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the Practical Farmer

A quarterly publication of Practical Farmers of Iowa

Vol. 31, No. 4 | Fall 2015



Farmer Led Welcoming All Showing Information
30 years
1985-2015
PRACTICAL farmers of Iowa
Strengthening Farms
and Communities

On the cover



Catalpa Magnuson and Xavier Rosmann play while the crowd listens to Ron Rosmann at the Rosmann family field day.

(See more photos from the field day, which included a PFI 30th anniversary celebration, on pg. 29)

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

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



Practical Farmers in 30 Years?

In honor of Practical Farmers' 30-year anniversary, this year we have taken several looks back to our beginnings and history. The milestone is also a good opportunity to look forward as well. What will Practical Farmers be like in the year 2046?

If you're interested in noodling and discussing this intriguing topic, please join us for the PFI conference session on Jan. 23, 2016, when Practical Farmers member and facilitator Tina Bakehouse, assisted by board member Gail Hickenbottom, will lead us on an exploration of what Practical Farmers might look like in 30 years.

From addressing the Farm Crisis of the 1980s to embracing consumer demand for local foods, Practical Farmers has always responded to the agricultural climate surrounding us. About five years back, a group of us spent time at a PFI conference session working through three scenarios of the future of agriculture. What if the agriculture of 2046 involves:

- All of us aghast that we were once so wasteful with energy that we burned fossil fuels in our vehicles
- International corporations, with their research power and resources, continuing to dramatically increase yields of corn and soybeans
- Ecological systems, which we have overly strained, have crashed, and most people struggling toward self-sufficiency



Wally offers to help his owner Dan Beard clean up after the Beard field day.

- Soils that you rarely see uncovered because perennial grains like Kernza cover the landscape
- Most communication taking place in the virtual world – but people still make the annual trek to the PFI conference (they know there is no substitution for human contact!)

See practicalfarmers.org/blog for the three scenarios of agriculture in the future. And if you cannot join Tina, Gail and me for the conference session, send us your ideas.

As I prepare to leave my position as executive director here, I'll offer my predictions for the Practical Farmers of 2046:

- ▶ In 2046, each PFI member has a strong contingent of members in his or her community: There are grazing groups, social groups, equipment-sharing groups and more. (We are already making much progress in this area! I was glad to hear this summer about three young farming couples near Harlan close enough for their children to play together.)
- ▶ While Iowa remains the hub of Practical Farmers, there are critical masses of members all over North America as well, including chapters in every state.
- ▶ The shocks to our agricultural system have been tremendous, including frequent flooding, drought and unpredictable temperature variations; those still in business are the members of PFI who diversified, kept their soils covered and weathered the shocks.
- ▶ PFI farmers led the way in responding to the public's demand for an agriculture that uses nature, not industry, as its model; some agricultural practices that were acceptable in 2015 are no longer.
- ▶ For its 60th anniversary, PFI held a celebration, because its vision of so many years (see the back of your newsletter) has been achieved. A group began working on a new vision statement.

Predictions for the future often end up far off base, because of our lack of imagination and will to shape our future. However, some truths are simple and don't



With Gail Hickenbottom (left) and Dan Wilson at the Beard field day in October. What a delight it has been working with these two gentlemen on the PFI board of directors!

change. So I end with a quote from Fred Kirschenmann, who recently put down his thoughts on his farm's past and future for a PFI Farm Legacy Letter:

"In The Great Work, Thomas Berry reminds us that moments of crisis are always moments of grace. We tend not to make changes until we feel the pain of our current operations. I suspect we will have a lot of moments of grace in our future! . . . As Sir Albert Howard reminded us almost 80 years ago, when we farm in nature's image we will realize that: 'Mother Earth never attempts to farm without livestock; she always raises mixed crops; great pains are taken to preserve the soil and to prevent erosion; the mixed vegetable and animal wastes are converted into humus; there is no waste; the processes of growth and the processes of decay balance one another; ample provision is made to maintain large reserves of fertility; the greatest care is taken to store the rainfall. . . .' This will be the given practical approach on my farm and, I suspect, on many others."

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the leader of Practical Farmers. To the long and prosperous future of this organization!

– Teresa Opheim

Lifetime member, Practical Farmers of Iowa

Building Knowledge – and a High Tunnel

Prairie Sky Farm workshop helps farmers learn from each other

by Liz Kolbe

In the horticulture world, a high tunnel build is a little like a barn-raising, but with galvanized steel, polycarbonate and plastic, and more reliance on self-tapping screws than wood pegs. Practical Farmers has organized four high tunnel builds: in 2009 at Abbe Hills Farm, in 2010 at Genuine Faux Farm, in 2012 at TableTop Farm – and this year, at Prairie Sky Farm, operated by Sara Hanson near Algona. A high tunnel has been constructed start to finish each time. More importantly, the goal of the workshops – that attendees walk away with enough knowledge to be able to construct their own high tunnels – has been achieved.

Each high tunnel build has brought a hardworking crew of volunteers eager to help and learn, and this year was no different: Seven participants braved the late-summer heat on Sept. 3-4 (temperatures reached heat indices of around 100 degrees!) to help erect a Four Season Tools 30-by-48-foot high tunnel. This article highlights the hosts, leader and attendees who made the event a success.

In 2008, Sara Hanson bought her great-grandparent's farmstead near Algona. Soon after, she started Prairie Sky Farm, which sells a variety of fruits and vegetables through local markets. In 2010, she and several friends constructed a FarmTek high tunnel using funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS-EQIP). In 2014, the high tunnel was badly damaged in a windstorm. Sara and her partner, Bob Pearson, removed the structure last fall in preparation for a Four Season Tools high tunnel. Sara knew the high tunnel build would be a big undertaking, but she was impressed by the speed, hard work and engagement of the "crew."

Adam Montri, the hoophouse specialist from Michigan State University who led

the build, agreed: "I think what really set this workshop apart was that we had a small crew, and everyone was very engaged and took part in all aspects of the build."

Of the seven attendees, four joined PFI after learning about and attending this workshop.

Jeremy Quigley was one of them. Jeremy works in advertising and is a chaplain in the U.S. Navy Reserve, but he had an itch to plant an orchard. Three years ago he and his family moved from Chicago to rural Lamoni, where they are trying a little bit of everything – almost literally – on their 20-acre farm. "The plan," Jeremy said, "is to keep what we enjoy and get rid of the rest." Right now, the Quigleys have: pigs, beef cattle, a milk cow, laying hens, meat chickens, rabbits, and dairy

and meat goats. Their first two years, they also planted 250 orchard trees and 100 blueberry bushes, as well as grapevines, raspberries and blackberries.

As he arrived at the high tunnel build, Jeremy admitted he had a 30-by-72-foot Farm Tek high tunnel kit sitting in the back of the truck – and no idea how to put it together. After the workshop, however, he commented that his "favorite thing – besides the food – was that I walked away confident I could tackle a project that, before, was very overwhelming to me." The newfound knowledge he gained gave him the confidence to plan his own high tunnel build, with five friends, in early October.

Jeff Knuth drove 6.5 hours from Kenosha to attend the high tunnel build. Prior to a long career in the Navy, Jeff earned his income milking 65 cows and doing field work in northwest Wisconsin. He and his wife now own Southport Natural Farms, a 15-acre farm just north of the Wisconsin-Illinois border. As they move toward semi-retirement, they hope to create an education farm, hosting classes on canning, basic gardening, beekeeping, weaving and more, as well as expanding their few Devon beef cattle into a small herd.

Like Jeremy, Jeff has a high tunnel kit waiting to be built. Inspired by the premise of the Prairie Sky Farm workshop – that of farmer-centered, hands-on learning – he is working with his local extension agent and NRCS to arrange a similar workshop in



▲ From left to right: Daniel Bowser (in front of ladder), Jeremy Quigley (on ladder), Jeff Knuth, Chris Deal and Josh Nelson secure cross braces and purlines.



▲ Bob Pearson, Jeff Knuth and Sara Hanson attach the base board to the ground posts.



▲ **Michael McNeil and Daniel Bowser** close a brace band on a cross brace.

the spring for Illinois and Wisconsin locals. "You can see something in a book," Jeff said, "but when you see it demonstrated, do it yourself and then have somebody come around and check to make sure you did it right – that is incredibly valuable."

Michael McNeil lives and farms near Algona, and is also agricultural consultant. Always working on a new project, he heard about the high tunnel build workshop just in time: He had a Four Seasons high tunnel half built, and needed guidance on how to cover the high tunnel with plastic. By the end of September, his high tunnel still wasn't quite finished, but Michael said he was hopeful he'd have plants in before winter.

Like, Jeremy, Jeff and Michael, the high tunnel build was **Chris Deal's** first experience with Practical Farmers of Iowa. Chris' parents are third-generation farmers at Deal's Orchard, where they manage 45 acres of apple trees, plus pumpkins, a corn maze and Christmas trees near Jefferson. Chris works as a senior project manager at Modus in Des Moines, but he and his wife often go to the orchard on weekends in the fall to help out. Chris and his wife also own farmland next to the orchard, which they currently rent out. They're shopping for a high tunnel to put up in the spring, using funding they've secured through NRCS.

"I was impressed with the quality of the [high] tunnel we put up at Sara's," Chris said, noting he was considering a Four Season Tools brand tunnel. "We're looking at a high tunnel as a way to supplement the other offerings at the orchard. We'll probably do some tomato production, but we really want to do something outside

the norm. Some of the research on sweet cherries and peaches seems promising."

After working as a journalist for 10 years, **Josh Nelson** returned to Belmond to farm with his father, two uncles and a cousin, making him the sixth generation in a line of Iowa farmers. The family works collaboratively on corn, soybeans and pigs, but Josh is also trying his hand at produce on his portion of the farm, which he calls Cardinal Prairie Farm. Now in his second year of production, he sells through North Iowa Fresh (where he is also on the board of directors), at a local farmers market and directly to restaurants in the Wright County area.

"I joined PFI originally to learn more about cover crops and controlling nutrient runoff on my fields," Josh said. "Other articles in the [Practical Farmers] quarterly newsletter got me thinking about how I



▲ **Adam Montri, Sara Hanson and Bob Pearson** pose with Sara and Bob's dog, Chico, in front of the finished high tunnel.

could diversify my farm income, which led me to start the produce operation. I hope to expand the chemical-free produce to a few acres in the next five years." The high tunnel build, with such an intense hands-on component, is Josh's favorite PFI event to date.

Zac Couture and **Daniel Bowser** work at Lutheran Services in Iowa; Zac as the farm associate for the Global Greens farm in West Des Moines, Daniel as the community garden associate. Zac is working with the City of West Des Moines and Valley Church to put up an educational greenhouse for transplant production. Because of suburban zoning for fire safety and



▲ **Zac Couture and Josh Nelson** prepare to put L-flashing on the endwall.

handicap accessibility, he is still shopping for the right greenhouse kit – and the funds to make it a reality.

For Zac, the hands-on aspect of the Prairie Sky Farm workshop was especially valuable. "The knowledge gained will be useful because it was experiential." But his favorite part of the event was getting to meet new people. "Like all PFI field days, I enjoyed meeting a wide range of people from around the state and beyond. I like hearing their stories and how they are making it work in their area, to be good stewards and make a living."

Daniel added, "There is nothing else that I could have gone to or done that would have given me more knowledge about building a high tunnel."

Reflecting on a hard day of work building the tunnel, **Bob Pearson** offered a fitting appreciation: "If we had taken applications for six months, we couldn't have found a better group of people to work with."

"It was a whirlwind couple of days," Sara added, "but it was amazing to get everything done, and I'm so happy with the structure. We have greens planted inside and are looking forward to the first fall harvest." ■

There isn't enough space here to show off all the work this group accomplished! (A gallery of photos and videos with more details can be found on the PFI blog: <http://practicalfarmers.org/blog>).

Farming Debt-Free

Careful planning helps Lipes family turn philosophy into reality *by Julie Wheelock*

Many beginning farmers think starting a farm business is synonymous with incurring some level of debt. The average age of a Practical Farmers beginning farmer is 21, and many beginners simply have not lived long enough to acquire the necessary assets and cash reserves to jump-start a farm. To magnify the situation, a beginning farmer's household income may already be budgeted to support a young family, not a business start-up.

The alternative option – securing outside financing – comes at a price. Lending institutions view loaning to young farmers as “high risk,” meaning significant collateral is required. Beginning farmer loans are an option through the USDA Farm Service Agency, but only after the beginner has been turned down by conventional lending institutions. While starting a farm business in debt is not appealing, these obstacles make it seem like the only way.

Is it possible to start farming without debt?

For one beginning farm family, farming with no debt has not only been possible, it's part of their farming philosophy. Greg and Katie Lipes operate Lipes Family Farm in the rolling hills of Cedar County. Their 178-acre pasture-based farm is steadily becoming more profitable and producing enough grass-fed beef, pigs and poultry to allow both Katie and Greg to farm full-time. The couple is currently debt-free.

The Lipes are passionate about financial sustainability as an important aspect of their operation, but it's just one piece of their long-term sustainability plan: They also factor ecological, sociological and

generational aspects into their farming philosophy. Greg sees the financial sustainability played out in several ways, such as the farm paying its own bills without infusions of cash, growing the business from retained earnings, providing multiple incomes that are generous enough to attract the next generation, and being debt-free.

Preparing to Farm

Neither Greg nor Katie grew up on a farm, but both felt drawn to raising livestock using humane methods. In 2008, they enrolled in the Central Illinois Farm Beginnings course. Through this program, both worked with mentors full-time to

receive hands-on training; Greg on a livestock farm and Katie on an organic CSA farm. They wrote a business plan, began saving for their farm goals and practiced patience. “After our internships, we really wanted to start farming full-time right away,” Greg says. “However, we did not have access to land or a trust fund to tap for funds. So instead, we promised ourselves that we would work toward farming full-time, but that for the time being, I would take an off-farm job.”

To prepare for a future of no-debt farming, Greg and Katie determined they would need to save about three years' worth of living and farm operating expenses before they could depend on the farm to be self-sustaining. That would mean living frugally, but being thrifty was nothing new for Greg and Katie: Throughout their marriage, they had always been savers, and both agreed that saving for a future in farming was worth a conservative lifestyle. And, as Greg notes, as farmers they had an advantage: “We're growing our own food, so we are not going to go hungry.”

While Greg worked his off-farm job to support the family and fund their farm business start-up costs, Katie was in charge of their 5-acre farm in Wisconsin, as well as their growing family. This first farm consisted of two cow-calf pairs, five hogs, 50 chickens and 25 turkeys. After three years

▼ **Guests view cattle grazing in Greg and Katie Lipes' pasture during the field day the Lipes family hosted in August.**



of working off the farm, Greg was ready to join Katie on the farm full-time. However, they faced the same challenge that many other beginners cite as the main obstacle to farming full-time: access to land.

Securing the Land

In PFI's 2014 beginning farmer survey, participants ranked finding land as the second biggest issue they need help with, just behind capital infrastructure improvements. Because land is a finite resource, if an individual doesn't have connections, farming on a scale larger than a few acres can seem nearly impossible.

Greg decided to meet this obstacle head-on by getting the word out. "There is no one solution that will work for everyone for gaining access to land," he says. "We told everyone we knew what we were doing." It didn't happen right away, but Greg finally struck a deal with a couple that was initially against his farming career: his parents. "My folks, who were at first resistant to the idea of their son becoming a farmer, saw all the effort and money we were putting into our farming venture and realized we were not only passionate about it, but dedicated and willing to sacrifice to make it work."

Greg's parents were in the midst of looking for a place where they could build a home to retire. "I went with them to one of the city lots they were considering. When I saw the price tag on the bare ground in the city, I hinted that this kind of money would buy a whole lot more land out in the country." The subtle hint stuck. Greg's parents bought an acreage near West Branch to build their retirement home, and in 2013 began renting the surrounding pasture to Katie and Greg.

On Track with Profit Goals

Standing firm on their no-debt farming foundation, Greg and Katie continue to cash-flow their farm with no outside lending. The Lipes family direct-markets their non-GMO, drug-free meat and eggs through farmers markets, buying clubs and on-farm sales. Their figures have been right on track with seeing a net profit from the farm in about three years: 2015 marks the their third year farming full-time, and the first year they will be in the black.

To cash-flow the farm the past three years, Greg and Katie practiced – and still follow

We really wanted to start farming full-time right away. However, we did not have access to land or a trust fund to tap for funds. So instead, we promised ourselves we would work towards farming full-time, but that for the time being, I would take an off-farm job.

– GREG LIPES



– many of their daily living habits that got them into farming in the first place. They buy second-hand clothing; entertainment comes from the library for free; and they grow as much of their own food as they can. "We understand that each decision has an impact on our ability to keep farming, and that is enough motivation to keep us sharp with our spending habits," Greg says. While they are not drawing a wage from the farm just yet, this is because they are reinvesting any earnings right back into their growing business.

Any necessary farm equipment or structures are made with free materials (such as pallets), or bought used and cheap. The initial livestock and feed costs were paid for from savings, and the on-going feed expense is paid for with farm-generated income. Instead of buying a house and having a mortgage payment every month, the Lipes refinshed a small corner (about 600 square feet) of a machine shed to live in. They did much of the work themselves, learning as they went by watching YouTube videos, so they could put their money into the farm rather than pay a sub-contractor. The couple and their three daughters find the living situation sufficient for their needs.

Value-Driven Decisions

Sustainability is the primary goal driving Greg and Katie's farm decisions. They do not participate in any government programs, because they want to promote – and practice – farming as a viable career that is independent of subsidies and loans. Sustainability for them also means considering the next generation. "Our business must provide multiple salaries that are large enough to attract the next generation," Greg says. "A farm is only truly sustainable if the next generation is knocking at the door, begging to get their turn."

Greg cautions that getting into farming without going into debt is not easy. Leaving a good-paying, full-time job is scary, he says – which is why the Lipes have a risk management strategy: If the family needs off-farm income, Greg will go back to work. But for now, things are working according to plan. Even though the to-do list is never done, and exhaustion at the end of the day is common, Greg and Katie feel the effort is worth it.

"Starting a farm needs to be a labor of love, a calling," Greg says. "If it is, all the hard work doesn't feel like work at all – most of the time." ■

Farm Strength Through Diversity

A focus on soil, land stewardship helps Ackleys stay resilient

by Nick Ohde

Paul and Nancy Ackley farm in southwest Iowa near Bedford. The Ackleys raise corn, soybeans, small grains, cattle and sheep. They were among more than 40 Practical Farmers members who took part in the bus trip to Gabe Brown's ranch in North Dakota (see page 12 for a recap). Gabe Brown is doing some innovative things on his farm to promote resiliency and diversity – but so are Paul and Nancy, right here in Iowa! In late September, I visited their farm to find out more.



► For Nancy and Paul Ackley, efforts to improve their farm's diversity, resiliency and soil health have been an integral – and ongoing – part of their farm management philosophy.

At our first stop, we checked out a harvested wheat field that had been seeded to a multi-species cover crop mix, something that's become a foundation of the Ackley farm over the last few years. "It's a real soil-builder," Paul says. "We like to put it on some of our tougher ground."

At each successive stop, Paul grabbed a shovel out of the back of the truck, and turned over a bit of soil. In one corn field that had been planted with a wheat-multi-species cover crop mix last year, I got to see what was possible with careful management: The soil was pitch black, crumbly and spongy. Throughout the afternoon, it became clear that the soil was the resource that ultimately drove decision-making on the farm.

A Lifelong Commitment

Paul and Nancy have long been interested in protecting and improving the soil, and keeping it covered was the first step in that process. "We actually did our first rye cover in 1974, when most of our corn was chopped for silage," Paul says, "The hills looked too bare, so we spread rye with phosphorous and potassium and disked it in. The next spring we plowed it under, and the soil was so mellow and appeared to infiltrate water more rapidly and erode less."

That got him excited, and the following autumn, he and Nancy aerially seeded some rye, but it resulted in a very

inconsistent stand. The next year, they went back to broadcasting. In subsequent years, they tried taking cuttings of rye and baling it, but didn't get serious about rye again until the 1990s.

"Our soil washes, especially when we get 4 to 6 inches of rain at once," Nancy says. "And cover crops help hold that ground all year long. There are farmers out there, not necessarily family farmers, who are very hard on the soil because of the large equipment they're using. That's why the Gulf [of Mexico] is in such bad shape."

Paul agrees: "There's no way you can drive over that many acres and treat the soil the way it should be treated." He says that for him, regenerating and rebuilding the soil is "the best nutrient reduction strategy there

could be" – a reference to Iowa's statewide strategy for reducing nutrient loss from farms that calls for voluntary actions by farmers. "We need to be managing for what we want to happen, not for what we don't want to happen. It's more fun, more rewarding and more profitable."

Reducing tillage has also long been a part of the plan for conserving soil on the Ackley farm. By 2000, Paul and Nancy had gone to all no-till, but it just wasn't having the effect they wanted. It did a good job of protecting the soil, but Paul became discouraged with the soil structure. He says the tipping point came when he had some tiling done and got a look at the soil: It was blocky and hard. But where the future tile line cut into a grass strip, there was a big change. "There was all my structure!" he says.

“With different crops and livestock, you can always sell something; that way you have income every month. It helps spread it out a bit throughout the year.”

– NANCY ACKLEY



► Paul and Nancy integrated cattle and sheep into their operation to expand and round out their extended crop rotation.

For him, seeing the soil structure under grass compared to no-till was the epiphany that no-till is only part of the picture. "We need no-till," he says, "but we also need more roots in the ground." At the time, they used a rye cover crop before beans, but that wasn't enough to get the soil quality they wanted. Looking for answers, in 2008 the Ackleys attended the winter conference of No-till on the Plains, a non-profit based in Salina, Kansas, focused on providing farmers with information on developing high-quality no-till systems by using nature as a model. There, they heard Gabe Brown talk for the first time and became intrigued by his system of integrating livestock and diverse crops to improve soil health.

At about the same time, Paul and Nancy enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Paul says the program was helpful in adding a third crop to their rotation. "It's a good program," he says. "If you read between the lines, it encourages diversity, reducing inputs and many of the other directions we're headed on our farm."

Nancy says that while enrolling in CSP required a lot of paperwork, they already had most of the records. "It's always wise to keep track of what you do. Then you can look back on it and change or expand it, or do whatever you need to."

Opening the Door to Diversity

Paul and Nancy add a third year to their rotation, consisting of small grains, which are harvested prior to planting a diverse cover crop mix. From a soil health perspective, Paul says extending their rotation this way is a no-brainer. But he adds that more fully integrating their livestock into the system finally allowed them to make it work.

"The cattle are what make [this rotation] profitable," he says. "Being able to graze that cover crop mix after the wheat puts it on par with the cash crop year."

Adding a third year to their rotation allows them to reduce fertilizer, which further helps with the bottom line. "We couldn't reduce fertilizer with just a cover crop," Paul says, explaining that the extra year of a small grain with a diverse cover crop mix is crucial to promote a biologically active soil. The rye cover crop is what initially awakened Paul and Nancy to the possibility of what a small increase in diversity could do.

"We could see what rye seeded after corn was doing for the soil. Beans, corn and a rye cover crop mix is a three-crop biological rotation," Paul says. "But if we expand that, I think there's where we really kick the biology of the soil up. With more diverse roots comes more life, and there's where we're able to start seriously reducing some fertilizer."

"We need to be managing for what we want to happen, not for what we don't want to happen. It's more fun, more rewarding and more profitable."

— PAUL ACKLEY

Livestock Help Expand that Diversity

Paul and Nancy have integrated livestock into their operations to further expand their farm's diversity. Most recently, they added sheep to their operation. Because sheep like to eat broadleaves, they no longer have to mow weeds on some parts of their farm. Sheep also provide a marketable product in the fall, before their grain is harvested and ready to sell. Nancy says that having a mix of enterprises is important for farm finances: "With different crops and livestock, you can always sell something; that way you have income every month. It helps spread it out a bit throughout the year."

When asked what advice Nancy would give to beginning farmers hoping to diversify their farm enterprises, she says: "Start small, check out markets close by and see the demand. Maybe visit a local farmers market and see if there's demand for a new product." She also cautions beginners to be mindful of practical considerations, like available space and fencing.

The Ackleys think a lot about the next generation with their farming decisions. That's a big reason they have continued supporting Practical Farmers of Iowa for over 15 years. "The group is not only energetic, and kind, but they tell it like it is – and they're willing to work together to solve farmers' problems," Nancy says. "We're trying to do our best with teaching the next generation. We've farmed for 48 years, and want to pass some of that knowledge about how to be good stewards of the land to others." ■

30 Years of "Farmers Teaching Farmers"

Join Us January 22-23, 2016, in Ames!

Fifty farmers and friends attended the first Practical Farmers annual meeting on a cold day in December 1985, and came away with a plethora of practical information shared by farmers about research and farming experiences. Thirty years later, the crowd has grown significantly, but the vein of the gathering stays the same: farmers teaching farmers how to improve their farms and communities.

Even more than the learning that takes place, attendees prize connections they make at Practical Farmers conferences, from life-long friends and mentors to new business partners. "It's like attending a big family reunion," some members say.

Attend the Practical Farmers of Iowa 2016 Annual Conference to strengthen these important relationships while learning from farmers about building community; being stewards of our natural resources; and creating viable farms, farmers and food systems.

PRE-CONFERENCE SHORT COURSES

JAN. 21, 1-7 P.M. and JAN. 22, 8-11:30 A.M.

* **New Location:** Scheman Building (Same as conference!) *

1). Growing Good Small Grains

Growing small grains allows farmers to reduce fertilizer and pesticide inputs; plant cover crops earlier to fix nitrogen, build soil organic matter and offer forage for livestock; and to spread the farm workload and cash flow more evenly throughout the year. This short course will take an in-depth look at how to grow good small grains. Attendees will learn:

- The state of small grains and oat production in Iowa from **David Weisberger**, agronomy graduate student at Iowa State University (ISU)
- Oat physiology and market opportunities from **Bruce Roskens**, director of crop sciences at Grain Millers, Inc.
- Basics of spring wheat and barley production in North Dakota from **Joel Ransom**, professor of agronomy at North Dakota State University
- Details about small grains in an Iowa cropping system from **Matt Liebman**, professor of agronomy at ISU
- Which oat and wheat varieties are adapted for the southern Midwest from **Fred Kolb**, professor of crop services at University of Illinois

Farmers **Darren Fehr**, from Mallard, and **Bill and Al Frederick**, from Jefferson, will talk about their practical experience raising oats, wheat and cereal rye in Iowa.

2). Successful Establishment and Management of Orchard Trees

A lot of people know how to plant a tree; very few of them know how to establish an orchard and keep it thriving into maturity. Tom Wahl will discuss his experience and best practices for orchard establishment and management, including orchard floor, pruning, protection, and pest and disease management. He will also provide feedback on several beginning orchard plans from other farmers.

Tom Wahl owns and operates Red Fern Farm with his wife, Kathy Dice. Red Fern Farm is an agroforestry farm and nursery specializing in nut and berry crops as well as producing tree nursery stock and medicinal forest plants. The farm currently has around 75 tree and shrub species, and is the site of on-going research. Tom and Kathy were the 2015 recipients of PFI's Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"Common Characteristics of Successful Farmers"

FRIDAY, JAN. 22, 5:30-6:30 P.M.

JOHN KEMPF

Farmer and founder of Advancing Eco-Agriculture

What is a successful farm? This answer varies depending on whom you ask. Farming success can be defined as profit, ecological diversity, supporting another generation on the farm, providing healthy food, wildlife habitat – the list is long, and most farmers define success through multiple objectives.

Keynote speaker John Kempf has spent a decade working with innovative farmers across the country. John is known for helping farmers think differently to solve challenges they are experiencing on their farms. In this presentation, John will discuss the common characteristics in farming operations he views as extraordinarily successful – and how you can incorporate these same principles into your decision-making and problem-solving.

John Kempf grew up farming, and continues to farm in his Amish community near Middlefield, Ohio. John is an internationally recognized lecturer who speaks widely on the topics of regenerative agriculture and the inherent disease resistance mechanisms that plants can develop with proper nutritional management. A top expert in the field of biological and regenerative farming, John founded Advancing Eco-Agriculture in 2006 to help fellow farmers by providing education, tools and strategies that have a global effect on our food supply.



Bill Frederick



Tom Wahl



Darren Fehr

OTHER FEATURES

Practical Farmers Update

FRIDAY: 4:45 p.m.

Join us at our annual business meeting to hear the latest on PFI programming, finances, staffing and board elections.

Potluck Party

FRIDAY: 7-10 p.m.

* FREE EVENT *

Hosts: Ty and Bobbie Gustafson, Story City Locker

Catch up with old friends and meet new. **Please bring food and beverages to share!** PFI will provide a main dish, water and tableware.

Regional Breakfast Meetings

SATURDAY:
7:30-8:45 a.m.

Enjoy a FREE hot breakfast and get to know more people in your part of the state. We'll have gathering space for those who come from outside Iowa, too!



FRIDAY WORKSHOPS (12:30-4:30 p.m.)

Living Plants as Solar Collectors

LED BY: Robin & Kelly Griffith

Learn how father-son duo **Robin and Kelly Griffith** are harnessing solar energy to improve soils, increase yields and reduce inputs through companion crops, cover crops and no-till on their farm in Jewell, Kansas.

Farming Smarter, Not Harder & Financial Literacy and Business Management

LED BY: Richard Wiswall

Join Vermont-based farmer **Richard Wiswall** and gain the skills you need to better handle the business intricacies of farming. You'll learn about planning and analysis tools to operate a profitable farm; how to be an effective manager; and more!

Regenerative Grazing Management

LED BY: Jim Elizondo

Hear from **Jim Elizondo** about how his high stock density grazing management techniques helped him increase forage production by 4 to 5 times on land he has been rehabilitating. You'll learn about non-selective grazing benefits, and hear about Jim's experience grazing Mashona cattle in Florida to achieve the highest regenerative stocking rate while improving the environment.

Farmland Legacies: What Matters Most?

LED BY: Angela Tedesco, Dale Nimrod, Jim French and Margaret Smith

If you own farmland: What matters most about the legacy you leave behind? Come listen to three farmland owners who have done the soul-searching needed to answer that question. Then participate in activities and discussion on the future of farmland ownership in Iowa.

Establishing & Managing a Goat Dairy, Creamery and Farm Restaurant

LED BY: Leslie Cooperband and Wes Jarrell

Come learn from **Wes Jarrell and Leslie Cooperband** about how they manage their goat dairy, on-farm creamery and orchard, as well as how they handle marketing – and enjoy samples of farm products! Leslie and Wes own and operate Prairie Fruits Farm and Creamery near Champaign, Illinois. The farm raises Nubian goats and is licensed as a Grade A goat dairy and farmstead creamery.

Understanding Farm Rules & Regulations

LED BY: Rachel Armstrong; Ron Bartelt; Ty & Bobbie Gustafson; and Shanen and Beau Ebersole

In this two-part workshop, learn from legal expert **Rachel Armstrong** about business entities and insurance, and which options best suit your farm. **Then hear from farmers** about the rules and regulations for selling meat and eggs; inspection; labeling; and more.

Tackling Fruit and Vegetable Diseases, Weeds and Pests

LED BY: Maury Wills, Andrew Dunham and Matt Liebman

Learn from **Maury Wills**, of Wills Family Orchard near Adel, about managing diseases and pests in organic apples; then learn about weed ecology and management in vegetable crops from **Andrew Dunham**, of Grinnell Heritage Farm, and ISU agronomist **Matt Liebman**.



Maury Wills



Jim Elizondo



Angela Tedesco

SARE FARMER'S FORUM

A special conference track this year!

Practical Farmers is hosting the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) program's Farmers Forum in 2016!



This traveling annual event gives farmers, ranchers and others funded by NCR-SARE grants the chance to share information about their sustainable agriculture research, demonstration and education projects.



Richard Wiswall



Lisa & Jim French

WANTED:

Silent Auction Donations: Please donate baked goods, farm-raised products, handcrafted items, books, farm supplies and more! Proceeds go to PFI's beginning farmer program.

Shared Memories: To celebrate 30 years of Practical Farmers, we invite you to share a meaningful photo of yourself or farm and – **in 10 words or less** – a statement about what Practical Farmers means to you. Please email these to tamsyn@practicalfarmers.org by **December 18**.

LIVESTOCK FARMERS:

The Iowa Forage and Grassland Council will hold its annual conference immediately before the PFI conference, at the ISU Alumni Center (right next door to Scheman!). Attend both events for multiple chances to network and learn! For more details, visit www.iowaforage.org.

Graziers:

IFGC Conference is in Ames!
(Jan. 21-22 – Same time as short courses!)

SATURDAY SESSIONS



Bryce Irlbeck



Kayla Koether



Leslie Cooperband & Wes Jarrell

- * Interseeding Cover Crops
- * Managing Nutrition for Plant Health and Yield
- * Start to Finish: Producing and Marketing Grass-Fed Lambs
- * Nitrogen – Important Soil Nutrient or Water Quality Challenge?
- * Business Plan Vetting
- * Effective Farm Mentorships: Training the Trainer
- * On-Farm Solar Panel Installation and Financing
- * High Tunnel Vegetable Production
- * Practical Farmers of Iowa in 2046
- * Modifying Cultivators for Better Weed Control
- * Profitable and Practical Grass-Based Dairy Farming
- * Farm Energy Planning
- * We Learn More by Accident Than We Do on Purpose
- * Practical Tips for On-Farm Pollinator Habitat
- * Rolling Cover Crops with Modified Equipment
- * The 10-Year Journey
- * Poultry-Centered Regenerative Agriculture System
- * Five Generations of Farm Transfer
- * Farm Mechanization Efficiencies
- * Top 10 Cover Crop Species for Iowa – 2016 Edition
- * Introduction to Government Programs for Farmers
- * Ask an Expert
- * **Plus several SARE Farmers Forum sessions throughout the day!**

The Ultimate Farmer-Led Learning Experience

Members see diversity in action on Gabe Brown farm tour

by Stefan Gailans
and Meghan Filbert

Many will remember farmer and rancher Gabe Brown's appearance at our annual conference in January 2014. His sessions shed light on how to cultivate diversity and reduce chemical use on the farm by successfully integrating cash crops, cover crops and livestock. The message he shared was inspirational to many members, and the seed was planted for Practical Farmers to plan a trip to visit Gabe's ranch near Bismarck, North Dakota. In early August, that seed bore fruit: 50 PFI members boarded a charter bus for a three-day sojourn to see Brown Ranch and learn from Gabe and his family, while forging strong bonds with their fellow travelers.

When we arrived at Brown Ranch, Gabe began by sharing his family story – one that has unfolded over 20 years, and reflects a process of continual learning. After suffering crop failures due to hail and drought, Gabe said the family realized they needed healthier soils to weather those types of events. "Those four years of drought and hail were the best things that happened to me," Gabe said. In the early 1990s when he began farming, the organic matter levels of his soil were between 1.7 and 1.9 percent – common for conventional crop fields. Since then, Gabe has raised his level above 6.1 percent. To understand the importance of that jump, Gabe said to consider that "prairie is naturally 7 to 8 percent organic matter."

The key to achieving that dramatic increase? Soil microorganisms. "You have to feed them!" he said, emphasizing that giving back to the soil what you take from harvesting or grazing is essential.

Armoring the Soil

Gabe's initial challenge was building and maintaining an armor of plant residue on top of the soil. Once he began thinking about the farm as an ecosystem, he understood that plant diversity, coupled with minimal disturbance, could provide armor above and food for the microorganisms below. Gabe advised the group to allow about five years to cultivate more carbon and soil microbiology. His approach: planting diverse, full-season cover crop mixes consisting of seven to 20 species, and slowly weaning the soil off of synthetic fertilizers over a few years. "You can't go cold turkey," Gabe warned. "The soil is like a drug addict if it's been used to receiving synthetics for so long."

The Brown family's goal is to be a "least-cost producer through soil health." In between years of raising cash crops, Gabe seeds full-season cover mixes, which could also be considered annual forages. They are planted in the spring, grazed by cattle in the fall to give his perennial pastures a rest, and die in the winter. This is how the family gives back to the land: strategically integrating plants and animals to achieve biodiversity. After several years of this approach, Gabe began trials comparing the effects of applying fertilizer versus no fertilizer on his crop fields. For three years he saw no difference in production, which convinced him he had sufficiently improved his

soils so they could provide enough nutrients to his crops: The build-up of organic matter and improved soil health were working.

Most of the cash crops the Browns raise are companion-cropped – for example, rye with vetch (harvested for seed at the same time), and oats with clover and native forage grasses, to name a few. Gabe does not sell any of the grains they raise to commodity markets. While he says he could, he has found alternative markets, such as specialty animal feed or as cover crop seed to seedhouses and neighboring farmers. A good portion of the grain (15 to 20 percent) is fed on-farm to egg-laying chickens and hogs.

Expanding Livestock Diversity

In the mid-2000s, Gabe's son Paul graduated from college and came back to the ranch. Heeding his father's constant call for diversity, Paul told his dad that they needed to increase the number of livestock species on the farm – so the family added chickens, hogs and sheep to the farm. "How could I argue with him?" Gabe joked.

For the egg-laying chicken enterprise, the family retrofitted an old horse trailer, turning it into a mobile chicken coop replete with nesting boxes, so the chickens could follow the cattle on pasture. Egg production is good – but they don't want to subject the hens to artificial light, so allow it to taper off in the winter. Hogs are raised outdoors year-round: They are always farrowed outdoors on pasture (Gabe said the family usually expects five piglets per gilt); and a shelterbelt windbreak is used to protect them from the elements. They are fed a mix of peas, barley and corn; graze through the winter on cattle pasture; and have apple cider vinegar mixed into their water.

These hogs are netting \$900 per pig, Gabe said, pointing out how diversifying the family's livestock enterprises has resulted in an important new source of income. The hogs have been so successful, in fact, that the family plans to expand the enterprise.

Land Stewardship with Cattle

Grazing cattle is fundamental to the operation as the primary tool for land management. What's best for the land

▼ From left to right: Russ Wischover, Kaleb Anderson, Bruce Carney, Bob Regan (sunglasses in front), Chris Teachout and Holly Loftis stand in one of Gabe's mixed-species cover crop fields.





▲ The tour group looks at Gabe Brown's oat and vetch field.



▲ Gabe's British White Park cattle are well-suited to grazing.

and the animals is always on Gabe's mind. Except for when they graze on annual forages (those full-season covers in the crop fields), the cattle are kept year-round in paddocks on perennial pasture. Gabe stocks about 10,000-20,000 pounds per acre – a low stocking rate, considering Gabe's land could handle many more cattle. The cattle are moved every two days and only graze each paddock once per year. This gives the pasture adequate rest and allows the plants that are so essential for soil health to regrow.

Gabe ensures that the cattle don't overgraze the plants, and explained how the pull-and-tear action of their tongues on the plants actually stimulates forage root and plant growth. For the PFI members listening, this comment struck a chord. Throughout the visit, Gabe had emphasized his efforts to mimic nature through his management practices. While many in the group were graziers who understood the symbiotic relationship cattle can have with grass, something about the way Gabe articulated the idea – that cattle on the land, managed well, can have a positive impact, while also putting nature to work for you – struck the group in a new way. Many in the crowd seemed to have gained a new, deeper understanding about the importance of integrating livestock into their operations.

Gabe then explained wintering practices for the cattle: One pasture is always reserved to use over the winter, and the abundance of snow in a typical North Dakota winter eliminates any need for a sophisticated water source: The cows simply eat the snow instead.

To finish beef cattle on grass, Gabe said the key is keeping the cattle eating high-energy, high-quality forage at all times. This is supplied by the newest regrowth on the forages, which is especially energy-dense. When in the finishing stage, Gabe moves the cattle through paddocks five to six times a day using automated gate release timers called batt-latches. His choice of cattle breed (British White Park) helps: The cattle are moderately sized and gain weight easily on grass. After 22 to 30 months, they are finished and ready for slaughter.

Marketing a Family Brand

Meat and eggs are all directly marketed to consumers and sold at five farmers markets in the area under the family's Nourished By Nature brand, which was started (and continues to be managed) by Paul. The in-house label includes all the family's pastured meat and egg products. Bismarck is one of the fastest growing cities in the country, Gabe said, a trend that has led to an influx of people who want to know more about where their food comes from and how it is raised. The Brown family has taken advantage of this to direct-market their meat and eggs – a major revenue stream for the ranch.

Gabe is not certified organic. When asked why, he explained: "The first three questions we get from people at markets are: Where are you from? Do you feed GMOs? Is your meat antibiotic- and hormone-free?" Consumers ask the organic question last, he said, so the family decided that certification is not a priority for them at this time. Gabe credits Paul with creating the farm's brand identity and using it to market to consumers both face-to-face and online. They frequently see long

lines waiting to visit their stall at farmers markets in the summer, and routinely sell out of eggs. In the winter, the Browns participate in a buying club, through which they drop meat off at a central location every two weeks for consumers to pick up.

The Power of Farmer-Lead

Before we left from a fulfilling day on Gabe's ranch, he left us with the top five principles that guide his farming strategy: reduce tillage; armor the soil (with plant residues); ensure living roots all the time; integrate livestock; and strive for diversity. These principles have helped the family improve their soils, reduce their input costs, eliminate any reliance on crop insurance and federal programs, and improve their overall quality of life.

The amount of diversity on Brown's Ranch was stunning and impressive – and the family's dedication to soil health was plainly evident. If hearing Gabe speak at our annual conference was inspirational, getting to spend a full day immersed on his farm, absorbing his knowledge and learning from him one-on-one was electrifying and deeply moving for the PFI members who made the trek – a perfect example of the power that farmers teaching farmers can have. ■

The day after we visited Gabe, we spent time with Jay Fuhrer of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and with farmers Todd McPeak and Jerry Doan. For a recap of these visits, check out our blog at <http://practicalfarmers.org/blog/2015/10/20/dan-wilson/>

Members Reflect on the Trip of a Lifetime

Seeing Gabe's resilient farm inspires thoughts and actions

by Meghan Filbert
and Stefan Gailans

For many Practical Farmers members, the chance to visit Gabe Brown's farm in North Dakota was the trip of a lifetime. His ability to clearly distill his farming philosophy and practices, coupled with his charisma and capacity to inspire, resonated with all who took part in the trip. By the time we loaded the bus back to Iowa, the group was full of renewed motivation to increase the health and resiliency of their farm ecosystems through the soil – and plenty of ideas about how to do it. With a 10-hour return trip ahead of us, and a collective exhilaration, members used the time to reflect on their experiences.

Lessons Learned

"I learned that if I keep soil health as my number-one priority, it will solve so many problems – from production to profitability," reflected Hannah Bernhardt, a new member from Waseca, Minn.

Mary Cory, of Elkhart, said she learned more about the factors that contribute to healthy soil. "When soil health becomes a priority, everything seems to benefit – soil, plants, animals, nutrient-dense foods and the people, too."

For Katie Hensley, of Lamoni, and Landon Corlett, of Monona, big takeaways included the benefits of no-till, endless possibilities of cover crop mixes and cropping rotations, and the importance of animals on the land. "With the right practices, you can actually increase organic matter, which I didn't think was possible on crop land," Landon said.

Paul Ackley, of Bedford, mused on the implications of rebuilding Iowa's soils. "If we rebuild and regenerate our soils, we



▲ Andrea Rissing and Stephanie Nelson

can remove the need for Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy," he said. "We can use soils in a manner that is profitable, socially acceptable and recuperative while generating clean water."

For Stephanie Nelson, a beginning farmer in South Dakota, the trip reinforced her motivation to farm, while highlighting some pragmatic points: "I'm just starting the planning process, and these few days have encouraged me to continue to dream big – and then run the numbers. I've learned to

have the courage to try something, to start small and that, as Gabe said, 'we're only limited by our imagination.' "

Inspiring Moments

Getting to see healthy biological activity first-hand validated the lessons learned. A few members saw their first mycorrhizal fungi in the soil. Bob Regan, of Waukon, remarked on the life he saw in the soil and the holes present for

water, air and bugs. Hannah was similarly inspired by the abundance of ecological diversity: "Seeing all the insects, birds and life in Gabe's diverse cover crop field convinced me that those diverse mixes are doing something radical, and would have an amazing effect on land that's been in corn and soy the last 50 years."

Sally Gran, of Nevada, was inspired by the amount of direct-marketing Gabe does with row crops and livestock, and with the premiums he earns: "It made me think again about marketing options as we continue to think how to structure our farm."

Inspired to Act

For some members, inspiration was already morphing into ideas for action. John C. Gilbert, of Iowa Falls, said he will consider further opportunities to reduce tillage, and wants to start using Haney tests to evaluate his soils. Dave Campbell, of Maple Park, Ill., said he will now likely take a class in holistic management. His son, Tom, wants to get a no-till drill and try planting soybeans into roller-cripped rye next spring. Chad and Katie Hensley, who operate a vegetable farm, said they will use more mulch and cover crops, and look into buying club options to market their product online.

Kevin Loftis, of Craig, Neb., came away convinced that cover crops "are the answer to improve soil health," and that they will let him run more cattle on fewer acres. "I'll use covers to protect the soil after harvest, and to extend the grazing season, where practical."

Tom Wind, of Jamaica, Iowa, was inspired to craft an ambitious goal: He wants to build 4 inches of topsoil on 30 acres of his land during his lifetime. To do this, he said he plans to "phase out chemical fertilizers, GMOs and Roundup; always use a diverse cover crop cocktail mix; mob-graze cover crops; and reduce herbicide use."

Bringing Gabe's Vision to Iowa

Energized by the visit, members started discussing how they could implement Gabe's approach to diversified farming within Iowa. "Practice no-till and plant perennial poly-cultures," said Jason Misik, of Minneapolis. "We need to restore native

▼ Mary Cory (left) speaks with Holly and Kevin Loftis.





▲ Chad and Katie Hensley



▲ Dave and Tom Campbell



▲ Teresa and Rodne Wendt

prairie to build biomass and replenish organic material. Livestock grazing must be restored on corn and soy crop land in southern Minnesota and Iowa."

"All the same principles apply," said Luke Gran, of Nevada. "But practices and people will be different on every farm. Farmers who can work small grains into their rotations will undoubtedly improve their soil health and resiliency." John agreed: "Gabe's principles translate to all areas and operations. We need more pioneers and leaders to demonstrate proven examples and strategies specific to each region for others to follow."

Obstacles We Face

Many participants felt that entrenched ideas and habits were among the biggest obstacles to approaches like Gabe's becoming more widespread. John said the main obstacle was "the space underneath the farmer's hat" – a sentiment echoed by Russ Wischover, of Bedford: "Habit, custom and tradition are a three-headed monster that prevents progress in agriculture. Upsetting the status quo, fear of risk, and neighbors' perceptions and attitudes are significant barriers we have to deal with."

Stephanie said some obstacles are inner struggles that individuals will have to confront within themselves: "The farmers we visited spoke candidly about needing thick skin, because they're challenging their neighbors' core beliefs by choosing to farm differently. Hearing from these farmers, as well as PFI members, I'm reminded that, although there is pioneering to do, there is also plenty of support available."

External factors like land prices, cash rent expenses and land competition also hinder the ability to farm in Iowa, some members commented. These obstacles make it especially difficult for people who did not grow up on a farm to find and afford land. Tom added a related issue: Current infrastructure in Iowa does not support small grains production. He was hopeful, however, that "with the current low corn and soybean prices, more opportunities can be created for small grains, which might create more opportunities for cover crops."

For Hannah, "convincing conventional crop farmers that adding livestock and pasture is worth the effort and added work" is one challenge. Luke added that lack of livestock infrastructure, including meat processors, along with "people's limited livestock experience, lack of labor and high cattle prices" are all working against integrating ruminants on the landscape. For Teresa Wendt, of Stanwood, the human penchant for complacency was one of the biggest obstacles. "There are too few people who want to think this much and work this hard to manage livestock, rotationally graze and grow nitrogen fertility rather than buying it."

Opportunities and Advantages

Despite the challenges, PFI members commented that agriculture in Iowa has two significant advantages compared to North Dakota. "We have adequate moisture – double the rainfall of North Dakota," John said. "We also have a large capacity for nutrient cycling and growth of soil biology." "Our growing season is also longer," Teresa added. "This gives us more opportunity

for winter-hardy plants to get established between crops."

Iowa also has a higher population density, better access to urban areas and is experiencing a statewide boom in demand for locally grown, non-GMO and organic food. Considering these factors – and forthcoming land transitions – Iowa is in a pivotal position for change. As Tom pointed out, "lots of land will be changing hands in the next 10 years" as farmers and landowners age. For Andrea Rissing, of Ames, this impending change means opportunities are ripe for a new generation, with new ideas, to take over: "Iowa has a thriving community of young and beginning farmers who want to farm, a long history of farming being valued culturally, and a strong ethos of farmer-to-farmer support and education."

"We also have PFI to help us learn from some of the great innovators of our time," said Landon, echoing a sentiment felt by all on the bus.

Throughout the visit, Gabe reiterated his views on how to build healthy soils, and by the time we left, we had a clearer idea of how to do so. Getting to see those soil health-centered farm practices at work and generating a profit was one of the highlights of the trip. For a group of farmers who value practical, observable, farmer-led information – like the PFI members on the trip – seeing the Brown family's successful management strategies helped Gabe's message of soil stewardship hit home. Russ Wischover summed up what we all felt as we embarked on the trip home to Iowa: "Soil health should be the driving force behind all farming decisions." ■

Preserving a Place for Nature

Continuing Dan's Specht's farming vision

by Mary Damm

I met Dan at the 2004 North American Tallgrass Prairie Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. We were on a field trip to a hill prairie along the Wisconsin River, and he made the comment to me that “this looks like my farm in Iowa.” I said: “In Iowa?” I was surprised, because I didn’t think of Iowa as beautiful and rolling, like the prairie bluff landscape we were viewing. That evening there was a barbeque, and Dan introduced me to Laura Jackson, a biologist at the University of Northern Iowa. After the prairie conference was over, I went to a used bookstore in Madison and found a book that Laura had edited, *The Farm As Natural Habitat*. I looked through it, and Dan and his friend Jeff Klinge were in a chapter. What a coincidence!



Phil Specht, with Mary Damm, on the Dan Specht farm, now owned by Mary Damm

I first visited Dan's farm, which is on a ridge

close to the Mississippi River, later that year. I didn’t know much about farming; I’d only been to two farms before, and, at the time, I thought of Dan as a prairie guy more than a farmer. Dan showed me his cattle, his corn, the birds, the woods.

Dan planted a prairie in 2008 close to the woods on the northeast part of the farm. The prairie is special because of the legume species – specific rhizobia (nitrogen-fixing bacteria that live inside legume roots) – that Dan acquired from Peter Graham of the University of Minnesota. Dan met Peter at the 2006 North American Tallgrass Prairie Conference. Peter collected and studied soybean rhizobia from around the world for most of his career, but switched to prairie rhizobia near the end. Peter especially connected with Dan because Dan was a farmer interested in prairie legumes. Sadly, Peter died a few years after the conference, so the prairie with the rhizobia has even more biological significance now.

Dan changed his grazing patterns each year. He grazed the prairie during the drought of

2012. The prairie has warm-season grasses that complement the cool-season grasses in pastures. The prairie is green and nutritious when the pasture grasses are not.



Dan Specht
 “Dan wanted to show that farms can feed people and be a place for nature, that working farms and conservation can go together.”

Dan wanted to show that farms can feed people and be a place for nature, that working farms and conservation can go together. And ultimately, that if a farm is working with nature, the components of an ecosystem are present.

Because I lived in Indiana and Dan lived in Iowa, we communicated a lot by email and phone. He would always share stories about birds he saw and plants that were flowering in the roadside. He always gave a weather report, and if the Milwaukee Brewers had played, he gave me a recap of the game. He read a lot, and followed Aldo Leopold’s land ethic.

I had an eight-hour drive to visit him, so I would usually arrive at night. I would see the light in the kitchen window and feel myself relax as I drove the final stretch of gravel road. Dan would have a meal ready for me, and we



“When I visited the farm when Dan was alive, I would take my lawn chair out and sit and watch the birds. I still do, and sit there thinking ‘This is my farm now, my responsibility now.’”

would have a good conversation at the kitchen table that night and others. He would have his newsletters out and specific articles for me to read. He listened to public radio all day long. He and his brother Phil followed national and international news. I didn't know farmers could know so much about world affairs before I met them.

Dan had pigs for quite a few years. They were free-range on the south pasture. They would come up to the house and the big mulberry tree by the kitchen window and eat mulberries. But if they saw me looking, they would run away. They were so fun, curious and skiddish. Sometimes in the fall and winter when I visited the farm, Organic Valley would bring a truckload of outdated milk. Dan and I would go out and stab cartons of the milk, then the pigs would rip them further and drink the milk. Those pigs had a very good life. But Dan lost money on the hogs, so he eventually stopped raising them.

The year he died, he was having a good year. He had a lot of hay and was working with farmer Laura Krouse on delivering meat to her Community Supported Agriculture customers.

Dan had some rough years financially. He was a visionary and thought outside of the day-to-day world. That was a problem for Dan because he couldn't make himself deal with the business world. I worked with him a couple of times on spreadsheets. I had been dealing with my mom's finances, so that was becoming my world. I would ask him, "Dan, are you working on your spreadsheets?" He'd ho-hum and never finish. Phil had helped him too, but he always had late payments and late fees.

But he was always learning, like with his corn plots. For 10 years he worked on developing an open-pollinated blue-and-white sweet corn. A lot of people have grown it out, including the Meskwaki Settlement in Iowa. This summer, Phil posted a wonderful poem,

"My Brother's Hands," about Dan's corn and the Meskwaki's and others' interest in it.

Dan was passionate about grassland birds.

These birds are in great decline because of loss of native prairie (less than 0.1 percent of tallgrass prairie remains in Iowa) – but also loss of pasture land. Birds such as the bobolink are ecological indicators of a working ecosystem, unlike like a corn and bean system where most life that is not corn or beans is killed. Bobolinks migrate from South America to the northern United States to breed, and they return to their nesting sites from the previous year 90 percent of the time. Providing habitat for the birds is important, and some very rare prairie remnants in Missouri are being grazed by cattle in an attempt to improve habitat for the birds. I'm learning first-hand that managing the farm for birds is complex, but important as an alternative to grazing prairie remnants.

The sweet song of the bobolink reminds me of Dan. He would delay haying to allow nesting pairs more time to raise their young. He would leave sacrifice patches where he wouldn't mow.

His brother Phil, who farms nearby and now helps me with Dan's farm, is passionate about bobolinks as well. In my work as an ecologist, I would look up articles on prairies and grassland birds, and give them to Dan. Now I give articles to Phil, and we talk about them. Phil is doing his own research on – and improving – habitat for the birds.

➤ *Continued on pg. 28*

Field Day Photos



1.



2.



3.



4.

1). Donna Kromray looks at a prairie plant mix held by Freddy Schulte-Moore during Mike DeCook's field day on July 28.

2). Adam Montri (front left) speaks with Josh Nelson at Sara Hanson's Prairie Sky Farm high tunnel build and field day on Sept. 3.

3). Jackie Hoch (right), owner of Hoch Orchard in La Crescent, Minn., samples a pear with another guest at the Sliwa field day on Aug. 11.

4). Tyler and Dale Raasch pose with their Red Wattle piglets at the field day they hosted on Aug. 30.

5). Nate Kemperman (front-left, in blue shirt) describes to the crowd how he and Alice McGary create pollinator habitat on their farm during their July 25 field day.



5.

Field Day Photos



1). Ron Dunphy (left) chats with Colten Catterton, of Green Cover Seed, during Paul and Nancy Ackley's field day on Sept. 8.

2). Joanna Hunter and Billy Sammons listen during Bill Frederick's field day on Aug. 11.

3). Marcus Johnson (left) and Dick Schwab practice with Ann and Eric Franzenburg's Regi weeder during the Franzenburgs' field day on Aug. 2.

4). Maren Beard (left) chats with Barbara Massman during the Beard family field day on Oct. 3.

5). Mike Bevins (left, red-and-blue checkered shirt) discusses working with native trees and shrubs during his Aug. 26 field day.



Field Day Photos



1). Sue Kolbe, Deborah Bunka and Jerry Young Bear chat during the Scattergood Friends School field day on Sept. 26.

2). John Schulte (left) describes equipment to attendees at the Schulte family field day on Sept. 3.

3). Children feed apples to pigs during the Scattergood field day.

4). Robert Ryerson (left) speaks with other guests at the Paez field day on Sept. 15.

5). Baby Sylvie Schmidt, with parents Meg and Dave, was likely

the youngest guest at Mark and Melanie Peterson's Aug. 28 field day.

6). Some of the specialty corn on display at the Paez field day.

7). Guests at Laura Krouse's Oct. 18 field day got to sample produce plucked right from the fields.

8). Some heritage turkeys greet guests at Wendy Johnson's Sept. 12 field day.

9). Farm cat Shadowbeast takes a drink right out of Amanda Raster's water bottle at the Mustard Seed Farm field day.



- 1).** Buddy guards the food table at David and Perry-O Sliwa's field day.
- 2).** Mustard Seed Farm intern David Brown (right) looks at some of the pollinators found in Alicy McGary and Nate Kemperman's fields.
- 3).** Maren and Tom Beard pose in front of solar panels they are installing on the farm.
- 4).** A curious goat at Wendy Johnson's field day is happy to pose for a photo.
- 5).** Guests at the Scattergood field day got to view these non-mechanized worm bins that the school is installing to expand its vermicomposting system.
- 6).** Attendees listen to Wendy Johnson (far right) discuss the alfalfa field she is transitioning to organic.



Saving Money and Energy When Drying Grain

by Mark Runquist

Corn drying is one of the biggest sources of energy use on Iowa farms. Nearly every year, Iowa corn farmers need to make day-to-day decisions regarding the interplay among time constraints of corn harvest; the variable seasonal conditions; and the economics of drying, marketing and storage.

Likewise, when farmers begin to plan investment in new on-farm grain storage, the drying techniques, energy costs and optimal bin configurations need to be well thought-out. While there are many guidelines and rules of thumb, in times when corn prices lurch towards the break-even point, making cost-effective drying and storage decisions can have an impact on farm profitability.

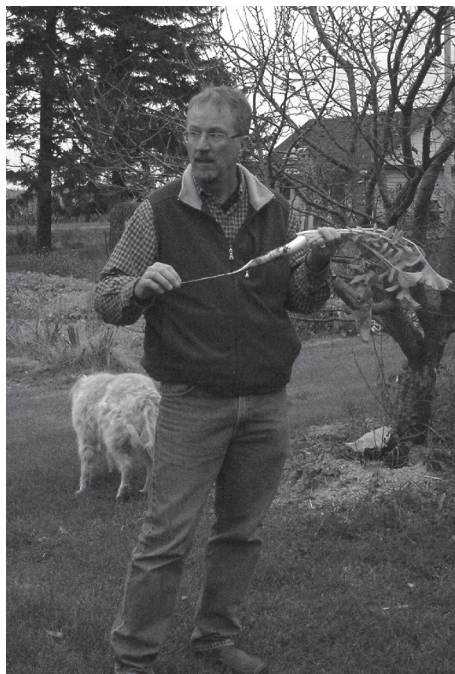
Field Drydown Characteristics

As corn progresses through its development, it is said to be physiologically mature 55 to 65 days after silking. A black or brown layer is visible at the base of each kernel and there is no more interaction between the cob and the kernel. The moisture level is around 30 percent, depending on hybrid or variety. All water loss after this point occurs through the kernel, and drying is dependent on weather.

On a warm, dry day moisture may drop 1 percentage point per day. On the other hand, wet and cool days may see no drying. Iowa State University research indicates a 0.5 to 0.6 percent moisture loss from late August through October. However, an earlier-maturing crop takes advantage of the greater drydown potential in warmer drying temperatures. Late August drydown rates average about 0.8 percent per day, compared with 0.4 percent for mid-September maturity. A joint study between ISU and the Iowa Crop Improvement Association found that early-season hybrids averaged 2.5 percent drier at harvest without a reduced yield compared to full-season hybrids. Generally speaking, a hybrid that varies by one day with another will typically have a 0.5 percentage point difference at maturity.

While weather is the main variable, the following characteristics also drive drying times: husk leaf number, thickness,

coverage of ear and tightness; kernel pericarp thickness; and how soon ears drop. Additionally, the longer a crop stays in the field to dry, the more potential losses are possible. These losses may be due to stock rot, lodging and wildlife. Research at The Ohio State University found that while moisture decreased nearly 6 percent between harvest dates in October and November, delaying harvest after mid-November achieved little additional drying, and that hybrids with poorer stalk ratings suffered more loss due to delayed harvest.



Mark Runquist

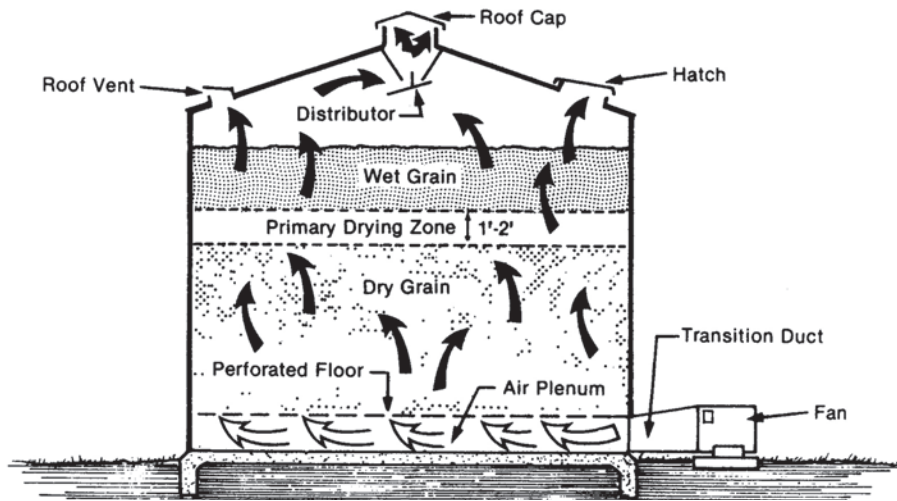
Another consideration includes the loss from mechanical harvest, which increases as moisture percentage drops. The average mechanical harvest loss is around 6 percent. However, one study found that harvest loss was 3.6 percent, from corn at 25 percent moisture, versus 12 percent loss from corn at 17 percent moisture.

Low Temperature or Natural Air Drying

To save on energy costs, some farmers use low temperature or natural air to dry corn. This technique uses air, powered by fans, from outside the bins instead of gas or propane-fired dryers. Commonly, this process takes four to eight weeks at 40 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. A fan dries the grain from the bottom up in the bin. There are typically three layers: a dry layer, a drying zone that's 1 to 2 feet thick, and wet grain above the drying zone.

If you plan to use this technique, keep in mind the following points:

- Bins used for natural air drying should be fully perforated at least a foot above the concrete pad.
- Clean the grain to eliminate fine particulates. An ISU study found that it takes as much as three times more fan power for uncleaned grain. If you decide not to clean, then remove some fines from the bin center or use a grain spreader to distribute them more evenly throughout the bin.
- If you have a stirrer, don't use it too much because the layered dry-drying-wet profile offers the optimal conditions for air-drying.
- Level the top of the grain surface in the bin.
- Stop the fan during heavy snowfall to avoid plugging holes in the perforated floor.
- Check the location of the drying front weekly and monitor for mold growth on top.



The zones within grain during natural air drying in a typical bin
(Graphic from North Dakota State University Extension publication)

- If the drying zone is at least halfway through the bin when fall ends – and the top level is below 23 percent moisture – drying can usually be completed in spring.
- The optimal bin size may be smaller than existing bins. Larger bins require larger fans, which are less efficient than more, smaller bin-fan combinations.

Increasing Efficiency of High Temperature Drying

High-temperature grain drying is often a bottleneck that delays harvest. ISU Extension offers two management strategies to help increase the efficiency and throughput rate. One method is called dryeration, and the second combines high-temperature drying with natural air-drying.

Dryeration: When using a high-temperature dryer, the outsides of the kernels dry faster than the insides. Dryeration lets you remove the corn when it reaches two to three points above your final target moisture. Moving the grain to a special bin to “steep” for four to 12 hours allows the moisture within the kernel to

Read More

For more information, check out the following resources:

- “Natural-air corn drying in the upper Midwest.” University of Minnesota Extension.
- “Dryeration and combination drying for increased capacity and efficiency.” Iowa State University Extension #PM 2089k.

equalize and move to the surface where it is easier to remove. Cooling the corn after this resting period removes an extra 0.2 to 0.25 points of moisture from the corn for each 10 degrees of temperature change from the high-temperature dryer. Drying capacity of your harvest can increase over 50 percent, and drying efficiency can increase by 20 percent.

The most effective systems use two bins – one for steeping and cooling, while another can be used for loading. Once the grain is cooled, it can be moved to storage bins.

Combining High-Temperature and Natural Air Drying

Using a high-temperature dryer before a natural air-drying system is especially useful when corn has a moisture content too high for reliable air-drying.

First, corn is dried to a moisture content of 22 percent or less in the high-temperature bin. Then it’s transferred to a low-temperature bin, where fans are started immediately to cool and finish drying the corn. Immediate cooling reduces the risk of condensation, while still removing an additional point of moisture. Combining these drying methods can decrease energy use by 50 percent, and can double the drying capacity of the high-temperature dryer, as corn isn’t in the dryer for as long.

PFI member Doug Lundgren farms near Stanton in southwest Iowa, where he grows corn and soybeans. He says he’s used high-temperature drying in the past when he’s had particularly wet corn, but hasn’t for several years. “Our operation isn’t that big, so we can afford to wait a little later in the season to harvest,” he says. He likes to harvest at around 17 or 18 percent moisture and then dry with small fans, but no heat. “Aeration seems to work better for me,” he says. “It seems like there’s less cracking of the kernels, and just overall better grain quality.” ■

Mark Runquist operates High Hope Gardens with his wife, Linda Barnes, near Melbourne. They have long focused on energy conservation on their farm.

Advantages: What are some advantages of natural air-drying? This method:

- Requires less equipment.
- Requires less labor at harvest, since you just fill the bin once.
- Doesn’t slow harvest because you don’t have to complete drying before storage.
- Uses fewer units of energy per unit of water removed.

Disadvantages of natural air-drying:

- In years when drying is not complete before winter, it may limit fall and winter marketing opportunities.
- In years with unusually warmer weather, some grain may have to be removed from the top of the bin.
- Corn moisture needs to be less than 23 percent for safe, full-bin drying.
- Corn at bottom of the bin over-dries to less than 15 percent moisture in dry years.
- It increases electrical demand, which may lead to upgrading electrical service.

Improvements to Whole Farm Revenue Protection Crop Insurance Policy

by Steve Carlson

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced several improvements to Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), a crop insurance policy first introduced in 2015 as a new coverage option for diversified farms. Under the first iteration, however, beginning farmers and farms with livestock had difficulty accessing the policy. The changes – which will take effect for the 2016 year – will make WFRP more accessible for a wider range of diversified farmers who previously had little or no crop insurance options.

Practical Farmers of Iowa members Marcus and Emma Johnson operate an 80-acre farm in Central City with Emma's parents, Vernon and Mary Zahradnik, where they grow more than 50 varieties of apples, 20 types of vegetables and 55 acres of field crops. They market through farmers markets, on-farm sales and wholesale outlets, and are among the farmers who stand to benefit from the policy changes: Not only are they beginning farmers, they have greatly expanded their orchard since 2012. Marcus and Emma took part in a winter 2015 PFI farminar on WFRP and have some familiarity with the guidelines of the original policy. To help other farmers better understand what the changes to WFRP will mean, Practical Farmers asked them to submit their questions about the revised policy to Justin Davis, crop insurance manager for Town and Country Insurance.

1. With our expanding orchard and vegetable farm, how can we insure our increased production from year to year?

Expanding operations now have the ability to increase their average revenue history up to 35 percent (previously it was 10 percent). Growth from additional acres, livestock and crops apply, as well as changes to production capacity, such as varieties or production patterns.

2. Previously, we needed five years of tax records to apply for WFRP. How many years of tax records will be required after the changes take effect?

Currently, five years of tax records are required – unless you qualify as a beginning farmer or rancher, which is someone who has been farming or ranching

for less than five years. WFRP requires at least three years records for beginning farmers and ranchers, so for 2016 coverage, records are required for 2012, 2013 and 2014. Also, a beginning farmer or rancher may qualify for an additional 10 percent premium subsidy.

3. We direct-market nearly all our orchard and vegetable crops through farmers markets, on-farm sales and wholesale to customers. We also have some field crops that we sell directly to our local elevator. What are the recordkeeping requirements for our diverse crops and sales outlets?

You may use any type of farm records that are used to document and track your direct-market sales. The USDA Risk Management Agency has a link on its website to some recordkeeping tools that help document direct sales (www.rma.usda.gov/policies/wfrp.html). Field crops sold to an elevator would require a delivery or settlement sheet.

4. We grow over a dozen different vegetable crops, many grossing less than 7 percent of our total revenue. Would there be a benefit to lumping some of these crops together? Is there sweet spot for crop diversity and insurance premiums?

Yes, there would be benefits to lumping some crops together, depending on what percentage of your revenue they comprise. In order to be considered a qualified commodity, [the crops that are lumped together] must make up a certain percentage of revenue. For example, if you had five crops, the fifth crop would have to be at least 6.66 percent of your revenue. If you are under the percentage requirement, you could combine crops to increase your revenue percentage. The maximum diversity factor is seven crops. ■

Justin Davis is the crop insurance manager for Town & Country Insurance, an independent insurance agency located in Webster City with branch locations in Fort Dodge, Humboldt, Eagle Grove, Clarion and Story City. For more information, contact Justin at (515) 835-9024 or jdavis@tcins.com.



Emma and Marcus Johnson

WFRP Changes for 2016

- Expansion to every county in the U.S.
- Expanded access for beginning farmers; WFRP will now require just three years of tax records
- Elimination of the 35 percent limit on expected revenue from animals and animal products, and from greenhouse and nursery crops
- Streamlined recordkeeping requirements for farmers who market directly to the public
- The ability for farmers who have physically been unable to farm for a year to substitute the lag year for the missing year
- The ability of tax-exempt organizations to qualify if they have appropriate records to substitute for tax records.
- The ability for expanding operations to more easily obtain increased coverage.

“Resilient Agriculture: Cultivating Food Systems for a Changing Climate”

by Mark Rosmann

Laura Lengnick's book, *Resilient Agriculture, Cultivating Food Systems for a Changing Climate* carefully examines the nexus between climate change and modern agriculture, while showing effective models and accounts of past and current agricultural systems. The book provides real-life examples of effective solutions, and how various farmers across the United States are influencing their regional biota and producing climate-"smart" agroecological systems. Laura also explores how the modern U.S. agriculture system, relying heavily on global markets and vertical integration, is being disrupted due to these environmental changes.

The book offers a thorough examination of climate resilience, and is divided into two key parts. The first part focuses on the impacts of climate change on Earth's biology and natural resources, taking into account historical considerations, exposure and risk. This part also outlines how the idea of "sensitivity" affects agricultural systems, both direct and indirect. Laura poses the question: What kinds of exposures from climate change exist, and how can they impact farms and agriculture? She also examines an important outcome of climate change: how variations in climate and temperate can alter the adaptive capacity of various biological tiers, from single plants or animals to populations – including rural communities. Looking at the link to agriculture, the book reveals how social, economic and physical factors found in farms and rural communities can also be manipulated by climate change. Much like agroecological systems, Laura writes, the resulting challenges and opportunities are also dependent on the context and severity, with many other social and economic variables unique to each region.

The second part of *Resilient Agriculture* highlights the various challenges and opportunities that exist for many producers throughout the United States.



Mark Rosmann rides the tractor at Rosmann Family Farms, the multigenerational farm near Harlan consisting of Ron and Maria Rosmann; Daniel Rosmann, Ellen Walsh-Rosmann and Xavier Rosmann; and David Rosmann and Becky Tompkins-Rosmann.

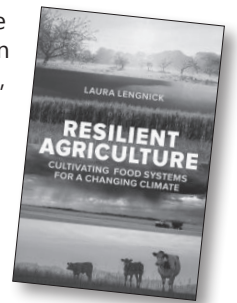
(See pg. 29 for photos of the recent PFI 30th anniversary celebration and field day hosted by the Rosmann family.)

In these examples, prominent individuals are implementing sustainable and agroecologically based solutions. Many of those featured are integrating innovative tools to protect their businesses financially, socially and environmentally. The author divides each perspective into four chapters based on the commodities: fruits and nuts, vegetables, livestock and grains. Based on these examples, Laura makes an argument that diversifying assets and biological systems is vital to improving climate resilience. Many producers featured have done just that: diversified their farm systems to include extended crop rotations, livestock and perennial flora.

In one example, Laura highlights a farm in Flushing, Mich. Jim Koan, of Almar Farm and Orchards, manages a 150-acre organic orchard and an additional 350 acres devoted to row crops, pasture, vegetables and pasture-raised swine. Like other farmers in the book, Jim explains that he faces typical challenges familiar to other farmers in his area. But he notes that more recently, variable weather patterns and extreme temperature fluctuations have become more noticeable and are affecting his system. In addition to his diversified farm, Jim is adapting to the biological challenges presented by climate change through novel marketing and business activities. This individual – and many others from across the Midwest, including Iowa – show how many farmers are making necessary adjustments to meet the new climate

change-induced challenges, and to make a difference in their communities.

Laura questions whether sustainable agriculture is climate change-ready. She concludes that sustainable agricultural practices offer the best kind of "transformative options" to enhance resilience to climate change. She argues that the idea of "climate resilience" must become part of the discussion on the future of agriculture, and she identifies key considerations and solutions that will be necessary to address the long-term problems wrought by climate change. The extensive research Laura conducted is evident throughout the book. I would argue that *Resilient Agriculture* is a necessary resource, and a must-read, for agricultural science students of all levels, as well as for experienced agriculturalists. It is also a great resource for individuals who lack on-farm experience, or want to learn more about climate change and sustainable agriculture. ■



Mark Rosmann is part of Rosmann Family Farms, of Harlan, which is featured in the book. He lives in Washington, D.C., where he works for the USDA Foreign Ag Service.

Mark Your Calendars: Fall Farminars Start Nov. 3

It's that time of year again: cooler nights, shorter days, harvest wrapping up – the perfect time to cozy up with a hot drink and a laptop while you gain some extra knowledge through PFI's fall farminar series. **The series begins on Nov. 10, and runs weekly on Tuesdays from 7-8:30 p.m., through Dec. 15.** Topics in the fall series range from greenhouse production and recordkeeping to small grains and soil tests – and were taken directly from PFI member feedback. Learn about:

1. **"Getting Started with Greenhouse Production: What We Know and What We Didn't"** – (Nov. 10) – *Lee Matteson and Rose Schick, co-owners of Lee's Greens, Nevada, Iowa*
2. **"Mindset and Method of Cover Crops in Vegetable Production"** – (Nov. 17) – *Tom Ruggieri, Fair Share Farm, Kearney, Mo.; and Mark Quee, Scattergood Friends School and Farm, West Branch*
3. **"Grazing Management for Grass-Finishing Cattle"** – (Nov. 24) – *Ryan and Kristine Jepsen, diversified row crop and livestock farmers, Dorchester; and Daniel Sheetz, row crop and beef cattle farmer, Toledo*



Kristine and Ryan Jepsen

4. **"The Haney Soil Test and Nutrient Turnover"** – (Dec. 1) – *Sarah Hargreaves, soil microbial ecologist, Ontario, Canada; and Paul Ackley, diversified crop and livestock farmer, Bedford*
5. **"Alternatives to Cereal Rye and the Benefits of Grazing Covers"** – (Dec. 8) – *Andy Lenssen, Iowa State University; and Nathan Anderson, Bobolink Prairie Farm, Cherokee*
6. **"A Simple Recordkeeping System for Fruit and Vegetable Production"** – (Dec. 15) – *Rick Hartmann, Small Potatoes Farm, Minburn; and Daniel Heldt, Dangood Garden, Johnston*

Farminars are webinars offered each autumn and winter to help farmers learn

about business and production issues that matter to them from the convenience of their homes. The series is free and easy to access: Tune in anywhere you have an internet connection, listen to the presenters while watching their slideshow and ask questions using a chatbox.

Farminars are led by farmers, and many are presented in a "fish-bowl" format where attendees listen as a farmer or business expert answers a beginning farmer's questions.

To participate, visit practicalfarmers.org, navigate to the farminar page under the "News and Events" tab, then follow the login instructions. ■

Cooperators' Program: For Curious Farmers Who Want Data

Have you been thinking of making a change on your farm? Do you have questions about production strategies, management techniques or financial implications of those changes – and want data specific to your farm?

Consider participating in **Practical Farmers of Iowa's Cooperators' Program**, which helps farmers design and conduct rigorous on-farm research to help answer their most challenging farming questions. Farmers in the program – which is open to PFI members – use science to help them transition to more sustainable and economically profitable systems through improved observation, record-keeping and on-farm testing.

The program also provides a forum – the annual Cooperators' Meeting – for participants to gather, network, discuss research conducted that year and plan new projects.

To learn more, visit practicalfarmers.org/member-priorities/research-demonstration. There, you can access an FAQ, see completed project reports and learn more about the history of the program. Questions? Contact Stefan Gailans at stefan@practicalfarmers.org. ■

Seeking Experienced Farmers for Labor4Learning Program

Are you an experienced farmer who could use some extra help on your farm? Do you care about supporting the next generation of farmers? If the answer is "yes" to both those questions, we invite you to consider becoming a trainer in our Labor4Learning Program. The program, now entering its fourth year, seeks to connect beginning farmers who are looking for on-farm experience with experienced farmers looking for a motivated farm employee.

In addition to hiring a beginning farmer in the Practical Farmers of Iowa network, we ask the Labor4Learning trainer to develop a set of learning outcomes with the trainee and cover those topics throughout the term of employment. PFI provides the trainer farm with a monthly payment to

compensate for additional time spent training.

Farms of all sizes, enterprises, production practices and regions in Iowa are encouraged to apply. To be eligible to serve as a trainer, farmers must live or farm in Iowa and be Practical Farmers of Iowa members.

Applications are evaluated by a committee of PFI members to ensure trainers have adequate experience farming and managing employees. For more information, visit the Labor4Learning page at practicalfarmers.org, or contact Steve Carlson, steve@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661. ■

Save the Date for CSA Workshop: Feb. 5-6, 2016, in Montour

Are you an experienced farmer currently managing a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) business, or an aspiring farmer interested in starting your own CSA?

Join Practical Farmers for a two-day workshop, Feb. 5-6, 2016, that will focus on your questions and challenges. Space is limited, so **RSVPs are required**. Please contact Lauren Zastrow, (515) 232-5661 or lauren@practicalfarmers.org, by Friday, Jan. 29.

Location: The workshop will take place at the Pilgrim Heights Camp & Retreat Center (3005 E Ave.), in Montour. All food and lodging will be provided.

Cost: \$10 for PFI members; \$60 for non-members.

Work will take place in two groups:

- **Exploratory Group:** This group will be geared toward beginning and aspiring farmers, and will include presentations from experienced CSA farmers, along with ample time for questions and some individual work.
- **Experienced Group:** This group will focus on experienced CSA farmers, structured as a participant-led workshop. Topics will explore current on-farm challenges and successes related to Community Supported Agriculture operations. Facilitators and topics will be determined prior to the workshop. **Suggestions?** Please contact Liz Kolbe, liz@practicalfarmer.org or (515) 232-5661 with your ideas.


District 1—Northwest

- Ben Albright, Lytton
- Robert and April Alexander, Granville
- Robert Alexander, Remsen
- Jack Ausborn, Ida Grove
- Emily Brown, Lohrville
- Leroy Kreykes, Sheldon
- Rob Lawler, Westside

District 2—North Central

- Ken Bagdon, Charles City
- Jonathan Chambers, Corwith
- Chris Deal, Ames
- Meghan Filbert, Ames
- Larry Graves, Glidden
- Joshua Hedges, Jefferson

Leave A Legacy



“I believe in PFI's values and mission. I want to see it continue into the future.”

— RICH PIROG

There are ways to provide for your loved ones AND leave a legacy for Practical Farmers of Iowa. You can do both, and it's easy.

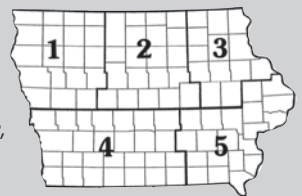
- Designation of your retirement plan for PFI
- Leave a life insurance policy
- Make a gift through your will
- Make a gift now and receive income for life with a charitable gift annuity.

Many such gifts can help you and your family today as well as help our mission years into the future. You can put some in place today without affecting your cash flow during your lifetime.

Want to learn more? Contact Teresa Opheim, executive director, at (515) 232-5661 or teresa@practicalfarmers.org.

** Important: Consult with your own legal and financial advisors before making any planned gift. **

Welcome, New Members!



- James Holz, Grand Junction
- Iowa P & W Inc., Mason City
- Michael McNeill, Algona
- Matthew Miller, Bristow
- Dennis Orcutt, Nevada
- Clinton Philipp, Floyd
- Daniel Sheetz, Toledo
- Ron Swanson, Galt
- Caitlin Szymanski and Steven Hall, Ames
- Katie Thompson, Ames
- Dale Wells, Fort Dodge

District 3—Northeast

- Gary and Sharon Armstrong, Center Point
- Cathy Colony Bunnell, Lisbon
- Mike and Barbara Henning, Waterloo

- Clarissa LaPlante, Cedar Falls
- Sherman Lundy, Cedar Falls
- Michael Malik, Cedar Rapids
- Charles Mazur, Independence
- Bridget McGreal, Strawberry Point
- Brian Noonan, Cascade
- Cindy Recker, Peosta
- Bob Regan, Waukon
- Reno Rodeghiero, Hudson
- Angela Rosol, Tripoli
- Molly Schintler, Oelwein
- Henry Wehrman, Luzerne

➤ Continued on pg. 30



The 120 acres I purchased will be managed the way that Dan would have. . . . I will try to maintain the integrity of the grasslands and improve biodiversity and habitat, just like Dan was trying to do.

◀ Continued from pg. 17

Phil's and Dan's efforts are paying off. I went out to the pasture with Phil in May and noticed a bobolink. "There's one! And another!" I said. Phil said: "They are everywhere!"

After I left Dan's memorial service, I went back home, knowing that eventually the family would have to do something with the farm. Dan died without a will. I thought maybe I could buy the house and a little bit of land around the house.

The following May – May 16 – Dan's brother Paul, who was the executor of Dan's estate, called and said, "We're going to put the land up for auction." I couldn't speak. My initial reaction was a gut one: "No, you can't do that! What about Dan's good soils?"

I then asked if I could bid on the farm, and Paul said: "Well, there will be an auction May 23. There are three parcels of land, two on the main farm and another across the road. We are taking the five highest bidders for each parcel as an initial bid. Then the highest bidders will come to the bank in Monona and there will be an auction on each of the parcels. It will be a round-robin: We'll go around, and everyone will have an option to bid higher."

I had six days to prepare for the auction, to do the financial work to determine what I could pay. Farming was not a business I understood! Dan's friend Jeff Klinge gave me some guidelines and a price that was reasonable; "the land

will hold that value," he said. At the time of the sale in 2013, land prices had been going up and up and up.

Paul let me bid by phone. We did a round for one of the parcels, and I was the highest bidder. Then we did another round for the second piece, and I was the highest bidder on that one. The third round involved the land across the road to the west. Another farmer, Mike, and I kept bidding on that one. I was a little less interested in the third parcel, which was always a hay field for Dan. I don't like herbicides, fungicides and pesticides, and I wanted that property to protect the house. I went over the price Jeff had recommended, but then Mike bid more. So I passed, and he got the land.

But the auction wasn't over yet. Next there was an opportunity for Mike and me to raise the total bid and buy all three parcels. I was sitting there sweating. It would be a real stretch for me to buy all the land at the price I would have to bid to. I hoped Mike wouldn't bid more for the whole farm, and he didn't. The auction was over, and I was now a farmland owner.

The auction was at 10 a.m. Afterwards, I took the rest of the day off because the auction was so nerve-wracking. Later that day I saw a bald eagle, and thought "that's Dan flying up there."

Now I am sad I couldn't buy that third piece across the road. Mike cut the woods in the valley and plowed the hay field and later planted it to corn. "Dan, I'm so sorry," I said when I first saw it. So now I don't look to the west anymore; I look to the east when I visit the farm.

The 120 acres I purchased will be managed the way that Dan would have. He was a farmer and I am an ecologist, so we have different backgrounds – but we had a similar vision for caring for the earth. I want to include more fencerow and shrub plantings. I want to plant more prairie. I want to keep the organic certification for the farm. I want to take soil samples for a baseline of Dan's good soils and learn what happens to them over time.

I would like to continue the grazing, the habitat for grassland birds and continue participating in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Dan worked for years to get that program passed, to help farmers get paid for conservation on working lands (rather than retiring land from farming, like the Wetlands Reserve Program, for example). I want to make sure that the CSP benefits his farm.

I will try to maintain the integrity of the grasslands and improve biodiversity and habitat, just like Dan was trying to do. That is my hope.

When I visited the farm when Dan was alive, I would take my lawn chair out and sit and watch the birds. I still do, and sit there thinking, "This is my farm now, my responsibility now." ■



▼ Ron Rosmann (right) explains the family's pig enterprise to more than 160 guests who attended the Rosmann family's field day and PFI 30th anniversary celebration.



▲ From left to right: Ellen Walsh-Rosmann, Daniel Rosmann, David Rosmann and Becky Tompkins-Rosmann



▲ Longtime PFI member Colin Wilson shares memories of PFI, as Father David Smith SJ listens.



▲ From left to right: Tom Frantzen, Larry Kallen and Mike Duffy listen to Maria Vakulskas Rosmann.



▲ Linda and George Pollak (center and right) speak with another guest.



▲ Cindy Madsen was among those who shared memories of PFI.

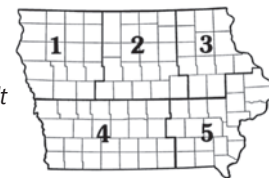
▲ Paul Mugge (left) chats with George Naylor.



▲ Teresa Opheim (front-left, turquoise shirt) and Irene Frantzen are among the guests who enjoyed getting to mingle together in the Rosmann family's corn fields.

◀ Continued from pg. 27

Welcome, New Members!



District 4—Southwest

- Randy Briney, Winterset
- Becky Casady, Cumming
- Colton Corrin, Neola
- Kyla and Bret Cox, Des Moines
- Tim Doud, Waukee
- Jon and Rebecca Frahm, Audubon
- Cathy Frisch, Macksburg
- Zach and Crystal Funk, Redfield
- Mark Gardner, Oakland
- Luann Gilman, Des Moines
- Beth Grabau, Adel
- Bill and Rita Hammitt, Portsmouth
- Gary Harvey, Council Bluffs
- Mike Henning, West Des Moines
- Steve Henze, Grundy Center
- HTS Ag, Harlan
- Brandon Jazz, Waukee
- Abraham Mah, Des Moines
- Mike and Donna McClure, Dallas Center

- Joel Myers and Linda Nelson, Dallas Center
- Linda Lee O'Neel, Stuart
- Jeremy Quigley, Lamoni
- Britt Robinette, Villisca
- James Sallach, Red Oak
- Mary Shields, New Virginia
- Kirby Welch, Bedford

District 5—Southeast

- Christina Anthony and Dennis Grelle, Donnellson
- Edmond Baxter, Muscatine
- Matthew and Lindsey Boerjan, Iowa City
- Rick Mallams, Mount Pleasant
- Mike O'Leary, Riverside
- Joseph Preston, Muscatine
- Carol Rogers, Davenport
- Travis Schulte, Amana
- Jennie Wunderlich, Iowa City

District 6—Out of State

- Matt Bauermeister, Fremont, NE

- Hannah Bernhardt and Jason Misik, Waseca, MN
- Bob Blain, Martinton, IL
- Carl Engstrom, Lincoln, NE
- Brianna Farber, Franklin, TN
- Aimee Finley, Bangor, WI
- Gary and Carol Gadbury, Manhattan, KS
- Perry Jones and Michele Goodman-Jones, New Castle, PA
- Jeff Knuth, Kenosha, WI
- Paul Larson, Lovell, WY
- Mike McDonald, Palmyra, NE
- John Mesko, Princeton, MN
- Midwest Labs, Plainview, MN
- Brad and Heather Nelson, Revere, MO
- Leonard Weisberger and Jane Andersen, Bronx, NY

UPCOMING EVENTS ~ NOVEMBER | DECEMBER | JANUARY

Various Dates – "Map of My Kingdom" Play Performances

Commissioned by PFI and written by playwright Mary Swander, the play explores stories of how farmers and landowners have approached their land transitions. For more, visit www.maryswander.com

Nov. 14 – Year Round and Seasonal CSA Success | Lansing, MI

The Michigan State University Student Organic Farm leads a day of Community Supported Agriculture exploration. Learn about different resources, strategies and approaches for CSA models from startup to growth. For more, visit: www.msuorganicfarm.org/farmer-field-school.html

Nov. 17 – Prairie Rivers of Iowa Water Quality Workshop: On-Farm Nitrate Testing Kits | Gilbert, IA | FREE | RSVP Required

Wondering what's leaving your fields? Learn a simple test farmers and landowners can use to measure the nitrates leaving field tiles. Please RSVP two days in advance. RSVP online at www.prrcd.org/workshops or contact Hanna Bates, watershed coordinator, at (515) 232-0048 or hbates@prrcd.org.

Nov. 17-19 – Farmer Veteran Stakeholders Conference | Sacramento, CA

Hosted by the Farmer Veteran Coalition, this conference will foster collaboration between all groups, public and private, that assist in the effort to help military veterans transition into agriculture. For more, visit www.farmvetco.org/fvsc

Nov. 19-20 – 2015 SOIL Conference | Des Moines, IA

The Drake University Agricultural Law Center, in cooperation with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, will host a two-day, state-wide conference on soil and water conservation policy. Individuals and organizations working to protect Iowa's soil and water resources will consider the role of policy and law in shaping our stewardship efforts. For more, visit: www.drakeaglaw.org

Nov. 20-21 – Iowa Farmers Union Annual Convention | Des Moines, IA

Help IFU celebrate 100 years of working for farmers and ranchers. The event will feature tours, intensive training sessions, interactive workshops and policy discussions, a Harvest Gala, live music and more. For more, visit <http://iowafarmersunion.org/2015convention/>

Nov. 22-23 – Iowa Organic Conference | Iowa City, IA

The theme of this year's conference is "Celebrating the Biodiversity of Organic Farming: People, Animals, Pollinators and Plants." For more, visit: <http://sustainability.uiowa.edu/2015-iowa-organic-conference>

Dec. 1-2 – Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting | Des Moines, IA

Learn about the partnerships that make Iowa a great place to live, farm and grow a business. For more, visit: www.iowafarmbureau.com/events

Dec. 3-4 – Midwest CSA Conference | Eau Claire, WI

This conference is designed to be hands-on, with a program developed by CSA farmers for CSA farmers. It will feature a keynote; two general sessions; and four concurrent workshop tracks, each with four workshop sessions. For more, visit: www.WisconsinFarmersUnion.com

Jan. 6-8 – Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism and Organic Conference | Springfield, IL

For full details, including sessions, speakers and conference tracks, visit: www.specialtygrowers.org/iscaoc-conference.html

Jan. 8-9 – Minnesota Organic Conference | St. Cloud, MN

For more, visit: www.mda.state.mn.us/en/food/organic/conference.aspx

Jan. 14-16 – GrassWorks Grazing Conference | Wisconsin Dells, WI

GrassWorks annual conference will include an exhibit hall and great speakers including Francis Thicke, Jerry Apps, Ray Archuletta – and many more. For more details, visit: <http://grassworks.org/?110340>

Jan. 21-22 – Iowa Forage and Grassland Council Annual Conference | Ames, IA

IFGC will hold its annual conference immediately before Practical Farmers' annual conference at the ISU Alumni Center. Two producer panels and other Iowa speakers will address topics including grazing cover crops, stockpiling forages, managing alfalfa, land use decisions, strategic supplementations and contract grazing. Attend both events for multiple chances to network and learn! For more, visit: www.iowaforage.org

Jan. 22-23 – Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference – "Farmers Teaching Farmers" | Ames, IA

Don't miss this premier farmer-focused learning opportunity! See pages 10-11 for more details, or visit practicalfarmers.org

For more events, visit practicalfarmers.org



Grow your farm with Practical Farmers. Join today!

This annual membership is a:

- New membership
- Renewal

I am joining at the level of:

- Student – \$20
- Individual – \$50
- Farm or Household – \$60
- Organization (including businesses, agencies, not-for-profit groups – \$110)
- Lifetime Member—\$1,000

My interest in joining PFI is primarily as a:

- Farmer/grower
- Non-farmer – (You will have the opportunity to expand upon this when you receive your membership information form.)

How did you hear about Practical Farmers of Iowa?

..... Each membership includes one subscription to *the Practical Farmer*.

Sustain PFI

For the long-term health and vitality of PFI, we ask you to consider making a donation above and beyond your membership fee. I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to PFI in the amount of:

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

JOIN OUR GIFT OF THE MONTH CLUB

The Gift of the Month Club is an easy way to support Practical Farmers of Iowa! Send in your pledge with your credit card information, and we will automatically deduct your donation the first of each month.

YES! I would like to give _____ per month to PFI, to be automatically charged to my credit card the first of the month. (\$10 per month minimum)

Practical Farmers of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you!

Individual, Farm or Organization Name*: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Street: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Primary Phone (with area code): _____

Alternate Phone (with area code): _____

Email: _____

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

Payment:

Total: \$_____ = \$_____ membership + \$_____ donation

- Check or money order enclosed. (Please make payable to "Practical Farmers of Iowa.")

TO PAY WITH A CREDIT CARD, PLEASE GO TO: <http://practicalfarmers.org/join-pfi.html>

Practical Farmers of Iowa

600 Fifth Street, Suite 100

Ames, IA 50010-6071



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