on the voluntary Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy – which supposedly will reduce nutrients leaving farm fields and flowing to the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately, Neil says, the strategy "can best be summarized as high hopes and best wishes, or less charitably, faith in magical thinking."

Yet he takes heart in the "rustling whispers of doubt" he's hearing from people concerned "about the food we eat and what it means for the land." To help tell the story, he enlists the occasional voice of "The Back 40," a perceptive plot of land hidden in the center of his home farm. Noting, for example, how some landowners are struggling to re-create prairie after their ancestors broke the virgin sod 150 years ago, The Back 40



wryly observes that "my time frame is so different than yours."

We need leaders with the vision to make changes, Neil says, citing World Food Prize recipient D. Rattan Lal of Ohio State University, who proposed a federal Healthy Soils Act akin to the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. He also praises groups like PFI and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. When Neil needed to sell part of his family's land, he made sure it went to a young farmer committed to keeping it healthy, rather than to an absentee investor.

"It may be hard in stressful times to think about the land as a priority," Neil writes. "The truth is, now is an excellent time to focus on Land because it is enduring and it provides a source of hope." The Back 40, also hopeful, expects a "spark of imagination" from scholars like the boy who went away to law school.

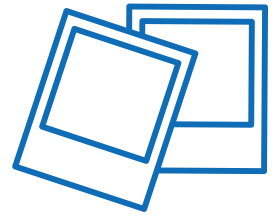
"My hope is you will find the genius in the law and the imagination in your hearts to protect me," The Back 40 says, "and to make it possible the land remains." ■

Larry A. Stone has authored five books and spent 25 years as the outdoor writer and photographer for the Des Moines Register. He and his wife, Margaret, manage her family's small crop farm in Tama County, Iowa, along with the woodlands, prairie and wildlife and their own farm near Elkader, Iowa. Learn more at larrystonesiowa.com.

PFI MEMBER

Photo Album

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



Dale Raasch (driving) and Tyler Raasch demonstrate a new version of the father-son tractor ride while putting up a new high tunnel with a crew of helpers. (Marcie Raasch – Bridgewater Farm, Bridgewater, Iowa)



New lambs make the acquaintance of their human, Henry. (Rebekah Ahrens – Twisted Oaks, Milan, Illinois)



The Kiko goat herd surrenders a round bale to Owen de Kok-Filbert during goat chores in March. (Meghan Filbert – Grassbelly Farmstead, formerly of Pilot Mound, Iowa)



A cat commences early-season garlic inspection at Blue Gate Farm. (Jill Beebout – Blue Gate Farm, Chariton, Iowa)



Maple sap collection in March. (Margaret Wolter – Sandhill Acres, Chelsea, Iowa)



A tree frog joins in to supervise the hive check. (Kristen Clark – Happy Bottom Homestead, Ames, Iowa)



Cats and goat kids all snuggled up on a March morning. Farm cats from left: Kitty, Kitty and Kitty. (Adam Ledvina – Iowa Kiko Goats, Chelsea, Iowa)



Have a photo you'd like featured in the magazine?
Email it to liz.kolbe@practicalfarmers.org or tag PFI on social media and let us know!

Happy Hellos, Fond Farewells

New staff join PFI while long-time staffer departs

Megan Bark | Senior Cost-Share Administrative Coordinator



Megan Bark joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in May of 2023 as the senior cost-share administrative coordinator. Her work focuses on managing back-end process and gathering information for PFI's field crop cost-share programs.

Megan grew up on a small hobby farm in central Iowa and earned her bachelor's degree from Iowa State University in 2009. She

double-majored in business management and horticulture, and minored in entrepreneurial studies. Small businesses have always been a passion of hers and she dreams of buying an acreage in the near future.

Before PFI, Megan worked in various support staff roles in the real estate industry. These experiences helped to strengthen her skills in business development, systems creation and management and client relations. After work, Megan enjoys gardening, home renovating, exploring new restaurants and spending time with family and friends. ■

Kasey Bunce | Finance Director



Kasey Bunce joined Practical Farmers Iowa staff in May 2023 as the finance director. In this role, she ensures sustainable funding for PFI programs and objectives while overseeing the financial vision and health of the organization. She also oversees and manages PFI's finance department, where she is in charge of creating and presenting monthly financial information to other PFI departments and PFI's board of directors.

Before PFI, Kasey worked at Living History Farms as the director of finance and administration and oversaw all finance operations, which included aspects of human resources, administration, admission and retail. Kasey has a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in accounting and a concentration in certified public accounting from Simpson College, as well as a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in accounting from Upper Iowa University.

Kasey lives in a small rural town outside of Des Moines, Iowa, with her four children and husband. She enjoys camping, boating, riding all-terrain vehicles, drive-in movies and spending time with her family. ■

Rachel Deutmeyer | Senior Video Coordinator



Rachel Deutmeyer joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa staff in May 2023 as the senior video coordinator. In this role, Rachel shares the meaningful work and stories of PFI members.

Before joining the PFI team, Rachel taught photography and art history at liberal arts universities in Missouri and Tennessee. She

has exhibited photographs of Midwestern people, prairie and farms at galleries across the nation.

Raised in eastern Iowa, Rachel graduated with a bachelor's degree in graphic design from Ashford University and a master's degree in integrated arts from Iowa State University. She enjoys time with family, gardening, bluegrass festivals and reading. ■

Emma Link | Senior Research Coordinator



Emma Link joined Practical Farmers of Iowa as the senior research coordinator for the Cooperators' Program in May 2023. In this role, Emma works with field crop, fruit and vegetable and livestock farmers to co-design on-farm research trials, and to analyze and interpret results.

Emma, who uses both they/their and she pronouns, grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and then moved to Minnesota to study geology at Carleton College. After receiving their undergraduate degree, Emma worked as a seasonal field ecologist and

vegetable CSA farmworker for several years. They then returned to school to pursue a master's degree in soil science from the University of Minnesota, where their research focused on soil microbiology and soil health in annual and perennial grain production systems.

Emma also began to volunteer with Farm Buds, a Minneapolis-based grassroots group that organizes volunteer trips to local farms that she now helps coordinate. After work, you can usually find Emma outside riding a bike, gardening or reading in a hammock. She lives in Minneapolis in an intentional community and feels lucky to be surrounded by friends every day. ■

Solveig Orngard | Field Crops Education Coordinator



Solveig Orngard joined the Practical Farmers of Iowa team in March 2023 as a field crops education coordinator. In this role, she works with the farmer-led education and field crops departments to engage farmers and coordinate educational programs, both virtual and in the field.

Growing up on an acreage in Boone County, Iowa, that supported a rotating assortment of row crops and a bountiful garden, Solveig developed a deep-rooted connection with and admiration for her homeland of field, forest and riverbank.

While attending Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, for music and anthropology, she discovered her passion for outdoor and place-based education at Wilderness Canoe Base, a summer camp adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota. Her first seasons working there shifted her vocational path. After becoming engaged

with food and agricultural systems through a student organization in college, she found an internship at Hidden Villa, an educational farm in California, which united her agricultural and outdoor education interests.

Prior to joining the PFI team, Solveig worked at Toluma Farms, a goat and sheep dairy farm and creamery in Marin County, California, and at Lost Lake Farm, a dairy farm near Jewell, Iowa, that produces cheese from grass-fed cows. She is thrilled to be back in the education world in her home state and looks forward to joining her siblings and parents in revitalizing the family farm in the coming years.

Outside of work, Solveig loves learning new folk arts and crafts, playing various instruments and musical styles, gardening and adventuring outdoors in all sorts of ways. She loves to travel and explore, and hopes she can find a balance between tending her homeland and continuing to visit new places across the country and abroad. ■

Nick Ohde bids PFI farewell as he looks to The Nature Conservancy

My career at PFI started out on the water. It was 2014 and I was hunting ducks on a central Iowa wetland with Stefan Gailans, my friend who'd joined the PFI staff in 2013, when he mentioned that long-time PFI staffer Tomoko Ogawa was leaving.

At the time, Tomoko was doing field work, tracking grants, writing articles and cooking delicious food. I had always wanted to work for PFI, and I thought those sounded like holes I could fill. I applied and was lucky enough to start my PFI staff journey in December 2014.

Since then, I've gotten to do everything from measuring cover crop growth to cooking food for events, planning field days and conference sessions to leading a team in producing PFI's first feature-length documentary.

But I'm most proud of the communications team we've built over the last six years. I was lucky to support the growth of this team of talented, creative professionals that PFI members should know is one of the best in the business.

I specifically want to thank all the members who helped create the video program at PFI. You gave so much of your time to let me and many other staff shove cameras in your face and lav mics under your shirt collars, and you always made us feel at home on your farms and in your homes.



My next step will take me back to the water. In early July, I'll be starting a new position with The Nature Conservancy, managing their work in the Mississippi River Basin. I'll continue to work toward PFI's vision of clean water in this role, supporting scientists and others working on nutrient reduction, floodplain restoration and more.

I won't be a stranger to PFI – my wife Emily

and I are lifetime members, and we live in Ames. I'm honored to have supported the PFI community by sharing your stories with more people every year.

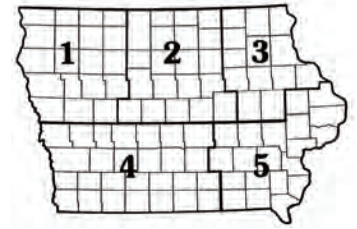
Thanks for everything,

Nick Ohde

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome, New Members!

From March 2, 2023–May 17, 2023



DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Ryan Van Beek – Orange City

DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Amie Adams – Ames
- Garrett Anderson – Leland
- Nevin Bailey – Jefferson
- Ben Lehman – Slater
- Ryan Madison – Gladbrook
- Shelby Smith – Ames
- Scott Torkelson – Thornton
- Julie Wright – Clear Lake

DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Jessica Bartscher – Elkader
- Mark Cassel – Manchester
- Erin Erickson – Marion
- Robert Hanson – La Porte City
- Bryan Janko – Cedar Rapids
- Guy Ngoma – Cedar Rapids
- Matt Riniker – Guttenberg
- Edmund Ruff – Farmersburg
- Joe Sass – Monona
- Nicholas Zakrasek – Cedar Rapids

DISTRICT 4 - SOUTHWEST

- Heidi Beckwith – Oakland
- Tom and Marcy Bradley – St Charles
- Angela and Chad Brockman – Atlantic
- Dylan Farrell – Ankeny
- Katie Flinn – Indianola

- Sue and Al Ites – Granger
- David and Kathleen Law – Des Moines
- Julia McGuire – West Des Moines
- Ann Polich – Council Bluffs
- Mariah Romano – Waukee
- Key Cooperative, Jim Bob Suiter – Newton
- Josiah and Grace Taylor – Milo
- Matt Thompson – Orient
- Diana Wright – Des Moines

DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST

- Jennifer Breon – Iowa City
- Brent Dresser – Keokuk
- Jerry Dunbar – Washington
- Sam Ingersoll – Iowa City
- Alton Miller – Kalona
- Naylor Seed Company, David Naylor – Scotch Grove
- Jared Nikkel – Sigourney
- Kim Schmidt – Davenport
- Kami Schmitt – Iowa City
- Arlys Van Kooten – Oskaloosa

DISTRICT 6 - OUT OF STATE

- Patricia Albers – Mountain View, CA
- David Dedert – Quincy, IL
- Marshall Fink – Lanark, IL
- Wayne Niehuse – Goff, KS
- Cindy Kamp – Ada, MI
- Atlas Agro, Kyle Kasten – Ann Arbor, MI
- Mark Arnesen – Roosevelt, MN

- Wayne Kozitka – Howard Lake, MN
 - Matt Leavitt – Saint Paul, MN
 - Joseph Merten – Austin, MN
 - Luke Peterson – Dawson, MN
 - Lukas Phillips – Rochester, MN
 - Ritchie Schaefer – North Mankato, MN
 - Betty Tate – Burnsville, MN
 - Abbe Turner – Albany, OH
 - Sarah Wilcox – Barnesville, OH
 - Dirk Oudman – Worthing, SD
 - Andy Bensed – Dallas, WI
 - Scott Carlson – New Richmond, WI
 - Tony Fanetti – Bloomer, WI
 - Dale Theel – Fond du Lac, WI
 - Derek Yanke – Loganville, WI
 - Carol Zimmermann – Cross Plains, WI
- INTERNATIONAL**
- Tim Kautz – Germany

Thank you
to our newest lifetime members!

**David Rosmann and
Dr. Rebecka Tompkins-Rosmann**
Avoca, 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.*



Attendees learn about precision farming with cover crops at the Wisecup family's 2022 field day near Missouri Valley, Iowa.

PFI Current Enrollments

From June-September

COVER CROP COST-SHARE

SIGN-UP DEADLINE: DECEMBER 1, 2023

practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share

SMALL GRAINS COST-SHARE

SIGN-UP DEADLINE: JULY 1, 2023

practicalfarmers.org/small-grains-cost-share

CONSERVATION COST-SHARE

COMING SOON! ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/wildlife-conservation-cost-share

BENEFICIAL INSECTS COST-SHARE

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/beneficial-insect-cost-share

LANDOWNER COACHING PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION

practicalfarmers.org/landowner-coaching

IOWA LOCAL FOODS PURCHASING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

ROLLING APPLICATION

Sign up to be a vendor at iowalfpa.org/producers



Find PFI At

JUNE

JUNE 10 • Gran Festival North Iowa

Hampton, IA | [Learn more at granfestivalnorthiowa.org](https://www.granfestivalnorthiowa.org)

JUNE 26-29 • North American Prairie Conference

Des Moines, IA | [Learn more at northamericanprairie.org](https://www.northamericanprairie.org)

AUGUST

AUGUST 1 • Jamaica OLOA Festival

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

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 21-24 • Oktoberfest

Marshalltown, IA | [Learn more at oktoberfest.com](https://www.oktoberfest.com)

SEPTEMBER 22 • Latino Fest in Iowa City

Iowa City, IA | [Learn more at downtowniowacity.com/latino-fest-2023](https://www.downtowniowacity.com/latino-fest-2023)

SEPTEMBER 23-24 • Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival

Des Moines, IA | [Learn more at latinoheritagefestival.org](https://www.latinoheritagefestival.org)





PFI Field Days

Find out more at practicalfarmers.org/field-days.

JUNE

JUNE 18 | MITCHELL

Maximizing Opportunity in a Small Town
Hosted by Steve Strasheim | Twisted River Farm

JUNE 21 | SPENCER

Creating On-Farm Habitat to Foster Wildlife Diversity
Hosted by Bev & Dwight Rutter | The Prairie Flower

JUNE 28 | PRAIRIE CITY

Rematriating Iowa's Historical Prairie: Combining Historical Management Techniques to Foster Modern Conservation
Hosted by Shelley Buffalo

JULY

JULY 7 | FONDA

Drilling Down on Oat Varieties, Double-Crop Soybeans and Rotational Grazing
Hosted by Neil & Elizabeth Peterson and sons Paul & Timothy | Clover Lane Farm

JULY 8 | NEWTON

Sheep Shearing
Hosted by Greg Padget | Plaid Perch

JULY 8 | BREDA

Closing the Loop With Complementary Enterprises
Hosted by Brice & Melanie Hundling | Hundling Family Fresh Foods

JULY 12 | LOHRVILLE

Purgatory Creek: A Tale of Oxbow Restoration on a Legacy Farm
Hosted by Kathy & David Law

JULY 14 | WEST CHESTER

Shifting to Regenerative While Transitioning Generations
Hosted by Natasha Wilson, Brian Wilson & Nancy Wilson | West Fork Farmstead

JULY 14 | ADEL

Agritourism and Orchard with an Ecological Focus at Wills Family Orchard
Hosted by Maury & Mary Wills | Wills Family Orchard

JULY 16 | STATE CENTER

Elevating Prairie Plants on a No-Till Flower Farm
Hosted by Hannah Scates Kettler & Kurtis Kettler | Minerva's Meadow

JULY 19 | ST. ANTHONY

Pollinators of the Iowa Prairie: Conservation 70 Years in the Making
Hosted by Carl Kurtz

JULY 19 | SPENCER

Relay Cropping, Permanent Clover and Irrigation Systems in Northwest Iowa
Hosted by Patrick White & Chuck White

JULY 23 | ATLANTIC

Trying Out Tools and Talking About Farm Transition
Hosted by Denise O'Brien & Larry Harris | Rolling Acres Farm | Kent Morris

JULY 24 | MT. VERNON

Playing the GAP Game: Looking at On-Farm Food Safety
Hosted by Donna Warhover | Morning Glory Farm

JULY 28 | ZUMBROTA, MN

Converting Row Crops to Perennial Pasture
Hosted by Zach Knutson & Brooke Calaway | Knutson Shorthorns

AUGUST

AUG. 6 | DONAHUE

Diversity, Resilience and Beauty at Miss Effie's Country Flowers
Hosted by Cathy Linker Lafrenz | Miss Effie's Country Flowers and Garden Stuff

AUG. 7 | CRAIG, NE

Improving Water Quality and Soil Health With Cover Crops
Hosted by Mark & Jodi Peterson and Lane Peterson | Peterson Farms

AUG. 10 | LOVILIA

Grazing a Perennial Forage Chain
Hosted by Beth Hoffman & John Hogeland | Whippoorwill Creek Farm

AUG. 10 | AUSTIN, MN

Creating a Legacy of Conservation in Traditional Row Cropping
Hosted by Joe Merten

AUG. 19 | CEDAR RAPIDS

Community Farm Tour at Matthew 25
Hosted by Matthew Arndt | Matthew 25 Community Farm

AUG. 20 | SOLON

Trying Out Tools
Hosted by Carmen Black, Maja Black & Helaina Thompson | Sundog Farm

AUG. 20 | SOLON

Collaborating to Scale Up Local Food Production
Hosted by Carmen Black, Maja Black & Helaina Thompson | Sundog Farm

AUG. 21 | CEDAR FALLS

Growing, Processing and Marketing Popcorn in Iowa
Hosted by Jim & Debbie Fitkin daughters Lora Fitkin & Jennifer Fitkin; and Jim's father, Wayne Fitkin

AUG. 23 | TRAER

Pollinators, Prairie Strips and Oxbows: Creating Varied Habitat on a Central Iowa Farm
Hosted by Larry & Margaret Stone

AUG. 26 | BUFFALO CENTER

The Secrets of Stock Cropping
Hosted by Zack Smith | The Stock Cropper

AUG. 31 | WINSLOW, IL

Practical Tips for Growing Wheat, Rye and Summer Cover Crops
Hosted by Ben Moest & Grant Moest | High Plains Grains

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 6 | SPIRIT LAKE

Microgreens and Marketing to Build a Food System in Northwest Iowa
Hosted by Calvin & Krissy Thiessen | Cherry Lane Farm

SEPT. 8 | BELMOND

Creating Space for Conservation and Regenerative Practices With Supportive Landowners
Hosted by Josh Nelson & Family; Paul Thompson; and Elena Meyer | Cardinal Creek Farm

SEPT. 8 | PELLA

Going With the Flow: Saturated Buffers to Improve Water Quality

Hosted by Jerry Vander Wert

SEPT. 9 | SPRING GROVE, MN

Pastured Pigs in a Wagon Wheel Pasture at Nettle Valley Farm

Hosted by Dayna Burtness & Nick Nguyen | Nettle Valley Farm

SEPT. 10 | DECORAH

Transitioning to No-Till, Tarping and More

Hosted by Hannah Breckbill & Emily Fagan | Humble Hands Harvest

SEPT. 10 | DECORAH

Farmland Owner Legacy Award Celebration

Hosted by Practical Farmers of Iowa, Humble Hands Harvest and Hidden Falls, LLC

SEPT. 13 | WINTERSET

Visual Soil Assessments and Johnson-Su Compost

Hosted by Rory & Lynette Van Wyk | RoLyn Hills Farm

SEPT. 16 | BLAIR, NE

Pastured Eggs 101

Hosted by Mariel & Anthony Barreras | Barreras Family Farm

SEPT. 18 | HAYWARD, MN

Cooperators' Trial With Soybeans Planted Green, Legume Covers and Strip-Till Corn

Hosted by Tracy & Sue Skaar and Mic Skaar

SEPT. 19 | ASHTON

Grazing Cover-Crops for Soil Health

Hosted by Aaron Alons & Andy Getting

SEPT. 21 | WATERTOWN, WI

Cover Crops Following Small Grains and Grazing Cattle

Hosted by Scott & Nancy Schultz and Family | Double S Ranch

SEPT. 23 | STANTON

Aerially Seeding Cover Crops, Talking Farm

Transfer and Cooperators' Program Research

Hosted by Mark & Melanie Peterson and Monroe Peterson | Bent Gate Farm



Other PFI Events

Note: Times are in CST (except where noted).

Full details about all events are available at practicalfarmers.org/calendar

JUNE

JUNE 15 • In Spanish • A Year in the Life of a Poultry Producer
Online | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

JUNE 22 • In Spanish • La Luz Centro Cultural Social
Hampton, IA | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

JUNE 24 • Beginning Farmer Social
Hosted by Luna Valley Farm
Decorah, IA | practicalfarmers.org/events

JULY

JULY 6 • In Spanish • A Year in the Life of a Poultry Producer
Online | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

JULY 12 • In Spanish • A Year in the Life of a Poultry Producer
– July Farm Visit
Hosted by Kate Mendenhall
Okoboji, IA | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

JULY 14 • Small Grains Shared Learning Call: Soil Health
Institute's Soil Health Assessment and Targets Project in Iowa
With Shannon Moeller
Online | practicalfarmers.org/shared-learning-calls

JULY 17 • In Spanish • Social at Valentina's Meat Market
Storm Lake, IA | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

JULY 24–AUG. 9 • In Spanish • Virtual Workshop Series:
Exploring Agriculture
Online | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

AUGUST

AUGUST 5 • In Spanish • A Year in the Life of a Poultry
Producer – August Farm Visit
Hosted by Kate Mendenhall
Okoboji, IA | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

AUGUST 18 • When Pesticide Drift Happens to You
Speakers: Rob Faux, Emily Marquez, Mark Smith, Karen Varley
Online | practicalfarmers.org/events

AUGUST 19 • Beginning Farmer Social
Hosted by Matthew 25 Urban Farm (*following the field day*)
Cedar Rapids, IA | practicalfarmers.org/events

AUGUST 20 • In Spanish • A Year in the Life of a Poultry
Producer – August Farm Visit
Hosted by Carlos Williams
Solon, IA | practicalfarmers.org/agricultores-latinos

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 16 • Beginning Farmer Social
Hosted by Barreras Family Farm (*following the field day*)
Blair, NE | practicalfarmers.org/events

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: _____ Email: _____

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

JOIN OR RENEW

1. I am joining at the level of:

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

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

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

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

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

4. How did you hear about PFI?

MEMBER BENEFITS

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

- Announcements
- Perspectives
- Field Crops
- Horticulture
- Livestock

Please add my farm to PFI's:

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

SUSTAIN PRACTICAL FARMERS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DONATION

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

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

- \$1,200
- \$500
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- \$ _____

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

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

PAYMENT

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

Additional Donation = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT = \$ _____

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

Name on card _____ Number _____

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



Locally grown food took center stage during last year's field day at Global Greens Farm in West Des Moines, Iowa. Tika Bhandari (*top photo*) shared her love of planting and growing peppers, and Marie Andre (*bottom photo, right*) partook in a potluck feast with family and friends at the end of the event on Sept. 25, 2022.

PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

1615 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 101
Ames, IA 50010

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

Standing Tall

Amos Johnson stands on a bluff in the midst of on-going oak savanna restoration at his family's century farm outside of Belle Plaine, Minnesota. Read more about oak savanna restoration on page 8.

