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Funding Impact Brief #6: Practical Farmers of Iowa

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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Funding Impact Brief #6: Practical Farmers of Iowa

Abstract

This publication looks at what's been learned from the Leopold Center's partnership with Practical Farmers of Iowa to support an on-farm Cooperators' Program and Field Days. The evaluation was conducted on six projects that have had major investments by the Leopold Center.

Disciplines

Agriculture

Funding Impact Brief #6: Practical Farmers of Iowa



About PFI

In 1985, the grassroots PFI was formed by a group of farmers and farm advocates dedicated to creating a support network that would connect farmers and friends of farmers together to advance profitable, ecologically sound and community-based approaches to agriculture. In 1987, the Leopold Center was established by the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act to identify profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources. The creation of these two complementary organizations at nearly the same point in time with similar philosophies but divergent platforms offered an opportunity to synchronize their efforts. PFI, with its network of 1,500 farmers and friends of farmers, supports farmer-led investigation and information-sharing, while the Leopold Center supports research-based projects. PFI has played an important role in connecting Leopold Center-supported research to the practical world of sustainable agriculture.

By the Numbers

(2011-2012)

- **\$100,000** awarded by the Leopold Center
- **\$1,041,879** externally leveraged funds
- **171** farmers changed practices as a result of PFI programming
- **\$167,117** awarded by the Leopold Center for pork niche market work which leveraged **\$1,300,000+** in external funds (2001-2013)

Support for PFI programming

The Leopold Center has invested in PFI since 1987.* The majority of funding has been used to support the following programs:

PFI's Cooperators' Program gives farmers practical answers to questions they have about on-farm challenges through research, record-keeping and demonstration projects. The Cooperators' Program began in 1987; today PFI's on-farm research projects include grazing, horticulture, on-farm energy, and food purchasing projects. Since 1987 PFI Cooperators have conducted more than 800 experiments on-farm and shared that information with neighbors and other farmers.

PFI's Field Days showcase innovative farming practices, share on-farm research results, and build urban-rural understanding. Field days give participants a chance to get outside and enjoy Iowa at its best while witnessing the variety of workshops, tours, entertainment and food that define these events.

The Leopold Center funded the **Pork Niche Market Working Group** (PNMWG). This group was part of PFI's niche pork programming which supports niche pork producers in Iowa. Niche pork is pork with attributes that appeals to certain market segments, meaning customers who want something different. These are known as niche markets such as "certified organic" and "humanely-raised" or "antibiotic free." Many PFI members raise and market niche hogs as a strategy to remain viable. Since 2001 PFI has focused on helping niche pork farmers succeed.

* This impact brief considers only programs during 2011-2012 for which data were available.

Beginning farmer Drew Lietz talks about his new farrow-to-finish hog operation.

Paul Ackley listens to a question about cover crops at a field day he hosted in 2012.

Credit: Practical Farmers of Iowa





About this series

Purpose: To communicate the impacts of long-term Leopold Center investments made in sustainable agriculture research, education and outreach on Iowa's communities, economies and landscapes. This brief is the sixth in a series of six featuring:

1. Low-Input High-Diversity Systems (\$357,479; 2004-2012)
2. Long-Term Agroecological Research (\$900,000; 1998-2012)
3. Hoop Houses for Alternative Hog Production (\$526,451; 1997-2012)
4. Regional Food Systems Working Group (\$922,837; 2003-2012)
5. Bear Creek Riparian Buffer Project (\$900,000; 1990-2012)
6. Practical Farmers of Iowa (\$100,000; 2011-2012)

Each brief was prepared based on data gathered from project publications, and 2012-13 interviews with principal investigators and/or key partners. The analysis showed that for every dollar invested in these six projects, an additional \$4.60 was leveraged complement or expand the work. Get all briefs: www.leopold.iastate.edu/change

Cooperators' Program

In 2012 PFI's Cooperators' Program included 26 projects and 37 participants. Participants were surveyed to determine if any farmers changed their practices as a result of this programming. Of the 37 participants, 28 responded to the survey; of those, 17 farmers (61 percent) reported behavior change.

Cooperators' Program 2012			
Reported changes in behavior	# of farmers who reported changes	Reported changes in behavior	# of farmers who reported changes
Cover crops	8	Nutrient management	1
Equipment purchases/changes	2	Animal care	1
Use of mulch/cloth/plastic for weed control	2	Diversifying operations	1
New corn varieties	1	Pest management	1
		Total*:	17

*May not represent the number of unique farmers who made changes to their operations since some farmers may have implemented more than one practice change on their farms.

Field Days

In 2011-12 PFI hosted 57 field days with 2,554 participants. Forty percent (1,034) responded to a survey. Fifteen percent of respondents (154) reported changes to farming practices as a result (note, however, that not all field day participants are farmers).

Field Days 2011-12			
Reported changes in behavior	# of farmers who reported changes	Reported changes in behavior	# of farmers who reported changes
Grazing	47	Tillage practices	6
Overall practices	26	Weed control	4
Cover crops	14	Marketing, business, planning	3
Diversifying operations with organic production	11	Washing and post harvest systems/facility design	3
Animal care	11	Season extension	2
Converting cropland to forage or grass production	10	Transition to non-GMO seed	2
Crop rotations	7	Equipment purchases/changes	2
Fencing	6		
		Total*:	154

*May not represent the number of unique farmers who made changes to their operations since some farmers may have implemented more than one practice change on their farms.

Niche Pork

Niche pork markets grew rapidly in the late 1990s and have continued to expand. As of 2007 there were at least 35 pork niche markets active in Iowa. These range from direct sales to consumers by individual farmers to organized marketing groups. Marketers consistently report more demand for pork than the existing supply of pigs raised to meet the niche market criteria can provide. They also consistently report a shortage of producers and the expectation that the niche market will continue to grow. The Pork Niche Market Working Group has leveraged more than \$1,300,000 in external grants since 2002 and has transitioned to independent leadership.

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

209 Curtiss Hall - ISU
Ames, Iowa 50011-1050
(515) 294-3711

www.leopold.iastate.edu

Prepared by Laura Kleiman and Corry Bregendahl



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