

the Practical Farmer

Practical Farmers of Iowa newsletter Vol. I, no. 1,
Spring, 1986

BOARD GETS PRACTICAL FARMERS MOVING

The Practical Farmers of Iowa board of directors met Feb. 21-22 and took steps to set the course of the organization for both the near- and long-term. In addition, board members got to know each other better and had the opportunity to hear author and farmer Wendel Berry speak on the family farm.

A set of goals was formalized as a statement of purpose. The board felt the priorities are the following.

- A) Finding and sharing ways to profitably reduce the use of such purchased inputs as herbicides, insecticides, fertilizers, and antibiotics-- both to lower production costs and to maintain a healthy environment.
- B) Promotion of conservation and improvement of the land, through:
 - 1) rotations and cover crops,
 - 2) residue handling and tillage systems,
 - 3) manure handling in livestock systems,
 - 4) avoiding unnecessary compaction and maintaining good soil structure.

The board reaffirmed that as a general policy PFI should strive to appeal to as broad a spectrum of

farmers as possible, from purely organic growers to those who haven't begun to reduce inputs.

There was a good deal of discussion about future regional and statewide programs. Look for local PFI activities this spring, a series of summer workshops around the state, and a late summer function in conjunction with Thompson Farm Field Days.

The board also met with Dr. Robert Crom, Dean of Extension at Iowa State University, and Dr. Jerry DeWitt, head of I.S.U.'s Integrated Pest Management program. Although Extension is facing a roughly 60% budget reduction, Crom and DeWitt expressed interest in doing what they could within their limited means to work with PFI. A good deal of research has already been done that would be useful to farmers looking for ways to reduce inputs. If the information could be "repackaged" specifically for this type of farmer it would fill a real need and would help to focus Extension's response to future inquiries on the subject.

Last but not least, the board of directors gave final guidance for the form of this newsletter. Newsletters are important to let members know about scheduled events and about what their elected

representatives in the organization are doing. The Practical Farmer will report this news on a quarterly basis, for the time being.

PFI WINTER GENERAL MEETING

Practical Farmers of Iowa held its first annual winter business meeting December 13, 1985, at the Gateway Center, in Ames. A member was elected to the board of directors from each of the five regions of the state.

The program started off at 9:00 A.M. After a welcome by Executive Vice President Larry Kallem, Sharon Thompson gave a slide talk on hog production without antibiotics. Isolation, fresh air and sunlight, agricultural lime and feed supplements of beneficial microbes are elements of this successful enterprise.

Next, Dr. Don Koch, of the Iowa Geological Survey, described the groundwater nitrate study going on in the Big Spring Basin of northeast Iowa. The pollution there is a preview of what we are likely to see elsewhere in the state in future years.

Then Rick Exner, a graduate student, outlined what researchers are saying about agricultural nitrogen losses and soil tests, and farmer Dick Thompson suggested methods that growers can put to use immediately to monitor nitrogen and fertilize efficiently. Items discussed included split applications, tissue and soil tests, and the seasonal pattern of N availability in soils.

After lunch, Sam Steel, formerly with the Iowa Department of Agriculture, presented the case for alternative crops and enterprises. Some PFI members are going this direction. There will be a seminar on fruit and vegetable marketing at this summer's workshops.

Many of those attending the

meeting described operations that already use one or more "non-conventional" methods. Throughout the presentations as well as in regional discussion groups, members themselves had some of the best comments and most useful ideas. For example, the information was volunteered that a mild case of scours can be cleared up with Pepto-Bismol!

December 13 was one of the coldest days of the winter, and at least one car didn't want to go home when it was all over. The fifty-or-so hardy people who made it to Ames not only selected the first regular board of directors from among the members, they came away with an earfull of information.

SPRING ACTIVITIES

Now that the state-level of Practical Farmers of Iowa is on an even keel, it is time to build up the five individual regions of the state. After all, a plant is only as healthy as its roots. On the other hand, even in the best soil it takes time for a few seeds to multiply enough to plant a whole field. Maybe you can look at yourselves and your elected district board member as the seeds. These elected representatives will be cooking up some local activities this spring, and they will be contacting you about them. One possibility is a slide show on an alternative farm operation. Another idea is a field day in which a car caravan stops at a number of farms. Nearly every operation has something different going on that would interest others.

These spring functions should be a good way to get to know other PFI members in your region. You may have something to contribute yourself. The district board members are:

District 1 (Northwest) Gary
D'Agrosa, Box 212, Boyden, 51234.
712-725-2175.

District 2 (North Central) Dick
Thompson, RR 2, Box 132, Boone,
50036. 515-432-1560.

District 3 (Northeast) Jim Hawkins,
Rt. 1, Box 22, Ossian, 52161.
319-532-9636.

District 4 (Southwest) Ron Rosmann,
Rt. 1, Box 177, Harlan, 51537.
712-627-4653.

District 5 (Southeast) David
Heacock, Rt. 1, Box 161,
Bellevue, 52031. 319-872-5939.

way to generate more reliable information about it, with less work for any one person.

SUMMER MEETINGS DEVELOPING

At the February board meeting initial plans were made for a traveling workshop series like the one PFI presented last summer. It was decided to hold these workshops July 8, 9, and 10, in Denison, Waverly and Iowa City, respectively. This year those who attend will have the option of buying or bringing their own lunch.

The program shaping up reflects interests expressed by farmers around the Midwest and the needs of PFI members, in particular. There will be a session on fertilizer, focusing on P and K. There will also be presentations on cost control, cover crops and interseeding, marketing of Iowa-grown fruits and vegetables, and conversion to rotations including cereals.

The meetings last summer were occasions for alot of information sharing and experience swapping. The next issue of The Practical Farmer will contain a complete program and registration information for this July's workshops.

ON-FARM RESEARCH

Where do you go for answers to your questions? Occasionally the question is one that hasn't been asked before. Farmers are finding some answers by setting up trials in their own fields and barns. While there are certain do's and don't's in the design of any trial, it is important that an experiment not amount to a lot of extra time and labor.

District board reps will be noting what questions come up and what people are trying out in their area. As a regional and a state organization, PFI may one day decide to coordinate on-farm research of some kind. If a subject were of interest to enough people, this would be a

PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA
MEMBERSHIP DISTRICTS



Practical Farmers of Iowa

Rt. 1 • Box 16 • Kelley • Iowa 50134