

# the PRACTICAL FARMER

SPRING 2026



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Taking Action for Water

Currents of Change

Where Local Took Root







Kathy and David Law held a field day on their farm in July 2023 where they have restored oxbows to create vital aquatic habitat. Hear about how they and others are working toward an Iowa with cleaner water on page 12.

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### ON THE COVER:

Laura Krouse, PFI's 2026 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award recipient, harvests vegetables in her hoophouse at Abbe Hills Farm in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Read about how she helped plant the seeds of Iowa's local-food movement on page 8.



# PRACTICAL FARMERS of Iowa

## 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

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## THE PRACTICAL FARMER

the Practical Farmer is a quarterly magazine published as a benefit of membership in Practical Farmers of Iowa. Through engaging stories and photos, our aim is to share the knowledge and experiences of PFI farmers, build a strong and connected community of members and supporters and celebrate our collective efforts to build resilient farms and communities.

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



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Several PFI staff members are involved with producing PFI's quarterly magazine.

To see the complete list of PFI staff, including contact details, visit [practicalfarmers.org/staff](http://practicalfarmers.org/staff).

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# Making Our Voices Heard

This February, I had the privilege to visit Washington, D.C., as part of a farmer fly-in organized by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Shaffer Ridgeway and Carmen Black, both PFI farmers and board members, joined me and my colleague Adam Mason, senior policy coordinator, to share PFI member priorities with policymakers. We teamed up with members of the Climate Land Leaders Initiative, including farmer and PFI member Seth Watkins and program director Sarah Hunt, to share farmers' priorities with Iowa's elected officials. Here are the main requests each farmer voiced:

## **Shaffer Ridgeway – Southern Goods | Vegetables and Cattle | Waterloo:**

“Local Food Purchase Assistance was a game changer for our farm, as well as many farms in my area. We were able to provide healthy food to our local communities through food banks, daycare centers and food hubs. Food bank customers knew that we dropped off our produce Wednesdays at 1 p.m. and timed their visits to get our food. We'd drop off 300 pounds of greens, from collards to mustards, and they'd be gone by Friday.

“It was a big blow to us to learn that the renewal for LFPA was cancelled in March 2025. We'd already purchased our seeds and sent them to the greenhouse that custom-grows them. After a few days of mourning, we went back to work, pivoted our markets and survived 2025. Please support future programs, like the Local Farmers Feeding Our Communities Act, to bring back this market and avenue for healthy food for our communities.”

## **Carmen Black – Vegetables, Sheep, Goats, Chickens | Sundog Farm | Solon:**

“I am excited that I can purchase federal crop insurance through the Whole Farm Revenue Protection program for the first time this year. We are not eligible for traditional crop insurance, and until this year have not been able to get a quote for any of the programs we are eligible for. I encourage you to continue working with the insurance industry to make these programs more accessible.

“Similarly, I urge you to include diversified farms and specialty crop farmers in future disaster programs like the upcoming Farmer Bridge Payments for American Farmers Impacted by Unfair Market Disruptions [a \$12 billion aid package to help farmers weather market disruptions]. There are very few disaster programs that include specialty crop farmers.”

## **Seth Watkins – Cattle | Pinhook Farm | Clarinda:**

“Programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program make it possible for farmers to steward the land in ways that best match its resource value. CSP brings diversity to the farm landscape, and this diversity bolsters the local community and its economy. In the southwest Iowa hills where my farm is, pastures, prairies,



From left to right: Carmen Black, Sally Worley, Adam Mason, Shaffer Ridgeway, Seth Watkins and Sarah Hunt. They gathered in Washington, D.C. in February 2026 to share farmers' priorities with Iowa's elected officials.

trees and conservation make the most sense on most of the farm. My farm has benefitted from these programs, and I want to ensure they are there for the next generation of farmers.”

As we headed into our elected officials' offices, NSAC staff reminded us that our voices matter, and we have power to bring about change. Commodity groups frequently visit Washington, D.C., to share their needs. Yet one office we visited told us that these groups hadn't brought up Whole Farm Revenue Protection access issues. While we don't have funds to visit the nation's capital as often as groups who have full-time lobbyists, our voices still matter. Showing up matters.

We have thousands of members who are finding creative and inspiring ways to steward their land, communities and the environment. Farmers like Kevin Novak and Tanner Faaborg, who have diversified their farms with mushrooms; Bonnie Warndahl, who has created land access for beginning farmers; and Kathy and David Law, who have worked to restore oxbows for water quality and imperiled species, like the Topeka shiner.

These farmers are all showing up in different ways to work toward a landscape of resilient farms and communities. Read their stories in this edition of the Practical Farmer. These farmers, and members like you, see the realities on the ground every day. Your experiences and insights matter. That's why it's even more important that we show up to share our priorities and solutions.

Shaffer, reflecting on our trip, said, “Getting involved in policy isn't really my thing, but I'm glad I went and made my voice heard. I encourage others to talk to policymakers to ensure policies serve the needs of our farms and communities.”

As the spring brings a cycle of new beginnings, I hope this edition brings you inspiration and community.

*Sally Worley*

# Giving and Growing

By Terri Mork Speirs

## Welcome to Giving and Growing!

We are pleased to launch this new magazine section that spotlights Practical Farmers' donors. This column will feature farmers plus others who support PFI through financial gifts. We are excited to share stories that:

- Give thanks to PFI's donors
- Educate about the many ways to contribute to the mission
- Show how farmer-led innovation is appreciated by a broad base of community members, including those who do not farm

A heartfelt thank-you goes to the many people who grow PFI's mission of farm and community resilience.

## Jim Sayers' Attitude of Gratitude



Lifetime member Jim Sayers, who farms in Humboldt County, Iowa, considers himself privileged because he has a retirement account. And because "I've never had a day in my life when I wasn't cared for," he says. Jim's grateful outlook is expressed through his generosity, and he includes PFI in his charitable decisions. Why? He offers three reasons:

1. **Connections** - Resources and networking he's gained through PFI events.
2. **Information** - He attended a field day at Dick and Sharon Thompson's farm during PFI's early days, and more recently has received advice about prairie strips.
3. **Soil Health Legacy** - Jim says, "This is a big deal for me personally. The soil is not an asset to be mined."

Lifetime member Jim Sayers gives from a place of gratitude to entities important to him, including PFI.

By law, Jim is required to take out a portion of his retirement fund annually - and pay taxes on it. He chose to meet this requirement through a qualified charitable distribution, which lets him transfer funds to PFI while also reducing his taxable income.

## Qualified Charitable Distribution



Jim and his wife Cheryl still live in the farmhouse where he grew up. It's where, as children, Jim and his siblings walked beans, milked cows, raised pigs and tended chickens. Jim reflects on his parents and upbringing with great appreciation. Nowadays, there are grandchildren in the picture. Jim's "attitude of gratitude" is seen in the way he cares for his family, his land and PFI's mission of resilience. ■



For more information or conversation, contact PFI's development director, Terri Speirs, at [terri.speirs@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:terri.speirs@practicalfarmers.org) or (515) 232-5661, Ext. 1066, or visit our website.

# On-Farm Research Corner

## Connecting Through On-Farm Research

By Emma Link

The program was still 30 minutes from starting, but the coffee was hot and people were already streaming past the registration table. The 2025 Cooperators' Program Meeting was underway. I was glad to see so many attendees.

This yearly two-day gathering for farmers in PFI's on-farm research program is always held in Ames, Iowa, in mid-December – which means the risk of wintry weather. But this year, the forecast was calling for blizzard conditions to start around dinnertime. We were also in a new location – Harvest Vineyard Church – after many years at the Quality Inn & Suites on 13th Street.

Neither of those factors seemed to deter attendees. Over 100 farmers in PFI's Cooperators' Program showed up, ready to discuss their previous season's trial results, plan projects for the coming year and connect with each other. I finally got to meet Darius Nupolu, a new participant who completed his first trial on broccoli varieties in 2025. After welcoming him to the meeting, I introduced him to a group of longtime horticulture and livestock farmer-researchers, who warmly invited him into their conversation.

The first part of the meeting featured 22 farmers sharing results of their 2025 research trials. Kate Edwards, a vegetable farmer and longtime participant from Solon, Iowa, presented

on her cowpea cover crop variety trial. The discussion was popular not just with horticulture farmers but with livestock and field crops farmers too. "I don't like being stuck with just crops or livestock or hort people," says Neil Peterson, a diversified field crops and cattle farmer from Fonda, Iowa. "We have a lot to learn from each other."

The second half focused on setting research priorities and brainstorming trial ideas for the 2026 growing season. Though not every idea can become a trial, these sessions reflect farmers' broad interests and curiosity. During a breakout session for horticulture farmers, Darius shared that one of his goals for the year is to learn more about identifying and treating pests effectively, and to share this knowledge with others in his community. By the end, the gathered farmers proposed over 40 unique trials they'll conduct on their own farms in 2026.

Important work also happens in the ample unscheduled time during meals and breaks. The hallways and tables are constantly abuzz as people chat and connect. Darius says that for him, the meeting was a success because "I was able to make connections with new farmer friends and exchange new ideas with people." ■

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**The Cooperators' program seeks to empower farmers to generate and share knowledge through timely and relevant farmer-led research. If that sounds appealing to you, please contact Emma Link at (515) 232-5661, Ext. 1045 or [emma.link@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:emma.link@practicalfarmers.org) to learn how you can become involved.**

**To read results of trials going back to 2010, visit [practicalfarmers.org](http://practicalfarmers.org) and click on "Resources."**



Neil Peterson (*left*) and Tate Carlson (*right*) are deep in conversation after the 2025 Cooperators' Meeting banquet.



**Left to right:** Darius Nupolu, Emmaly Renshaw, Hannah Breckbill and Gary Guthrie discuss ideas for 2026 on-farm trials during a breakout session for horticulture farmers at the 2025 Cooperators' Meeting.

# Where Local Took Root

Meet the farmer behind one of Iowa's first community-supported agriculture farms

By Elizabeth Wilhelm

**In 1988, Laura Krouse purchased 72 acres of land outside of Mount Vernon, Iowa. It was also her first year teaching biology at nearby Cornell College. But she had summers free – and a desire to farm.** There, on the land she would later call Abbe Hills Farm, Laura grew a large garden, raised laying hens for eggs, produced open-pollinated corn for seed and harvested hay.

But she also did something unusual for the time. While many Iowa farms focused exclusively on corn and soybeans, Laura saw a different path. “I knew I couldn’t make any money growing corn and soybeans,” she says. “I had to find a different route.”

So, she began scaling up vegetable production. Laura built hoophouses and filled them with rows of sprouting vegetables. At a time when local food systems were still rare, she began growing food directly for her community.

She didn’t know it then, but these choices would have a profound impact – one that would ripple far beyond the borders of her land.

## *Building Community Through Food*

In 1995, Laura launched Abbe Hills Farm – one of Iowa’s first community-supported agriculture programs. Community members who wanted fresh produce would pay ahead for a share of the vegetables Laura raised.

That support would help cover a portion of Laura’s farm operating budget while ensuring CSA members received healthy food raised with care. Just as importantly, the CSA model meant farmers and local people were working together to support one another. That first year, Laura supplied produce to 10 CSA members. At its peak, she would feed nearly 200 families.



For more than 30 years – through droughts, market uncertainty and even the powerful 2020 derecho that tore through the farm, destroying both of her hoophouses – Laura has fed her community a cornucopia of vegetables, along with eggs from her pastured chickens.

By her estimate, she has prepared about 57,600 boxes of produce for local households, each filled with vegetables she and her team planted, harvested, washed and packed by hand. “Growing food is fun,” Laura says. “It’s an honor to grow food people like to eat and that I know is good for them.” Over the years, Laura expanded food access even more – by supplying fresh food to local restaurants, including Cobble Hill and Feedwell Kitchen & Bakery in Cedar Rapids, as well as retirement homes and food hubs.

As it turns out, with those first hoophouse crops, Laura wasn’t just planting vegetables – she was planting the seeds of Iowa’s local-food movement.

## *Finding Her Path*

Laura grew up in northern Linn County, Iowa. While she didn’t grow up farming, she spent much of her childhood gardening with her family, which sparked an early interest in water quality, conservation and the environment.

Laura entered Iowa State University as a political science major with plans to become an environmental lawyer. But her future path changed when she asked to take a soils course. “I was told it wasn’t allowed because it didn’t count toward my degree requirements,” Laura says. She chose to follow her curiosity and switch her major to agronomy – a decision that directed her path toward farming.

Laura earned degrees in agronomy and farm management from ISU, followed by a master’s degree in agronomy from the

(Continued on page 10 →)



**Clockwise from top left:** The Abbe Hills Farm sign welcomes visitors to the diversified farm. Pastured chickens gather beneath a mobile coop. Laura speaks with attendees during a field day at the farm in 2002. Fresh carrots are harvested from the hoophouse. Laura receives the 2026 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award at the Practical Farmers of Iowa’s 2026 Annual Conference in Des Moines, Iowa, in January. From left are Natasha Hegmann, Maja Black, Laura Krouse, Carmen Black, Margaret Smith and Kate Edwards.

## Despite her influence, Laura does not see herself as a pioneer.

*“I just did what I wanted to do, which is farm.”*

University of Florida. Her graduate work focused on subsistence farming, where families grow food primarily to feed themselves, which brought her to farming communities in Iowa, Kansas, Florida and Costa Rica.

During that time, Laura studied food farms and learned about many different systems in practice. Along the way, she realized she wanted to farm herself. Farming, she says, gave her room to experiment. “It’s a really creative career,” Laura says. “You can do a lot of things. You can also get stuck in a very narrow box. But I saw the opportunity to do some really fun things.”

### *More Than Vegetables*

Everything fell into place in 1988, when her mother spotted a farm listing in the newspaper. Laura purchased the property that would become Abbe Hills Farm and set about farming in a way that reflects her values of community and land stewardship.

That stewardship goes beyond vegetables. Open-pollinated corn tassels sway, releasing pollen carried naturally by wind rather than developed by a corn breeder. “I grew it, processed it for seed and sold it all around the Upper Midwest, primarily to organic farmers and dairy farmers,” Laura says. The base genetics of this corn come from seed that has been grown and carefully selected on the farm since 1903.

Across the farm, a pond she built captures runoff, restored wetlands filter water and pollinator habitat hums with life. She uses minimal pesticides and rotates crops using extended rotations of cover crops, corn, soybeans and hay. These practices all improve water quality and soil health, and strengthen the farm over time.

Despite her influence, Laura does not see herself as a pioneer. “I just did what I wanted to do, which is farm.” Still, she understands that the early choices she and other growers made mattered. When local food systems were just getting started in Iowa, Laura and those other local-food trailblazers showed that community-based farming could work – and endure.

Laura’s influence also extends beyond her own farm. She served for more than 20 years as a commissioner with the Linn Soil and Water Conservation District. And she taught biology at Cornell College for nearly two decades.

When asked about her success, Laura is quick to credit the people around her. “Everything I know, I’ve learned from connections I’ve made through PFI,” she says. “I just feel so

lucky to know people who can figure things out, look at things differently and try something new.”

### *A Career Worth Honoring*

In January, Laura received PFI’s 2026 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award for her lifelong commitment to sustainable farming and feeding her community. Each year, PFI honors an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food.

Longtime PFI member and board member Margaret Smith, of Hampton, Iowa, presented the award. The two first met at ISU when Laura transferred into the agronomy program. Margaret recalls spotting Laura right away. At the time, there were only three women enrolled. “Her farm has been a perfect vehicle for her to live her values: education, environmental wellbeing, fairness and good food,” Margaret says. “Iowa is better for the work Laura has done.”

Laura has made sharing knowledge a central part of her work. Over the years, she has mentored hundreds of students and beginning farmers, many of them working side by side with her in the hoophouses and fields at Abbe Hills Farm. She has also taken part in PFI on-farm research and shared her knowledge at many field days, conferences and more.

“I’ve had the privilege of being around a lot of really creative people who want to farm,” Laura says. “It makes me feel hopeful about how we’re going to feed ourselves.”

### *Making Space*

That hope carries into her plans for the future. After decades of hard work, the years show in her weathered hands, and Laura is beginning to step back as young farmers take over both the farm and the open-pollinated corn business. Still, she remains closely involved. Laura continues to manage the crop ground, tends to her home garden, keeps an eye on the hoophouses and offers advice when needed.

“These are really smart, creative, competent and capable young families,” she says. “They’re going to do awesome things, as long as we get out of the way.”

She carries a quiet pride in what she has built, earned by showing up year after year. At the heart of her work is a simple belief she has held from the start. “I just want people to be able to have access to really good food,” Laura says. “Everybody, no matter their income, ought to be able to eat well.” ■

## Meet Our Board

# Q & A

## with Kristine Lang



Kristine with her 2025 research team. From left to right: Kristine Lang, Gabby Thooft, Chloe Dondlinger, Karissa Bickett and Kristina Harms.

**Kristine Lang, at-large board member of Practical Farmers of Iowa, lives in Brookings, South Dakota, with her husband, Brent, and daughter, Wren. Kristine manages a local-food and cut-flower research program through South Dakota State University, where she is an assistant professor and extension consumer horticulture specialist.**

**In this Q&A, we learn about Kristine's upbringing in Minnesota, her graduate studies in Iowa and work in South Dakota, and more. This background endows Kristine with a broad and rich knowledge, which she brings to her work with Practical Farmers. (This interview has been lightly edited for length, style and clarity.)**

By Emma Liddle

### **When did you know you wanted to study agronomy and horticulture?**

I grew up on a turkey farm in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota. My dad and I grew vegetables, roses and flowers. So the love of all things green came naturally to me. In high school, I got involved in the National FFA Organization and found my passion was the nursery and landscape competition. I enjoyed studying for the exams and learning how to identify trees and shrubs.

Originally, I only wanted to study plants, but added a communications major [in school] because I also enjoyed talking about them. I worked for three years in garden centers and a research greenhouse before deciding to pursue a graduate degree. Once I started, I honed my focus on food crops and food systems and didn't look back.

### **When did you hear about Practical Farmers of Iowa?**

The strong ties between PFI and the sustainable agriculture graduate program at Iowa State University meant PFI was on my radar within my first two weeks of moving to Iowa. I remember touring the office [on 5th Street in Ames], and sitting in a small breakroom listening to Sarah

Carlson, Liz Kolbe, Nick Ohde, Stefan Gailans and Steve Carlson.

I attended the PFI conference as a graduate student thanks to a generous donation from Helen Gunderson, covering my registration fee. My first field day was hosted by Billy Sammons and George Naylor, so Billy's passing felt especially sad to me this past year.

### **What differences exist in the agricultural landscape between South Dakota and Iowa?**

I am no stranger to shorter growing seasons but needed reminding when I moved here from Iowa. I've had to retrain my brain to later planting schedules. And while high tunnels are a useful tool, they still have their limitations.

We've had some gnarly wind storms the past several years, including multiple derechos. I spend a lot of time reminding farmers who build high tunnels to install bows every 4 feet and use double poly [a greenhouse-grade plastic film] with an inflation fan to withstand wind speeds of 60 miles per hour or more.

The western side of South Dakota is much more arid than Iowa, and growing in the Black Hills of South Dakota brings many challenges with fluctuating temperatures, heavy clay soils and high

wildfire risk. I have a lot of respect for vegetable and cut-flower farmers who make a go of it out there!

### **You're an "at-large non-farmer" director on our board. What does this role mean to you?**

I feel especially honored to be one of two board members in this role. I try to think through the ways that non-farming members and organizational members interact with farmers and PFI when I engage in board meetings. One thing that's really hitting home is that this will be my last term and I'm one of the seasoned board members. That feels like a big responsibility.

### **How has PFI influenced your work?**

I have really tried to bring the PFI ethos into how I run field days and work with farmer collaborators. I now have people bringing research and outreach ideas to me, which is awesome!

### **Is there a project you're looking forward to?**

I'm excited about a new project focused on heat-tolerant lettuce and tomatoes for high tunnel production. I was able to look at some past PFI on-farm research reports and include some of the farmers' suggested varieties in my trial. I love it when things come full-circle like that! ■

# Taking Action for

# WATER

*PFI members are working to flip the script of water quality in Iowa – and showing how individual efforts can lead to positive change.*

By Vanya North



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**The weather in Red Oak, Iowa, on March 9, 2024 was ideal for an early-spring day in Iowa – sunny and 65 degrees with a warm south wind. But just upstream of town, an ecological disaster was slowly unfolding.**

An agricultural co-op had left a valve open. Over two days, 265,000 gallons of concentrated nitrate fertilizer flowed unchecked into the East Nishnabotna River. The spill would spread 60 miles and kill over 750,000 fish – as well as frogs, mussels and other aquatic life – as it flowed downstream before reaching the Missouri River. It would rate among the worst fish kills in Iowa history.

A year later, after the state had made little progress seeking accountability for the spill, beginning farmers Jodi Reese and Terry Langan of nearby Griswold decided to take action. In March 2025, the couple founded Nishnabotna Water Defenders. The nonprofit, based in Red Oak, seeks to raise awareness about water quality, advocate for local watersheds and engage the community through education and hands-on water quality monitoring.

“We are encouraging a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship with our water in Iowa,” Terry says.

## **A Daunting Problem**

The grassroots organization grew out of the couple’s frustration with repeated pollution incidents. Across Iowa, the water quality picture is stark. Iowa’s rivers have some of the highest nitrate pollution in the nation. Many streams, lakes and wetlands are routinely contaminated by nutrients and bacteria.

This is reflected in the data. According to a draft report released in February by the Iowa Department of Natural

Resources, about two-thirds of Iowa’s tested streams and lakes are impaired. The listing means a water body fails to meet state water quality standards for uses such as swimming, fishing, protecting aquatic life or drinking water.

The factors causing poor water quality are many, ranging from agricultural sources like manure, nutrient and chemical runoff, to poorly maintained septic and sewage systems, to runoff from roads, construction sites and urban areas. The end result, however, is the same: degraded waters that can harm people and the environment.

But the story doesn’t end there. Across the state, people are taking action – from projects to restore streams and rivers, to farmers planting cover crops, to concerned citizens, like Jodi and Terry, working to engage their communities.

## **Engaging the Public**

Since founding Nishnabotna Water Defenders, the group has expanded its mission. “We want to help residents at the local and state levels foster a deep connection to the water in Iowa, and understand the impact agriculture can have on it,” says Jodi, who works full-time as a nurse. Working with Izaak Walton League, NWD has hosted events within the Red Oak area centered on water quality.

Through the league’s Nitrate Watch program, NWD provides free nitrate test kits, available to anyone in Iowa. Data from the kits is uploaded to Izaak Walton League’s Clean Water Hub, a national database that collects and visualizes data from

**“What we want to see is an Iowa that is both an agricultural state and a state with clean water. We believe both can exist together.” – Jodi Reese**



**Opposite page:** Jodi Reese and Terry Langan, founders of the Nishnabotna Water Defenders. **This page:** A view of the East Nishnabotna River. **Below:** The 2024 East Nishnabotna River fertilizer spill killed over 750,000 fish, one of the worst fish kills in Iowa history. A billboard marketing campaign by the Nishnabotna Water Defenders in 2025 was installed to help raise awareness about water quality and nitrate test kits.

a range of community-based water quality monitoring projects. To raise awareness about water quality, and the nitrate test kits, NWD installed two billboards within the watershed in 2025 that encourage people to think about what’s in their water.

The organization is also advocating to have stormwater, runoff and tile drainage added to the definition of point-source pollution. The original Clean Water Act of 1972 did not include tile drainage as a point source, Jodi explains, exempting it from regulation under the act. NWD is hoping to change that. “Pretty much all of Iowa had its water table lowered by 4 feet as tiling was put in over the last century-and-a-half to make land more suitable for farming,” she says. “Now there is all this tiling that rushes water off the land but isn’t recognized as a source of contamination.”

Despite their advocacy, Jodi and Terry emphasize that Nishnabotna Water Defenders is not anti-farming. Terry has ancestors, including his dad, who



farmed in Nebraska. With Jodi, he’s now returning to his family’s small-scale farming roots. They have 80 acres of farmland outside of Griswold that they’re working to restore. “What we want to see is an Iowa that is both an agricultural state and a state with clean water,” Jodi says. “We believe both can exist together.”

Planting cover crops is one practice they say is proven to improve water quality leaving farmland. These crops grow when cash crops are absent, absorbing excess nutrients in the soil that can leave fields during heavy rain before spring planting or after harvest.

Jodi also encourages farmers to be intentional about when they apply fertilizer. “Apply at planting,” she says, “not when it is convenient timing or the middle of winter, where it may wash off into creeks. It would save money, time – and our water from unneeded nutrient runoff.”

### Restoring Oxbows

A couple of hours away, near Lohrville, Iowa, farmers Kathy and David Law have also taken action to protect water quality. Their 300-acre corn, soybean and cattle farm sits along Purgatory Creek, a sinuous waterway that flows into the North Raccoon River. To help improve water quality in the creek, they have restored several oxbows on their land.

*(Continued on page 14 →)*

**“It was very exciting, creating a new home for them [Topeka shiner].” – Kathy Law**

“I wanted to restore the creek to how it was in the 1960s and ‘70s,” Kathy says. “There used to be so many fish, minnows and vegetation, but I noticed all of that life disappearing in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I wanted to restore it to how it was in my childhood.”

Oxbows are U-shaped, shallow ponds that were once part of a stream or river’s winding path. Over time, these bends got cut off from the main channel, connecting only during heavy rain or floods. When restored on farmland, oxbows are excellent filters of runoff from nearby fields. According to The Nature Conservancy, they can remove, on average, 62% of excess nutrients, like nitrate.

Oxbows also provide vital habitat for a range of species – including the endangered Topeka shiner, a prairie minnow that needs clear, slow-flowing water with gravel or sandy bottoms. Once abundant across parts of the Midwest and Great Plains, their numbers plummeted due to widespread

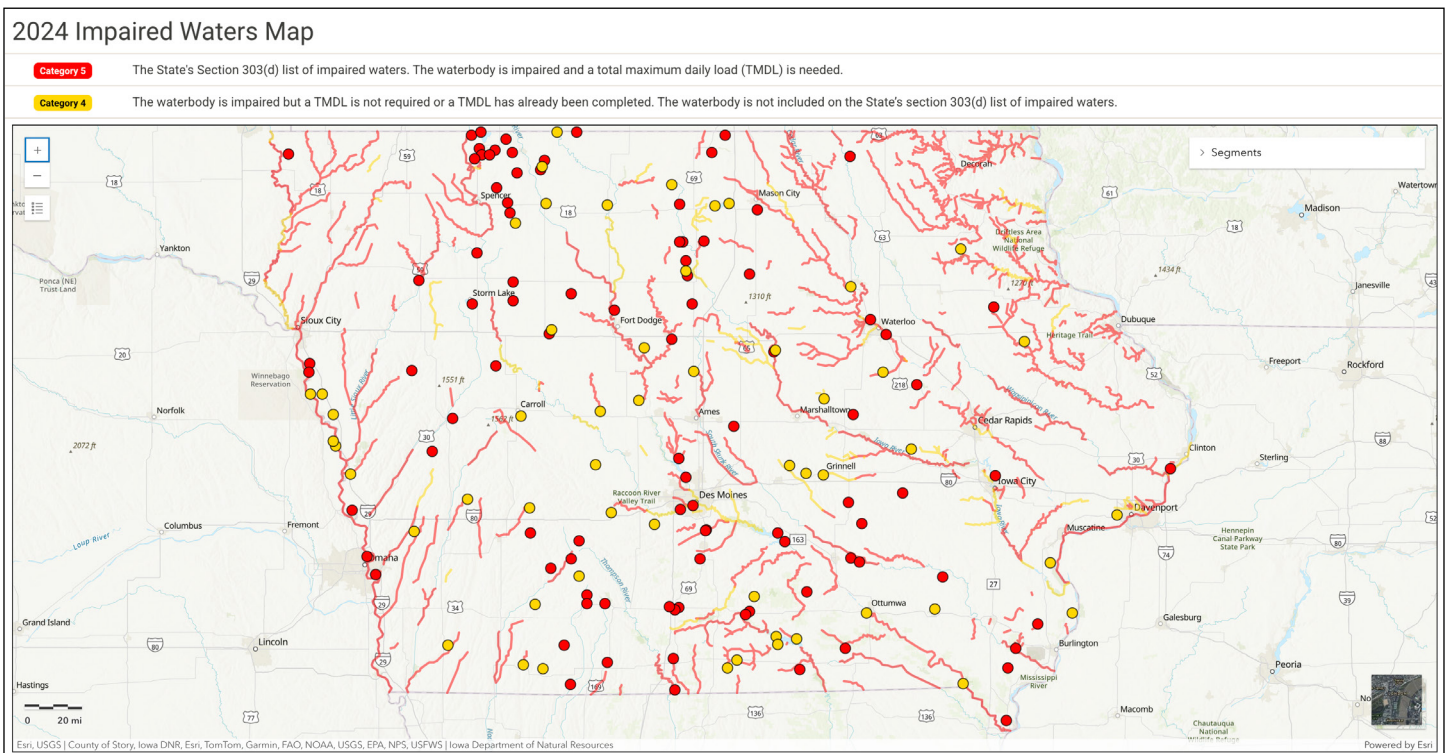
habitat loss, land use changes and water pollution. In 1998, when Topeka shiners were listed as federally endangered, they were believed to occupy just 20% of their historic range.

In 2021, Kathy and David partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Iowa Soybean Association to restore five oxbows on their land. The process involves excavating silt and mud that’s built up over time, often decades, to reconnect the oxbow to the water table. Kathy says when she and David learned that restoring oxbows could help bring Topeka shiner back to Purgatory Creek, they were eager to take part. “It was just a no-brainer that we wanted to do it,” she says.

In 2025, after three years of waiting, their dedication paid off: A population of the silvery minnow, with its reddish-orange fins and dark stripe, was confirmed by FWS staff during routine monitoring. “That’s the first time it was documented that we had them,” Kathy says. “It was very exciting, creating a new home for them. For us, it was the right thing to do.” ■



**Above left:** Topeka shiners from Kathy and David Law’s restored oxbow. **Above right:** Kathy and David stand on their property in Lohrville, Iowa. **Below:** A 2024 impaired waters map from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



# Currents of Change

*Farmers and landowners are taking actions and speaking up for practices that support cleaner water*

By Solveig Orngard

## The Middle Branch

Everything clicked at a class hosted by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network in 2019. “That was really where farming practices and water quality started coming together for me,” says Tammy Deal, referencing demonstrations showing that soils from cover cropped, no-till and pastured fields retain water and structure better than repeatedly tilled bare fields.

Tammy had been managing her family’s farmland near Panora, in Iowa’s Raccoon River Watershed, since returning home in 2011. But because she was not farming herself, learning about field crop agriculture had been a gradual process. “What I understood from the class,” Tammy says, “is that many of the nutrients we use to feed our crops will actually stay with the soil in the field if you have cover crops and no-till practices in place.”

Inspired by what she learned, Tammy decided to try cover crops and no-till on her family’s farmland. She recruited a local cover cropping farmer to farm one of her fields. That first year went well. Over the ensuing years, Tammy’s other tenants took up the practices too, with her support.

To encourage open communication and constant growth, one question Tammy asks her tenants each year is, “If there’s one thing that we could do to continue to improve this farming operation for the next year, what would

(Continued on page 16 →)



**Above right:** Tammy Deal received the 2025 Women Impacting Agriculture honor from ISU Extension and Outreach’s Women in Ag program. **Above:** Tammy’s dogs Zoey and Gracie gaze upon a blue-green algae bloom in Lake Panorama, caused by an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus in the water. Photos courtesy of Tammy Deal.

**“Many of the nutrients we use to feed our crops will actually stay with the soil in the field if you have cover crops and no-till practices in place.” – Tammy Deal**

you suggest we try?” That invitation to exchange ideas has helped Tammy and her tenants adopt more conservation practices each year.

Yet water quality continues to be a concern for her, especially from her home looking out over Lake Panorama, where she enjoyed swimming as a child. “When I moved back here in 2011, there was about a two-week episode of blue-green algae blooms. And over time, the length of those blooms kept increasing.”

The blooms, caused by an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus in the water, can be highly toxic – harmful to swim in, much less drink. Tammy never lets her dog in the water, and she knows neighbors who have had dogs die after accidental swims in the lake during a bloom.

### The North Branch

Two counties away, in the North Raccoon River Watershed, farmer James Hepp is also appalled by the state of Iowa’s water. “I grew up with Twin Lakes 5 miles away and you’d never dream of swimming in it,” he says. “Looking back, that was normal. But that’s not normal, it’s wrong.” He understands that much of the nitrate making its way into rivers comes from farms. Some of it is from fertilizer leaking from farm fields into waterways. Wind can also blow nutrient-dense topsoil into ditches, where it gets washed into nearby streams.

Like Tammy, knowing that farms play a key role in Iowa’s water quality guides many of the decisions James makes for his operation. As a first-generation farmer, he rents nearly all his acres and says he’s grateful the landowner – his farming mentor, Keith Sexton – has never demanded that he farm a particular way. In 2020, James took over farming all of the Sexton family’s acres. He raises corn and soybeans and embraced no-till and cover cropping after seeing the weed



soybeans rise up through a terminated rye cover crop in one of James Hepp’s fields. He believes keeping soil covered throughout the year is paramount for improving water quality. *Photo courtesy of James Hepp.*

reduction potential of his first rye cover crop. James also found that he was able to reduce his herbicide passes in the spring, saving \$15-\$20 per acre.

Eventually, James added small-grain crops into his rotations: cereal rye for cover crop seed and food-grade oats. He values the yield bump oats offer a corn crop. He also likes that he can grow his own nutrients through a summer cover crop mix following the small grain in rotation. James’ farming practices flow from his concern for both the health of his soils and downstream impacts. Seeing ditches blackened with topsoil in the winter frustrates him.

“Every speck of dirt has a nutrient value to it, and where does it go? It goes to the ditch,” he says. “What does the ditch do? Fill with water. Where does the water go? Down the tile.”

### The Confluence

James’ and Tammy’s farms sit on different ends of the Raccoon River Watershed, which drains about 1.7 million acres of cropland. Waters from tributaries within the watershed convene just northwest of Van Meter and flow about 30 miles east to the confluence with the Des Moines River.

Just upstream, along the final stretch of the Raccoon River, is the Fleur Drive Treatment Plant, one of the water treatment facilities overseen by the regional Central Iowa Water Works. The plant sources from the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers, as well as groundwater, to provide drinking water for 600,000 residents of the Des Moines metro area.

In early December 2025, nitrate levels in the Raccoon River rose above 10 milligrams per liter, the legal federal limit for safe consumption. The plant was able to draw from slightly cleaner groundwater and Des Moines River sources for a time. But nitrate levels in the Des Moines River soon rose above that limit too, forcing CIWW to turn on its nitrate removal system in early January. The last – and only other – time the water utility had to run that system in the month of January was in 2015.

Normally, high nitrate levels are more of a concern from April through June as snow thaws and spring rains fall. But milder winter temperatures and lack of frost allowed unusually high levels of nutrients to enter waterways, causing the nitrate spike. Since turning on the nitrate removal facility in January, Central Iowa Water Works has had to run it nonstop at a cost of between \$4,000 and \$16,000 per day, according to the utility.

High nitrate levels can max out the facility’s treatment capabilities. That’s what happened last summer, when nitrate levels rose past 20 milligrams per liter – the highest level recorded since 2013, when it reached a record 24.4 milligrams per liter. The dangerously high levels in 2025 forced officials to enact water use restrictions, including a first-ever lawn watering ban, for the entire metro area.

**“Every speck of dirt has a nutrient value to it.” – James Hepp**

## The Influence

James and Tammy have been using their stories to influence others. “We’re running the nitrate plant already,” James says. “As much as I hate it, I think that’s a great headline to help us further our point faster. Enough’s enough.”

James has joined with Iowa farmers Matt Bormann and Zack Smith to form an advocacy group called the Lobe Rangers to raise awareness and push for a change in policies affecting soil and water health. “Peer pressure is a really big deal in farming,” James says. “The amount of people I talk to that love what I’m doing and know it works but won’t do it because their neighbor will make fun of them is baffling to me.” A long-time attendee of educational events for farmers, James is increasingly stepping up to present at such events. He’s hoping to normalize the conversation about the responsibility farmers have to safeguard Iowa’s water quality.

Meanwhile, Tammy is making her own splash. As a landowner successfully working with tenants to adopt new conservation

farming practices, she spends much of her time engaging with other landowners. For several years, she hosted a Ladies’ Lunch for women landowners to learn ways to work with tenants to make gradual on-farm changes.

Tammy and James both believe that education, as well as opening lines of communication between farmer tenants and landowners, is key to making the changes needed to improve Iowa’s water quality. Though the work can be daunting as nitrate levels remain high, the ripples of their efforts are widening.

“When I get older,” James says, “I want my kids to look back and say, ‘I’m glad Dad stood up for something.’ Because we need to change. We have to change.” ■



Look for Part 2 of our exploration of how agriculture intersects with human and environmental health in our Summer 2026 issue.



**Left:** James showcases his cover cropping practices at his Practical Farmers field day in 2023.



**Right:** James’ concern for future generations, including his kids August (left) and Karsten (right), drives many of his farming practices and decisions. Photo courtesy of James Hepp.

## Learn More



Curious about current water quality in Iowa? See the latest data on nitrate levels, pH, E. coli and more in wells, rivers and treatment plants across Iowa through these two sites:

**Central Iowa Water Works’ Fleur Drive Lab:** [dmww.com/water\\_quality/advanced\\_water\\_quality\\_data.php](http://dmww.com/water_quality/advanced_water_quality_data.php)

**Iowa Water Quality Information System:** [iwqis.iowawis.org](http://iwqis.iowawis.org)

► Learn more about the Lobe Rangers and the Women Impacting Agriculture award in the web version of this article.

# A Different Way To Own Land

*Land-based condominiums offer a creative path to farmland access*

By Rachel Burke

**In nearly every decision she makes – as a farmer, land steward and advocate for beginning farmers – Bonnie Warndahl is guided by a singular mission. “I’ve spent my whole life invested in protecting land and natural resources and trying to regenerate land,” she says.**

That mission has shaped not only how she farms, but where – and under what kind of ownership structure. Bonnie is the owner and operator of Winnowburrow Farm & Florals in Colfax, Wisconsin, where she has spent the past seven years building a farm business. She began by growing vegetables for a community supported agriculture program, then transitioned primarily to cut flowers while also occasionally raising chickens, cultivating mushrooms and growing dried beans.

In addition to her farm work, Bonnie serves as a farmland access specialist for Renewing the Countryside, where she helps beginning farmers navigate one of the biggest barriers in agriculture today: gaining secure, affordable access to land.

She brings deep insight to that role in part because of her own experience living and farming within something known as a land-based condominium – a lesser-known land access model that offers long-term affordability and shared stewardship.

## Private Home, Shared Land

In a traditional condominium, residents own individual units and share responsibility for common amenities, like a pool or gym, by paying a fee to their condo association. In a land-based condominium, the common amenity is land.

The approach differs from similar land access models, like community land trusts and agrihoods. With community land trusts, a nonprofit organization owns the land and provides long-term leases to farmers. Agrihoods are planned residential communities that tend to center around a single farm and often have a high price point for entry. With land-based condominiums, by contrast, land is subdivided into a mixture of privately owned plots and common lands. Residents own their homes on the private plots while sharing ownership of the remaining common lands with other condo members.

Bonnie and six of her neighbors each own a homestead consisting of a house surrounded by 5 acres. In addition to their individually owned parcels, they collectively share access to about 276 acres of common land, which is owned by their condominium association. “We don’t have association fees because we don’t have shared infrastructure,” Bonnie says. “Twice a year, we each pay our one-seventh share of the property taxes on the common land, which comes out to about \$1,500 a year for me.”

Because the shared land is hilly and primarily recreational, the tax burden remains relatively low. “If it were prime farmland, it would be much higher,” she adds. The model significantly reduces the financial burden of land ownership – especially for beginning farmers. “I only had to finance a house and 5 acres, but through the condo association I have access to 276 acres,” Bonnie says. “It’s a much lower investment upfront and a lot less financial risk.”

The land-based condominium where Bonnie lives was established long before she moved there. In the 1970s, a group of friends came together to purchase the 300-acre property and create a communal living environment rooted in shared land access and stewardship. They formed a condominium association, which still governs the property today. The shared land is held by the



Bonnie Warndahl



The circles and rectangle are homesteads and the 5 acres accompanying them at Bonnie Warndahl’s land-based condominium in Colfax, Wisconsin. The remaining land is shared land owned by the condo association.

association in perpetuity, meaning it is not subdivided or sold off as individual parcels. Residents can access the land without bearing the full financial burden of purchasing farmland outright.

If someone in the association decides to leave, they sell their homestead – the house and 5 acres they own individually – as well as membership in the LBC. This allows the departing resident to retain the equity they have built while creating an opportunity for a new resident to step into an affordable land access arrangement. “That continuity is really important,” Bonnie says. “The land stays intact, and new people can access it without starting from scratch.”

### Governance Matters

Bonnie sees many benefits to the land-based condominium model. But she is quick to emphasize that its success depends heavily on strong governance – particularly well-written bylaws. She advises anyone thinking of starting an LBC to draft them early in the process. “Bylaws are incredibly important in a condo association, and the accountability written into those bylaws is just as important,” she says. “They’re your governance structure. They’re what everyone refers to when questions come up about what you can and cannot do on the land.”

Bylaws can cover a range of issues – like where and how farming can happen, rules around livestock, noise ordinances, insurance requirements and conflict resolution processes. They are meant to establish clear communication, outline shared expectations and provide mechanisms for accountability when those expectations are not met. For example, farmers can create a bylaw that requires approval from the rest of the farmers in the condo association if they plan to take on new enterprises or build new infrastructure.

In Bonnie’s association, gaps in the bylaws have created challenges. “We don’t have accountability written in,” Bonnie says. “So when bylaws are broken, there isn’t always action we can pursue.” This gap became apparent when her LBC had problems with a homestead owned by someone who did not live on the property. The house fell into disrepair and the owner’s teenager began hosting parties there.

**Land-based condominiums offer significant potential for beginning farmers.**

“One of our bylaws requires that every owner carry insurance on their house and any outbuildings,” she says. But when the owner failed to comply, the association realized the bylaws did not include an enforceable mechanism to require compliance or remediation. “We ended up having to consult an attorney. It took a lot of time and money to resolve.”

### Opportunities for Beginning Farmers

Despite those challenges, Bonnie says the cooperative nature of the LBC can build a strong culture of mutual support. She also believes they offer significant potential for beginning farmers, particularly as land prices continue to rise. Collaborative ownership can make farm systems more resilient while making farm expansion more feasible.

For instance, farmers in an LBC could share labor, coordinate livestock care, support one another during busy seasons or emergencies – or even collaborate on farm businesses. “There’s also a lot of potential for shared infrastructure,” Bonnie says. “Wash-pack facilities, outbuildings, tools or equipment could all be owned collectively.” The costs associated with this kind of infrastructure would be reflected in the condo association fees farmers would pay, Bonnie says, spreading costs across multiple users and reducing individual financial strain.

The biggest challenge to starting more land-based condominiums is acquiring the land. “With land prices so high, it requires a significant upfront purchase,” Bonnie says. And, she adds, it’s possible that whoever makes the initial purchase may not see a financial return. But the broader impact can be substantial. “They’re creating land access for generations of farmers,” Bonnie says. “They’re also protecting the land long-term, because selling it requires consensus from the association members.”

Bonnie is now actively thinking about how to implement the model intentionally from the start – and how to support others who want to do the same. “It’s incredibly hard for farmers to finance land, even when it’s a combined effort,” she says. “I would love to work with farmers and organizations to build another land-based condominium and make it replicable.” ■

### Learn More



Bonnie is producing and hosting a new farmland access podcast called “Passing the Torch, Planting the Seed.” The series will explore farmland access stories and feature beginning farmers searching for land, as well as retiring farmers looking to transition their farms to the next generation.

Tune in at [www.eFarmony.us](http://www.eFarmony.us) to learn more about land-based condominiums and other creative approaches to farmland access.

# Annual Conference

January 9-10, 2026 | Des Moines, Iowa

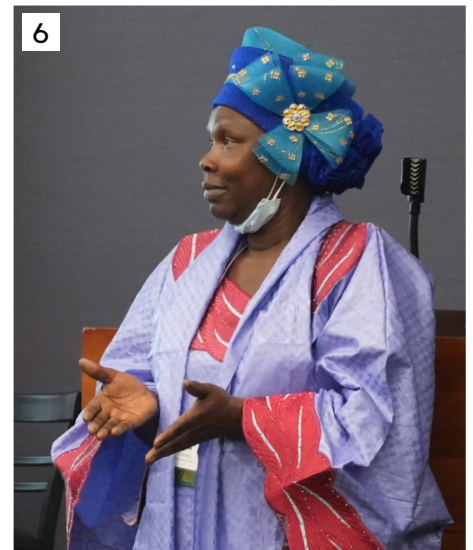
## Photo Album

Thank you to 126 speakers, 102 exhibitors and over 1,000 attendees who joined us at the 2026 PFI Annual Conference! Every one of you contributes to making the conference a success. The PFI spirit of curiosity, creativity and community was evident from the first cowbell to the final goodbye. See you again in 2027!

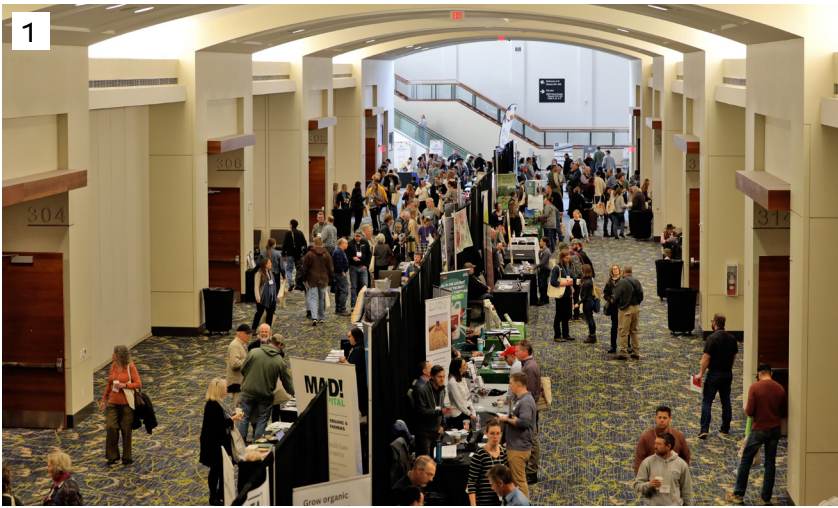


(1) John and Halee Wepking (*left*) and Natasha Hegmann and Pete Kerns (*right*) join 2026 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award recipient Laura Krouse (*center*) for a photo following the award ceremony. After more than 35 years as a farmer feeding the community of Mt. Vernon, Iowa, Laura is transitioning her open-pollinated seed corn business (*to John and Halee*) and vegetable CSA (*to Natasha and Pete*) to the next generation.

(2) Amber Lambke, CEO of Maine Grains, delivers her keynote address: “10 Ways To Build a Better World With Bread and Beer” on Saturday afternoon.



**(1)** Attendees enjoy a locally sourced lunch Friday during the conference. The conference welcomed over 1,000 people during the two days. **(2)** An attendee laughs with Sarah Hewitt from the Audubon Society. **(3)** Ereik Sittig and Kelly Wells Sittig of Orangeacre Farms enjoying the conference. **(4)** Arnulfo Perrera of Regenerative Agriculture Alliance (left) chats with Ralph and Craig Kropf of Yorktown Organics. **(5)** Chad Keller (left) and Seth Keller (right) of Indigo Hills Farm pause for a photo with Katie Meyer (center). **(6)** Esta Minani, who farms at Lengua Lengua Farm in West Des Moines, Iowa, delivers her presentation in Kirundi to a packed room. Her presentation, titled, “Growing African Vegetables in Iowa,” was interpreted to English and Swahili via headsets.



**(1)** Attendees and exhibitors make good use of a session break. The 2026 conference had a record 102 exhibiting sponsors and 107 overall sponsors. **(2)** Mo Valko and David Sliwa discuss a seed variety from Johnny's Selected Seeds during the Seed and Scion Swap on Saturday. **(3)** Ann Franzenburg of Pheasant Run Farm and her daughter, Ellen Franzenburg, compare notes during a break. Ann was one of the 2026 storytellers on Friday evening. **(4)** Scott Borcharding (left) and Dick Isaacson of Growthland chat in the exhibit hall. **(5)** Attendees (*nearly*) filled the seats during the keynote address, where they learned about the operations, challenges and immense local impact of Maine Grains, Inc., which sources and mills regional heritage grains in Skowhegan, Maine.



**(1)** During the Storytelling session, Todd Western IV shares the history and grit of his family's farm near New Sharon, Iowa. Founded in 1864, Western Family Farm is one of the few Black-owned and -operated farms in Iowa, now in the care of its sixth and seventh generations. **(2)** Melissa and Chris Kasten enjoy the conference on Friday after attending Thursday's poultry short course. **(3)** (From left to right) Jackson, Andy and Richard Drost present a session on Saturday about their roles in their popcorn business, Drost Brothers Popcorn. **(4)** (From left) Kathy Dice and Tom Wahl record farm memories and history with help from Theresa Warren in PFI's Conversation Coop. Recorded conversations are archived in the Library of Congress and on the StoryCorps website. **(5)** Ron Rosmann of Rosmann Family Farm signs a hot-off-the-press copy of his book, "A Practical Farmer's Journey," for PFI staffer Heidi Ackerman.

# Making Room

# for Shrooms

*Iowa farmers are growing mushrooms in a variety of spaces to meet rising demand for specialty mushroom products*

By Ashly Senske

**Mushrooms are commonly found in moist, shaded areas - like the forest floor, on the sides of trees, in leaf and compost piles or anywhere else conditions are right.**

But increasingly, edible varieties are sprouting on farms across Iowa in basements, garages, renovated hog barns and custom-built facilities as growers see a chance to meet rising demand for a crop whose popularity has surged in recent years.

While mushrooms have long held culinary appeal, interest in their medicinal and health benefits has rapidly grown, according to the Cornell Small Farms Program's Specialty Mushrooms Project. They're rich in essential nutrients like selenium and B and D vitamins. Medicinal varieties like reishi and lion's mane have high levels of bioactive compounds that are thought to reduce inflammation and support brain health, among other benefits.

This interest is reflected in the range of specialty mushroom products showing up in stores - from coffees and teas, to meat alternatives, to medicinal tinctures, to skin care products and more. Farmers have caught onto this demand and are finding ways to replicate the forest floor in a variety of spaces and setups.

## **Bounty From a Basement**

Mike Mahoney, of Rots Bounty in Iowa City, Iowa, converted his garage into a space for growing mushrooms. "It's like Christmas every morning when I come here," he says. Mushrooms - which are the fruiting body, or spore-producing phase, of a fungus' life cycle - can fruit quickly, resulting in overnight changes to the racks of mushroom blocks lining his growing space, offering a new bouquet each day.

Mike started getting serious about growing mushrooms in 2012 and has been through a few iterations of his growing setup since then. His love of mushrooms started long before, though, as an art student in northwest England. He became fascinated with the rainbow of fungi on his woodland walks and eventually began cultivating mushrooms as a hobby. "I think they're just beautiful," Mike says. "There's so many small things that affect their morphology. It's just a never-ending learning process."

With the help of PFI member Tyson Allchin, a former mushroom grower from Columbus Junction, Iowa, Mike eventually found a setup that now lets him grow mushrooms full-time. He produces around 200 pounds of lion's mane, oyster, maitake, pioppino, chestnut and reishi mushrooms a week. These varieties are considered specialty mushrooms by the U.S.



Department of Agriculture. The designation applies to any mushroom that's not part of the *Agaricus* genus, which includes the familiar white button, crimini and portobello mushrooms. Mike sells his mushrooms directly to consumers at farmers markets, as well as to a few restaurants.

The process of cultivating mushrooms differs from grower to grower but can be broken down into a few basic steps. First, choose a sterile medium and mix it with mushroom spores. Next, allow the spores to colonize the mixture in a warm, dark space. During this phase, you're waiting for mycelium – the threadlike underground part of a fungus – to grow and spread. Finally, entice mushrooms to grow, called fruiting, by moving the mixture to a different climate-controlled environment.

Mike emphasizes that there is no need to spend a lot of money getting started. He uses what's available to him, often reusing or recycling materials that may otherwise go to waste. His incubation room is in the basement of an unoccupied house owned by a friend. "It mostly self-regulates the necessary environmental conditions that produce mycelium," he says. That includes keeping the room relatively dry and around 65 degrees.

Instead of an autoclave, which some mushroom growers prefer for sterilizing their growing medium, Mike uses a repurposed bread proofer – which is basically a temperature-controlled box that also provides humidity. Once his mushroom blocks are prepped and incubated in his friend's basement, Mike moves them to his own garage, which he converted into a climate-controlled room, to wait for fruiting.

### Gourmet Flavor From a Specialty Facility

In Honey Creek, Iowa, on the other side of the state, Kevin Novak grows gourmet mushrooms at Flavor Country Farms. The business, which formally launched in 2018, has grown from a basement space into a custom-designed building designed for efficient workflow. As a former chef, Kevin knows how to make a process efficient. The space begins with an area to prep substrate, leading to a lab for cultivating spores and inoculating the mushroom blocks. He moves those to a climate-controlled incubation room. From there, the blocks can be wheeled into a space designed for fruiting.

Kevin's former life as a chef informs his market as well. Looking for a career change, Kevin leaned into his love of gardening and attended a horticulture program in Omaha, Nebraska, where a professor introduced him to the world of mushrooms. He was instantly hooked and began doing market research. "I realized that this area didn't really have a gourmet mushroom grower," Kevin says. "That started it, with me growing in a basement, in a little tent."

He gathered customers "account by account," starting with his friends' restaurants. "Now, we do between 40 and 50 restaurants a week," Kevin says. He grows oyster, lion's mane, black pearl and chestnut mushrooms to sell mainly to restaurants in the Omaha area. He's now working on his newest mushroom hobby: trying to find the secret to growing more elusive varieties, like chanterelles and morels, which are exceptionally hard to grow in captivity.



Mike Mahoney of Rots Bounty shows off a handful of mushrooms grown in his converted garage in Iowa City, Iowa. Photo courtesy of Mike Mahoney.



A variety of mushrooms are grown in Kevin Novak's custom-designed building in Honey Creek, Iowa. Photo courtesy of Kevin Novak.



Kevin Novak of Flavor Country Farms sells mushrooms to restaurants in the Omaha, Nebraska, area.

(Continued on page 26 →)



Tanner Faaborg converted a hog barn into a mushroom production space for his business, 1100 Farm in Radcliffe, Iowa. Photo courtesy of Tanner Faaborg.



Tanner Faaborg and his brother, Tyler, display mushrooms they've grown and some of their value-added products. Photo courtesy of Tanner Faaborg.



King oyster mushrooms grown by 1100 Farm sprout from the growing medium. Photo courtesy of Tanner Faaborg.



**“You can make so many different value-added products, which allows you to have a more national audience. But you can also help localize the food economy by selling fresh mushrooms.”**

*- Tanner Faaborg*

### From Hogs to Fungus

While Kevin built a high-tech space for his mushrooms, in Radcliffe, Iowa, PFI member Tanner Faaborg of 1100 Farm converted an old hog barn into a mushroom production space. After 30 years of raising hogs, Tanner’s family was looking for the next step for the family farm. Through the support of a nonprofit that works to transition farms from animals to plants (or in this case fungi), Tanner began exploring different business models, with the ultimate goal of retrofitting the existing hog barns on his family’s property.

Many ideas came and went – until he discovered mushrooms and fell in love. “I knew nothing about mushrooms,” he says. “But then I just couldn’t stop reading about them. You can make so many different value-added products, which allows you to have a more national audience. But you can also help localize the food economy by selling fresh mushrooms.”

Around 2024, Tanner started with a small facility in the family’s shop building. He wanted to learn the process before scaling up. Eventually, he was producing around 400 pounds a week in that space. That’s when his brother, Tyler, joined the team and they launched 1100 Farm, selling tinctures, coffee and other mushroom products online to customers across the country. “I thought it was pretty crazy, and it would never work,” Tyler says. “But after a while, the idea sort of grew on me.”

Tanner and Tyler worked together to convert the hog building into a structure suitable for growing mushrooms. The new operation recently began producing its first mushrooms. They’re taking what they learned in the shop and scaling it in the hog barn. Eventually, they will be able to produce an estimated 5,000 pounds of mushrooms per week, mainly for their diversified line of value-added health products.

Though Mike, Kevin and Tanner each have unique operations with different setups and markets, they all share a fascination with mushrooms as a unique specialty crop. They also offer the same advice for anyone looking to grow mushrooms: Just like the tiny spores that sprout a mushroom, “start small.” ■

# No Bull About It

Artificial insemination has advantages and disadvantages. But when farmers are clear about their goals, it can help them build their ideal cattle herd

By Amos Johnson



Paul Quam on his farm near Jefferson, Iowa.

## For 30 years, against the hilly backdrop of Hardin Creek just outside Jefferson, Iowa, Paul Quam has worked to improve his land.

He's rerouted drainage to dry the floodplains, which now grow more than just reed canary grass as forage. The hillsides are clear of dense honeysuckle and the clutching windfall of downed branches, and grass grows abundantly now that sunlight can reach the ground.

Paul has also meticulously improved his herd of around 25 beef cows using a combination of artificial insemination and natural breeding. Paul says his aim is to have cattle built for the land they live on, the forage they eat and his management needs. His efforts show results. Over the decades they've become better mothers, more docile and smaller-framed.

But AI isn't necessarily the right tool for all farms. Deciding whether to use it on your farm depends on your goals, budget, farm size and available time or labor, among other factors.

## Some Benefits

For Paul, one of the main benefits is access to genetics. Flipping through one of his bull genetics catalogues, he says he's not reliant on the quality of bulls on his or his neighbors' farms. "These bulls are probably going to be in the top 1% of the bull population of the United States. It's not unusual for one to cost a quarter-million dollars. We could never afford to own a bull like that."

Artificial insemination has been used in livestock for over 100 years. Today, in the dairy industry, about 60% of animals are bred using AI, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. But it's still somewhat rare in beef cattle operations, accounting for 5%-10% of inseminations.

Jim West, a retired veterinarian in Ames, Iowa, says that all types of cattle operations and farm sizes can benefit. His background in breeding programs and international genetic transfer goes back decades. "If you have specific goals that you're breeding for, AI can speed up significant advances in your herd," he says. If the goal is improving your herd's

(Continued on page 28 →)

*“If you have specific goals that you’re breeding for, AI can speed up significant advances in your herd.”*

*- Paul Quam*

genetics, AI offers faster results because you’re choosing from “the best of the best.”

It’s also simpler to move genetic material like semen and embryos across state lines than it is to move live animals, which are subject to a range of strict federal, state and Tribal regulations meant to prevent disease and protect animal welfare. With AI, farmers can access wider genetics while minimizing biosecurity risks, and the costs and paperwork involved in transporting live animals.

In his catalogue of bulls, Paul has marked the ones that interest him. Like a seed catalogue (you could say this is technically a seed catalogue), pictures are augmented by descriptions and statistics – like “expected progeny differences.” That’s an industry term referring to quantified traits like calving ease and meat marbling that farmers can expect to manifest in a bull’s offspring. With AI, Paul can match each cow with a different bull who complements her strengths or addresses her weaknesses. The a-la-carte approach lets him raise the quality of his herd more quickly than using his own bull to breed all of his cows.



### **Logistics**

For years, Paul had a professional AI technician handle the process. But a

combination of cost and logistics swayed him to learn how to do it himself. “If you call and your technician says ‘I’m at my daughter’s softball game in southeast Iowa, it’ll have to be tomorrow,’ that doesn’t work,” Paul says. “There’s a very short window for this.”

Because cows cycle every 21 days, missing that window delays conception and breeding by almost a month. This can be addressed using hormone treatments to synchronize heat cycles, which would ensure all cows are ready to breed on a date preset with the technician. But that adds other challenges, like rounding up the animals to administer the hormone shots. It might also require extra labor and special handling facilities.

Learning to do AI alleviated some of Paul’s logistical challenges. But he says it takes practicing on hundreds of cows to become competent. He recommends taking classes and offering to help neighbors for free to gain experience. Training helps farmers understand a cow’s reproductive anatomy, semen handling, sanitation protocols and how to use an AI gun properly to ensure correct semen placement – and to avoid harming the cow. Performed incorrectly, artificial insemination can cause pain, lead to infection or even result in infertility or death. It can also lower your success rate. Attention to detail is crucial.



Paul’s curious Simmental cattle investigate the visitors to their dry lot in Jefferson, Iowa.



Jim and Mary West

Photo courtesy of Jim West.

Even after you've achieved a level of familiarity and confidence, success can be mixed. Paul says his cows conceive around 70% of the time through AI, though his success has varied by 20% on either side of that. There's only so much you have control over, Paul explains. Even if the cow is in perfect health, the semen is pristine and the timing is perfect, it could be 100 degrees in the shade and nothing will take.

In part, that's why Paul's bull is usually more successful, at around 80% of cows bred on their first cycle. Jim points out that bulls have better luck because they have nothing else to do. "They're standing out there, willing to try multiple times," he says. "It's more likely they'll hit the perfect moment." Fresh semen also has more sperm that live longer compared with frozen and thawed sperm.

To make sure his cows have the best chance of being bred, Paul keeps a "clean-up" bull on hand. Ten days after artificially inseminating his cows, he lets the bull out with them. The time delay allows for enough difference in development that when he later does a blood test to check for pregnancy, he can tell which cows conceived by AI and which were bred naturally.

This approach means that Paul still has to maintain a bull, which adds expense on top of the costs of his AI program. Going 100% AI is possible, but it requires a high level of skill and management. So for Paul, keeping the bull is worth it for ensuring all his cattle get bred in a timely manner.

## Things To Consider

Beyond the learning curve, starting an AI program also has other costs, ranging from semen straws and storage tanks, to drugs for synchronizing cows' heat, to labor and handling costs – along with fees to hire a professional AI technician. And while boosting a herd's genetics is one of the advantages of AI, there's a flipside as well: large-scale genetic diversity can rapidly drop.

The dairy industry presents a cautionary tale. In 2015, Penn State University researchers found that over 99% of Holstein sires today trace their lineage back to just two bulls from the 1960s. While Penn State is now leading an effort to recover lost Holstein lineages, it will take time to meaningfully fix the bottleneck. Inbreeding "narrows the genetic base," Jim says. This can increase the risk of inherited diseases and make it hard for a population to adapt to future disease or environmental threats.

Jim underscores the point with another example. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, dairy farmers around the world started noticing a higher number of stillborn calves. Others were getting recurrent infections and dying within a few months. Tracing the common denominator, USDA researchers found the farmers had all bought genetics from an American bull –



Paul makes notes on some potential Simmental bulls he'll research more before buying, plus one bull he has experience with but whose calves are a little wild.

another popular sire from the 1960s – that was a carrier for bovine leukocyte adhesion deficiency.

"He impacted the dairy industry all over Western Europe and across this country just because he had really good feet and legs," Jim says. "But he also had bad blood."

Protecting his herd's health is one reason why Paul uses AI, and why he's chosen to keep a closed herd from the start. By only growing his herd from calves born on the farm, Paul avoids the risk of exposing his cows to parasites and diseases that could lurk in outside cattle. He can trace the lineage of all his animals back generations, and can do the same with the bulls he selects in the donor registry. But as the cautionary tales show, AI isn't a guarantee against future problems either.

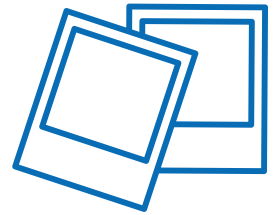
So how do you decide if AI is for you? Paul emphasizes the importance of knowing your numbers and comparing potential expenses between systems. If you're starting from scratch, the question of economics might balance out differently than if you've already invested in infrastructure.

Paul adds that AI doesn't have to be all or nothing. It can be used as part of a hybrid system. Like other management practices, it's important to do your homework, know your goals – and treat AI as another possible tool for building the farm you want. ■

# PFI MEMBER

## Photo Album

This section features photos taken by PFI members. Whether you're a farmer, landowner or a non-farmer, we invite you to share your images of the everyday, the awe-inspiring or the curiously beautiful from your farm or community; we'll work to curate them into the album.



My grandson Teddy helping with sweet potato planting. (Gary Guthrie, Growing Harmony Farm, Nevada, Iowa)



Chickens enjoying breakfast and a beautiful sunrise. (Ralph Chiodo II, Haven Acres Regenerative Farmstead, Des Moines, Iowa)



Reviewing the cover crop demonstration plot in Polk County, Iowa. (Michael James, Ankeny, Iowa)



My favorite photo from the PFI 2026 Annual Conference. Left to right: Omar de Kok-Mercado with sons, Owen (top) and Niles (middle), Tim Youngquist and Maggie McQuown. (Meghan Filbert, La Farge, Wisconsin)



Looking forward to another year in bloom at Rose Farm. Photo by David Blum. (Kari Rose, Rose Farm, Norwalk, Iowa)



An aerial photograph of an oxbow restoration on the east side of Beaver Creek on my farmland in Pocahontas County, Iowa. There are a total of five oxbows in the plan, three of which are pictured. (Helen Gunderson, Ames, Iowa)



The northern lights in brilliant color above an old corn crib. (MaryAnn Mathis, Cory Family Farm, Elkhart, Iowa)



I have had lots of people tell me we needed a new sign. Every small-business owner will tell you it's sometimes hard to keep up with everything that needs to be done. We are happy to announce, new for 2026 ... our new sign! (Lyle Matteson, Lee's Greens, Nevada, Iowa)



Wisdom imparted, learning received from Joel Salatin. Photo by Caleb R. (Ralph Chiodo II, Haven Acres Regenerative Farmstead, Des Moines, Iowa)



Have a photo you'd like featured in the magazine?  
Email it to [rachel.deutmeyer@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:rachel.deutmeyer@practicalfarmers.org) or tag PFI on social media and let us know!

# Review of Dave Hage & Josephine Marcotty's "Sea of Grass"

Reviewed by Chris Johnson

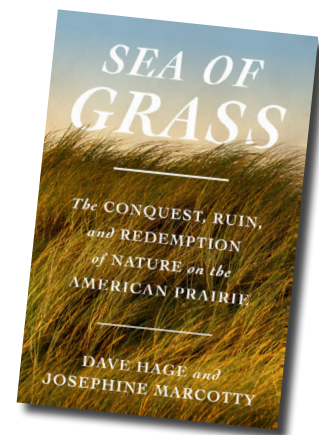
**The brilliantly crafted introduction to the remarkable book "Sea of Grass: The Conquest, Ruin, and Redemption of Nature on the American Prairie"** published in May 2025 by authors Dave Hage and Josephine Marcotty, describes "the paradox of the prairie" and how it shows up in a variety of ways. This idea is a vibrant thread running throughout the book's narrative. At the start, for example, we learn that the American prairie is at once one of the richest, and most threatened, ecosystems on Earth.

The introduction also previews the authors' even-handed portrayal of farmers and ranchers. "It would be easy to cast farmers as the villains of this story," they write, foreshadowing later descriptions of how decades of widespread tillage, tile drainage and fertilization practices are damaging the soil, water and climate. But they hasten to emphasize that such a characterization "would be unfair and mostly incorrect."

Rather, the authors describe the farmers they met as "generous, curious and hardworking people who survive in a system not of their own making." We're shown the ingenuity, grit, determination and strength of farmers and ranchers, and their powerlessness in the face of forces largely beyond their control – weather, huge profit-driven corporations, markets and prices, costs, government policy; the list is long.

Discussing the transformation of the prairie to agriculture over the course of about 100 years, Dave and Josephine acknowledge the vastly enlarged capacity to feed the world that resulted. And they decry the disastrous environmental and social effects of doing so. The book deftly portrays both the profound fragility and remarkable resilience of the ecosystems – and the human beings – that collectively make up the American prairie.

At the same time, the authors artfully paint an enthralling picture of the stunning beauty and biodiversity that's above and below the ground. Their frequent invitations to marvel at the prairie's wonders are interspersed with illuminating conversations with farm and ranch families around their kitchen tables or out in the field. The lush narrative tapestry also includes well-researched strands of geological and social history, science (biology, botany, chemistry, climate science, hydrology), sociology and anthropology, politics and public policy, economics, arts and culture, and more.



The authors manage to incorporate both the majestic sweep of huge realities and complex questions – such as the impact of industrial versus regenerative farming practices on the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, a vast area where marine life can't survive due to algal blooms caused by massive nutrient pollution – and the close-up, nuanced stories of individual people, families and communities.

The book's subtitle foreshadows what for some might be the whiplash-inducing experience of reading the book: in turns frustration, despair, helplessness, even anger interspersed with moments of awe and wonder, exhilaration and astonishment, gratitude and joy. There is much in the book that is bleak and overwhelming. Thankfully, the authors also point to reasons for hope. Examples include Daybreak Ranch in South Dakota, where economics and care for the Earth have developed a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship. "It turns out that working with nature, rather than fighting it, saves ranchers a lot of money," they write.

Happily for this audience, the book also features a fairly extensive and positive portrayal of PFI. It highlights PFI's championing of "a trio of well-known and well-studied conservation techniques" like no-till, cover crops and diversified crop rotations. One of PFI's great strengths, they note, is that it "knows how to talk farmer." It avoids partisan politics. And in its wide range of programs and initiatives, PFI brings together farmers, scientists, multinational consumer food companies and reformers under a big tent.

In so wonderfully crafting this important and engaging book, Dave and Josephine have performed a great service, both to their readers and to the American prairie. ■



**Chris Johnson grew up on a farm near Litchfield, Minnesota, and for many years lived and worked in Cedar Rapids and Storm Lake, Iowa – places that have helped him to remain rooted in the prairie. An educator, facilitator and writer, Chris is founder and principal of The Milkweed Group, LLC. He is also the father of Amos Johnson, PFI's senior livestock education coordinator.**

## Get To Know Your Board Members

In January, PFI members voted in our annual board elections on a slate of incumbent and first-time candidates.

Carmen Black of Solon, Iowa, was reelected as an at-large farmer director (she is also PFI's board president). Kristine Lang of Brookings, South Dakota, was reelected as an at-large friend of farmer director. Shaffer Ridgeway of Waterloo, Iowa, was reelected as a farmer director for PFI's northeast district.

New to the board is Erica Lydolph of Stockport, Iowa, who was elected to her first term as a farmer director for PFI's southeast district. "I'm looking forward to serving PFI and helping ensure our work stays grounded in the real-world needs of farmers across Iowa and beyond," she says.

All board members serve three-year terms and may serve up to three times. The four individuals elected in January are part of PFI's 12-person board of directors, which helps ensure PFI stays fiscally sound and focused on members' priorities. Board members serve in many other ways too, from providing leadership and advice to strategic direction.

Learn more about board service and PFI's current board members at [practicalfarmers.org/board-of-directors](https://practicalfarmers.org/board-of-directors).

"PFI creates a rare space where farmers, regardless of background or operation size, can come together to openly share what's working and what's not," Shaffer says. "That culture of learning and collaboration is what drew me in. ■



Carmen Black



Kristine Lang



Shaffer Ridgeway



Erica Lydolph

## PFI Wins a National Award for Our "Don't Farm Naked" Billboards

In April, PFI was honored with the National Agri-Marketing Association's first-place award in the "Outdoor: Billboards or Other Outdoor Ads" category for our "Don't Farm Naked" billboards. Sarah Krumm, PFI's graphic design and photography manager, designed the billboards and received the award for PFI and our advertising agency partner, Trilix, at NAMA's annual conference in St. Louis.

The billboards premiered in select locations across Iowa in 2025 to raise awareness about cover crops and encourage farmers to plant them. In January, the billboards won first place in NAMA's regional Best of NAMA Awards for Region 3. All regional first-place winners advanced as contenders for NAMA's national awards.

"I was proud to represent PFI at the awards ceremony," Sarah says. "The recognition shows that a strong campaign, a simple yet compelling design and a little humor can make a meaningful impact in hearts and minds."

If you missed seeing the billboards in 2025, you'll have another chance this year: We're expanding the campaign to more cities across Iowa. Between August and October, look for our "Don't Farm Naked" billboards in Des Moines (Aug. 10-23), Ames (late August through mid-September), Iowa City, Denison, Spencer and Fort Dodge. We also posted billboards earlier this year in Atlantic, Ottumwa, Cedar Rapids, Storm Lake and Mason City.

**Did you see any? Share your photos!** If you spot any of these billboards on your travels - and can safely photograph them - we'd love to see your pictures. Send them to [sarah.krumm@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:sarah.krumm@practicalfarmers.org).



## Meet the Newest Member of PFI's Team

Learn more about the PFI staff at [practicalfarmers.org/staff](https://practicalfarmers.org/staff).



**Emily Meyer** | Office Assistant

Originally from a small town in eastern Iowa, she has lived in central Iowa for many years. In her free time, Emily enjoys walking her dog, Sally, finding good music near and far, and baking for friends and family.

## Meet Our SIP Class of 2027

In January, PFI welcomed 16 beginning farmers, representing 13 farms, to join our Savings Incentive Program Class of 2027. The participants together reflect a diverse cross-section of farming interests and enterprises, from fruits and vegetables, to cut flowers, to conventional corn, to livestock, herbs, tree crops, African vegetables and more.

Throughout the two-year program, these farmers will get support from PFI staff, work on creating or strengthening their business plans, make valuable connections with other farmers and grow their savings. PFI matches their savings when they complete program requirements.

Learn more about the Savings Incentive Program, read profiles of the newest class and see profiles of past SIP participants at [practicalfarmers.org/savings-incentive-program](https://practicalfarmers.org/savings-incentive-program).



## Need a Pick-Me-Up? Read Our 2025 Annual Report

With all the day-to-day challenges facing farmers, local communities and our environment, it can be easy to feel anxious about the future. PFI's annual report is a good antidote to those doldrums, reminding us about the broader progress we're making together towards our vision of a diverse, resilient agricultural landscape.

In our 2025 annual report, available online, you'll read how:

- **PFI celebrated 40 years of farmer-to-farmer learning.** Our big-tent approach and farmer-led model continues to grow and prove its value at sharing practical knowledge and building community.
- **We hosted a record number of farmer-led events,** from our annual conference and field days, to socials and peer-group meetings, to webinars, workshops and more. Nearly 7,100 people attended these events to learn, exchange ideas, build community and work toward shared goals.
- **Our on-farm research program continued to grow,** with 107 farmer-cooperators completing 185 on-farm research trials across seven states last year. This program empowers farmers to generate and share knowledge on practical farming questions that matter to them.
- **Our diverse suite of farm viability programs served thousands of farmers and landowners,** making it easier for them to implement changes that make their farms more resilient.
- **And much more!**



As always, the report is filled with member stories, photos and quotes that show the creativity, curiosity and leadership of our members. Read the full report online at [practicalfarmers.org/accountability](https://practicalfarmers.org/accountability).



# PFI Events

Registration information for all PFI events can be found at [practicalfarmers.org/events](https://practicalfarmers.org/events), or by calling the PFI office at (515) 232-5661.



## JUNE

**JUNE 17-18 • Winter Webinar Series: Lessons Learned: Maximizing Crop Rotations With Cover Crops | Free | Online**  
*Full descriptions at [practicalfarmers.org/winter-webinars](https://practicalfarmers.org/winter-webinars)*

**JUNE 17-18 • Midwest Meat Summit | Ankeny, IA**  
*Registration required at [practicalfarmers.org/midwest-meat-summit](https://practicalfarmers.org/midwest-meat-summit)*



# PFI Current Enrollments

From April - June 2026

## Grazing Consultations

ROLLING APPLICATION

*[practicalfarmers.org/grazing-consultations](https://practicalfarmers.org/grazing-consultations)*

## 1-on-1 Land Matching

ROLLING APPLICATION

*Contact Martha McFarland at [martha.mcfarland@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:martha.mcfarland@practicalfarmers.org) or call our office at (515) 232-5661.*

## Labor4Learning On-Farm Applications

APPLICATION CLOSES MAY 31, 2026

*[practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning/trainees](https://practicalfarmers.org/labor4learning/trainees)*

## Precision Conservation

ROLLING APPLICATION

*[practicalfarmers.org/precision-conservation-analysis](https://practicalfarmers.org/precision-conservation-analysis)*

## Petite Prairies

ROLLING APPLICATION

*[practicalfarmers.org/petite-prairies](https://practicalfarmers.org/petite-prairies)*

## Cover Crop Cost-Share

STAY TUNED FOR OPEN ENROLLMENT

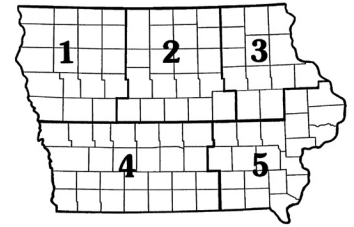
*[practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share](https://practicalfarmers.org/cover-crop-cost-share)*



PFI staff recently enjoyed time together for a meeting and party at Topgolf in West Des Moines, Iowa, on March 2.

# Welcome, New Members!

From November 1, 2025 – February 12, 2026



## DISTRICT 1 - NORTHWEST

- Jari Brink – Sheldon
- Jane Cunningham – Glidden
- Andrew Dial – Lake City
- Robert Donahoo – Peterson
- Michael Frazier – Denison
- Cody Gradert – Le Mars
- Neil Gustafson – Aurelia
- Chris Healy – Westfield
- Dave Hoffman – Carroll
- David Homan – Remsen
- Jeremy Homan – Remsen
- Doug Imming – Storm Lake
- Clint Kanne – Auburn
- Rick Kellen – Alton
- Katy Koth – Rock Valley
- Kevin Langel – Alton
- Tyler Millard – Alta
- Greg Pennings – Sioux Center
- Jon Richter – Storm Lake
- William Rosgaard – Rock Valley
- Michelle Shirbroun – Coon Rapids
- Brett Trecker – Carroll
- Jesse Vande Weerd – Sheldon
- Benjamin Wagner – Sanborn
- Gina White – Spencer
- Ashley and Dylan WolfTornabane – Storm Lake
- Landon Wright – Merville
- Michael Wright – Merville
- Charley Zylstra – Sibley
- Tommy Zylstra – Sibley
- Thomas Zylstra II – Sibley

## DISTRICT 2 - NORTH CENTRAL

- Jonathan Allen – Scranton
- Allan Armbrecht – Colo
- Tyler Beenken – Traer
- Beth Chappell – Nevada
- Loren Conrad – Albion
- Drew Duff – Corwith

- Tracy Jo Engel – Jefferson
- Andrea Fager – Charles City
- Robert Frundle – Montour
- Wyatt Funcke – Jefferson
- Nadilia Gomez – Ames
- Denzil Gould – Liscomb
- Josh Gould – Liscomb
- Paige Gunn – Scranton
- Jenny Holmes – Moorland
- Wenjuan Huang – Ames
- Tom Huntley – Goldfield
- Adam Janke – Ames
- Michael Killewald – Ames
- Roger Kluesner – Ames
- Darrin Kruger – Wesley
- Kevin Lambert – Dayton
- Linda Laur – Ames
- Decker Mann – Marshalltown
- Mike Mckibben – Marshalltown
- Mike McNace – Boone
- Jeff Metzger – Ames
- Midwest Insurance Corporation – Nevada
- Mary Jane Newswanger – Nora Springs
- Ray Plesek – Tama
- Todd Reece – State Center
- Sydney Schilling – Manly
- Adam Shriver – Ames
- Spraytec – Ames
- Craig Stowe – Eldora
- Kevin Thompson – Huxley
- David Whitaker – Ames
- Glen Yoder – Pilot Mound

## DISTRICT 3 - NORTHEAST

- Daniel Batige – Cedar Rapids
- Lillie Beringer – Cascade
- Michael Brannaman – Mount Vernon
- Scott Brant – Holy Cross
- Denise Buddenberg – Decorah
- Gary Buker – Martelle
- Jacob Cina – Clermont

- Randy Cook – Worthington
- Travis Cook – Bernard
- Abigail Costello – Cedar Rapids
- Stacy Davi – Postville
- Duaine Davis – Luana
- Nathan Decker – Dubuque
- Ryan Demmer – Epworth
- Dan Dietzenbach – Fort Atkinson
- Ted Domeyer – Holy Cross
- Ashley and Dan Dye – Cedar Rapids
- Brandon Freiburger – Dubuque
- Mark Gaul – Farley
- Thomas Gavin – Peosta
- Dakota Hawes – Waukon
- Clint Heacock – Holy Cross
- Bill Heims – Delhi
- Martin Hermsen – Farley
- Hunter Hinde – Waterloo
- Loras Hoeger – Hopkinton
- Karen Hoffmann – Dubuque
- Conner Jones – Oelwein
- Robert Kalb – Aurora
- Ron Karrer – Lawton
- Matt Knepper – Cascade
- Mark Knipper – Hopkinton
- William Kopp – Elma
- Dennis Kruse – Cresco
- Jason Lehman – Sherrill
- Byron Manternach – Dunkerton
- Brooks Mathis – Harpers Ferry
- Steve Meyer – Garrison
- Danny Nefzger – Manchester
- NextEra Energy – Cedar Rapids
- John and Meghan Palmer – Waukon
- Randy Pancratz – Zwingle
- Jeff Pape – Dyersville
- Mike Reicks – Lawler
- Anthony Reiss – Dubuque
- Nathan Scheidel – New Hampton
- Mark Schlitzer – Dubuque
- Jim Schmitt – Sherrill

- David Schneider – Farley
- Mitchell Schueller – Farley
- Craig Schuster – Zwingle
- Michael Scott – Westgate
- Ben Scott – Maynard
- James Seymour – Epworth
- Brent Sharff – Maynard
- Andy Simon – Cascade
- Mark Smith – Hopkinton
- Steven Smith – Center Point
- Matt Strief – Farley
- SWCD, Black Hawk County – Waterloo
- Pete Taylor – Holy Cross
- James Thatcher – Cedar Rapids
- Jeff Thier – Worthington
- Gretchen Tucker – Sherrill
- Olivia Turnis – Bernard
- University of Northern Iowa, Center for Energy and Environmental Education (CEEE) – Cedar Falls
- Curtis Wentz – Farley
- Katina White – Shellsburg
- Kevin White – Dubuque
- Greg Wille – Sherrill
- Kenneth Wille – Holy Cross
- Andy Wilwert – Holy Cross
- Allie Wise – Decorah
- Kevin Wolf – Holy Cross
- John Wulfekuhle – Holy Cross
- Matt Wyatt – Hudson

#### **DISTRICT 4 – SOUTHWEST**

- James Anderson – Essex
- Benjamin Atkins – Johnston
- Claire Baudler – Adel
- Brock Bentley – Macedonia
- Sydney Bergman – Newton
- Susan Brakhane – Winterset
- Joel Brodersen – Monroe
- Nick Cain – Cumming
- Anna Carlson – Essex
- Paul Carter – Clive
- Jeff Clarke – Fontanelle
- Connor Clayton – Walnut
- John Clayton – Walnut
- Laura Clements – Des Moines
- Bryan Coffman – Guthrie Center
- Christopher Conner – Walnut
- Kelly Crawford – Braddyville
- Brook Crozier – Corning
- Galen Crozier – Corning
- Angela DeCook – Lovilia
- Brennen Devney – Logan
- Joshua Dickinson – Des Moines
- Michelle Dill – Minden
- Clint Eckles – Dexter
- Lyle Ellison – Braddyville
- Grant Fagen – Dallas Center
- Eric Fara – Irwin
- Amy Gamble – Des Moines
- Roger Gaul – Minden
- Evan Gleaves – Oakland

- Terry Gleaves – Oakland
- Carter Griffin – Atlantic
- Joe Gutschenritter – Farragut
- Josh Haning – Hamburg
- Dylan Hansen – Woodward
- Linda Hansen – Avoca
- Perry Hartley – Johnston
- Sasha Hatton – Red Oak
- Lori Howe – Adel
- Iowa Soybean Association – Ankeny
- Patricia Jensen – Red Oak
- Owen Johnson – New Market
- Christian Jorgensen – Atlantic
- Anna Killpack – Neola
- John Krchelich – Clarinda
- Andrew Larson – Huxley
- Darwin Marquardt – Van Meter
- Evan Maynes – Corning
- Jarrett Maynes – Stanton
- Lonnie Maynes – Lenox
- Nick Maynes – Lenox
- Murray McKee – Carlisle
- Scott Mellencamp – Clarinda
- Clayton Mercer – Corning
- Brian Meyer – Anita
- Justin Miller – Wiota
- Mel Nehring – Saint Charles
- Pheasants Forever – Garden Grove
- Debra Potter – Runnells
- Dave Price – Clarinda
- Evan Robertson – Des Moines

*Thank you*

to our newest lifetime members!

**DaQuan Campbell**  
Waterloo, IA

**Monte Marti**  
Mount Vernon, IA

**Kevin & Kendra Martin**  
Mount Ayr, IA

**Dan & Susan Voss**  
Atkins, IA

**Mark & Alana Yoder**  
Leon, IA

*Lifetime membership is open to anyone, and confers the same benefits as regular membership – without any renewal notices! Learn more about this option at [practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership](https://practicalfarmers.org/lifetime-membership).*

- David Robinette – Villisca
- Wyatt Robinette – Elliott
- Brad Ross – Indianola
- Marlin Rossell – Des Moines
- Thomas Rothwell – Norwalk
- Justin Rumble – Casey
- Tim Runyon – Allerton
- Prakash Sapkota – Des Moines
- Casey Scheidel – Ankeny
- Ray Stall – Huxley
- Scott Stall – Huxley
- Jesse Stimson – Clarinda
- Josh Strong – Bedford
- Dhan Tamang – Des Moines
- Alec Turner – Corning
- Wayne Twedt – Huxley
- Janae Vanderwilt – Sully
- Brock Webb – Pleasantville
- Dan Weiss – Coin
- Debbie Weiss – Northboro
- Chase Wheatley – Massena
- Zack Wolfpack – Milo

#### **DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST**

- Blake Bayliss – Keota
- Kary Becker – Maquoketa
- Roger Brinning – Keota
- Tom and Megan Brockett – Sperry
- Michael Corpman – Ainsworth
- Kathryn Dalton – Iowa City
- Ryan Danaher – Fairfield
- Gracie Danner – Atalissa
- Todd Duckett – Tipton
- Randall Eichelberger – Muscatine
- David Fetzer – Williamsburg
- Cory Gamble – Miles
- Jeff Grimm – North English
- Grinnell Farm to Table – Grinnell
- Maisey Haines – Grinnell
- Helena Hayes – New Sharon
- Aaron Heath – Letts
- Angela Horvath – Iowa City
- Chris Jones and Bridget McCarron – Iowa City
- Keaton Keitzer – Mediapolis
- Neal Kriegel – Malcom
- Ben Leichty – Mount Pleasant

- Kurt Lokenvitz – Bettendorf
- Lucy's Soil – Tipton
- Chris Malichky – Riverside
- Corey Malichky – Wellman
- Carson Miller – Wellman
- James Miller – Wellman
- Keith Miller – Wellman
- Wyatt Mohr – Danville
- Alison Niebuhr – Davenport
- David Niermeyer – Lowden
- Becky Ochsner – Pella
- Ed Pacha – Brighton
- Mavis Phillips – West Des Moines
- Nicholas Prevo – Pulaski
- Holly Reichert – Fairfield
- Anthony Reiss – La Motte
- Nick Rutherford – Grinnell
- Michael Schmidt – Maquoketa
- Perry Schnicker – Washington
- Kenny Schott – Tipton
- Randy Shumaker – Tipton
- Rick Shumaker – Tipton
- Andrew Swope – Fremont
- Nikhil Wagle – Bettendorf
- Joe Westemeyer – Iowa City
- Jessica Wiskus – Lisbon
- James Wymore – Bettendorf
- Darrell Yutesler Jr – Lowden

#### **DISTRICT 6 - OUT OF STATE**

- Jessica Cherry and Lynne O'Rourke – Anchorage, AK
- Kris Godfrey – Davis, CA
- Garrett Hilpipre – Denver, CO
- Ally and Greg Rajnowski – Ft. Collins, CO
- Angie Frank – Geneseo, IL
- Nicholas Frillman – Bloomington, IL
- Winifred Hoffman – Earlville, IL
- Shay Litwiler – Aledo, IL
- Don McCoy – Dixon, IL
- Lisa Redington – Galena, IL
- Fresh Roberson – Beaverville, IL
- Adam Smith – Mapleton, IL
- Dave Stutzman – Lexington, IL
- Michael Vincent – Hull, IL
- Randall Wright – Lexington, IL
- Guthrie Wyss – Minonk, IL

- Chris Beach – Stanchfield, MN
- John Becker – Dundas, MN
- Sam Behrends – Hastings, MN
- Paul Beskau – Hastings, MN
- Climate Land Leaders – Saint Paul, MN
- Angela Colbenson – Rushford, MN
- Melanie Dickman – Willmar, MN
- Luke Dubbels – Randolph, MN
- Mark Enninga – Rochester, MN
- Spencer Enninga – Rochester, MN
- Kevin Fox – Rosemount, MN
- Bernard Frandrup – Hastings, MN
- Arnold Gruenes – Richmond, MN
- Kevin Guse – Janesville, MN
- Jack Biver – Dodge Center, MN
- Derrick Kasper – Medford, MN
- Ben Klein – Elgin, MN
- Dennis Krautkremer – Montgomery, MN
- Nick Krautkremer – Montgomery, MN
- Tim Lawler – Rochester, MN
- Tom Leifeld – Cannon Falls, MN
- Justin Luthens – Hutchinson, MN
- Patrick Maher – Hastings, MN
- Matthew Mesenbrink – Watkins, MN
- Edward Mirick – Faribault, MN
- Andrew Mulvhill – Farmington, MN
- Roger Peine – Cannon Falls, MN
- Michael Peterson – Northfield, MN
- Shane Peterson – Northfield, MN
- Lynn Pfarr – Lamberton, MN
- Regenerative Agriculture Alliance – Northfield, MN
- Larry Roberg – Paynesville, MN
- Michael Rohrer – Ostrander, MN
- Dennis Rossiter – Saint Peter, MN
- Kate Rowe – Minneapolis, MN
- Carl Sackreiter – Chatfield, MN
- Christian Sanders – Marshall, MN
- Brad Saueressig – Hastings, MN
- Jeremy Saueressig – Farmington, MN
- Dominic Smith – Circle Pines, MN
- Luke Stevens – Hazel Run, MN
- Timothy Twohey – Stewartville, MN
- Bobbi Vandendriessche – Marshall, MN
- Eric Vandendriessche – Marshall, MN
- Gary Vandendriessche – Marshall, MN
- Ramy Vandendriessche – Marshall, MN

- Ryan Vandendriessche – Marshall, MN
- Jennifer Wahls – Kellogg, MN
- Dustin Williams – Russell, MN
- Scott Williams – Russell, MN
- Thomas Wirtzfeld – Northfield, MN
- Trisha Zachman – Belgrade, MN
- Melisa Ahrens – Mexico, MO
- Brian Asher – Center, MO
- Kevin Budden – Saint Louis, MO
- Duane Burk – Richmond, MO
- Mark Cadle – Grant City, MO
- Chris Dickel – Green Castle, MO
- Lance Dobson – Lexington, MO
- Mark Dobson – Lexington, MO
- Paul & Laura Evans – Stewartsville, MO
- Kellan Farnan – Guilford, MO
- Andrew Geiser – Chillicothe, MO
- Robert Hall – Palymra, MO
- Brett Henggeler – Maryville, MO
- Jimmy Kempf – Boonville, MO
- Jason Shrewsbury – Lathrop, MO
- P. (Peter) Stephen Baenziger – Lincoln, NE
- Steve Barlean – David City, NE
- Davis Behle – Arlington, NE
- Randy Bromm – Tekamah, NE
- Lucas Brugman – Adams, NE
- Troy Easterday – Eustis, NE
- Nancy Garrelts – Holdrege, NE
- Jonathan Garwood – Eustis, NE
- Michelle Garwood – Valentine, NE
- Mark Hall – Norfolk, NE
- Gary Hellerich – Valparaiso, NE
- Colten Hintz – Meadow Grove, NE
- Trent Jakob – David City, NE
- Ted Jensen – Saint Edward, NE
- Patrick Lammers – Hartington, NE
- Marty Mahler – Allen, NE
- Aaron Nussbaum – Omaha, NE
- Michael O'Brien – Albion, NE
- Orrin Petska – Ord, NE
- Bruce Rogers – Pawnee City, NE
- Christian Suhr – Meadow Grove, NE
- Thomas Volkmer – Syracuse, NE
- Derek Walbridge – Arapahoe, NE
- Michael Wurtele – Nebraska City, NE
- Charles Walberg – Parsippany, NJ
- Ronald Assmus Jr – Plankinton, SD
- Matt Butler – Brookings, SD
- Cody Kafka – Alexandria, SD
- Chris and Melissa Kasten – Parker, SD
- Michael Roth – Redfield, SD
- Dylan Troske – Northville, SD
- BioXRG K-Ferm Organic Biostimulants – Bryan, TX
- Heather Stubenvoll – Murray, UT
- David DeBoever – Radiant, VA
- Alisha Utter – Grand Isle, VT
- John Helde – Seattle, WA
- Sara Ann Schroeder – Seattle, WA
- Katy Dickson – Browntown, WI
- Linda Halley – Viroqua, WI
- Travis Jones – Dodgeville, WI
- Tony Peirick – Watertown, WI
- Pj McHugh Farms – Onalaska, WI
- Krysten Zummo – La Crosse, WI

**DISTRICT 6 - INTERNATIONAL**

- Barry McDonald – Uralla, Australia



Rows of flowers stand tall in the early summer sun at Bonnie Warndahl's farm, Winnowburrow Farm & Florals, in Colfax, Wisconsin. Bonnie lives and farms within something known as a land-based condominium – a lesser-known land access model that offers long-term affordability and shared stewardship. Read more about this model on page 18.

# PRACTICAL FARMERS *of Iowa*

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## Standing Up For Water Quality

James Hepp shares a moment of fun examining cereal rye with his son, Karsten, at their field day in 2023. Learn about how the Hepp family is supporting and advocating for healthier water in Iowa on page 15.

*Photo courtesy of James Hepp*

