

Tips for Field Days

Feb. 2007



Promotion

- Your PFI field sign is made for permanent installation. (That's one reason it cost more than \$100.) Please mount it permanently in a visible spot!
- Local Extension involvement – get on their calendar, invite them to present.
- Consider local sponsorship, keeping in mind the need to maintain your independence. Maybe your seed corn dealer will send invitations for you, etc.
- Send out invitations to friends and neighbors. PFI coordinators can supply you with mailing labels from previous field days.
- Visit with newspaper editors, etc. following up on Emily Clark's press releases.
- Invite area legislators, community leaders, educators, selected townspeople and consumers.

At the Event

- Introduce important **guests** (e.g., bankers, researchers, Leopold Center people, other PFI cooperators, board members, or staff, your hired hand.) Introduce ***your family!*** This will be a good entry point for you to describe your farm and your goals in farming. Remember, this is *your* farm, and *you* are the host – not Extension, not PFI. They/we are assisting *you*.
- ***Introduce Practical Farmers of Iowa!*** It's easy to forget under pressure. Acknowledge PFI's sponsorship of your field day! In a few words, give some thoughts about, for example, the value of PFI to you and what the organization is doing, how it is membership-based, the district structure, who the district reps are, use of on-farm research by cooperators, etc. Introduce the PFI/ISU farming systems coordinators, who can help fill in any information gaps.
- Mention “**support** from Iowa State University and the Leopold Center” and from other funders on specific trials (SARE, ISU Entomology Dept., etc.). **Acknowledge** any ISU researchers you have worked with on the trials.

- Draw everyone's attention to the **sign-up** sheet. Tell people we need their name and address so we can send them an evaluation form. Some cooperators get their kids to circulate through the crowd with the sign-up sheet.
- Give people the opportunity to **join PFI!** If you have a lineup for refreshments, approach everyone as they go through the line. Give them a membership brochure and tell them how inexpensive and useful PFI is (newsletters, annual meeting, the Member Directory, the information-sharing network).
- **Encourage questions** and comments! REPEAT the questions or answer them in a way that makes it clear to those in the back just what question your answer applies to! Otherwise they're stuck listening to one end of a phone conversation.
- Before you describe *what* you are doing in a particular trial, **explain why**. What questions, what thinking led to this trial? What is the experimental question? How has the trial been designed to answer that question?
- Provide a **handout**. It gives you an opportunity to describe:
 - the trials (diagrams are sometimes helpful)
 - tests used (e.g. late spring soil nitrate, stalks test)
 - previous years' trial results, including economics. People like to know. (And previous years' results are about all there is to show in mid-season.)
- **Go to the field regardless** of whether there are visual differences among treatments. “You can't see any difference anyway.” Well, why have a field day at all?! Seeing is believing, and your guests deserve the chance to make up their own minds.
- If you take a hay wagon out on the road – PFI's insurance requires that **vehicles with flashers** go both ahead and behind the wagon. Ten mph is a reasonable *top* speed!
- Have clear **field signs**. They don't have to be fancy. One approach is to flag each strip according to treatment and provide a single sign to translate flags into treatments.
- At research field days, make a clear **distinction** between information that is from replicated trials and information that is your personal opinion. PFI field days are known both for research-based and for experience-based information. Help your audience understand which is which.
- Leave time for **discussion**. Ask other farmers for their experiences with particular practices. That takes pressure off you, and it gives others some recognition.