Partnership receives $560,000 grant to continue Value Chain project

A project designed to help build new food supply networks for sustainably raised Iowa foods has received a $560,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to continue its work for the next 2 1/2 years.

The grant will fund the “Value Chain Partnerships for a Sustainable Agriculture” project directed by the Leopold Center. Other partners are Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI), Iowa State University Extension, ISU College of Agriculture and the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU.

Value Chain Partnerships has focused on developing markets for small and midsize farmers who use production practices that follow very high standards of environmental and community stewardship. Also key is using collaborative approaches and ISU’s research capacity to establish a value chain where producers, processors, distributors and retailers all can benefit.

“This project brings together all types of farmers, commodity groups, non-profit agencies and the university community to address some of the challenges found in these promising markets for food and other products,” said project director Rich Pirog. “We know the interest and need are high for this type of collaboration based on what we’ve seen from the Pork Niche Market Working Group.”

The grant will be used to continue work of the project’s first effort, the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG) that began in January 2002. Two other working groups also will be formed – to develop strategies for building local and regional food value chains, and to address producer ownership and equity.

Hoop Group gets second federal grant

Iowa State University’s Hoop Group research team has received $210,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to continue and expand its work on hoop barns for livestock production.

The Hoop Group, created by the Leopold Center in 1997, built one of the first hoop research facilities for hogs at the ISU Rhodes Demonstration Farm. Like other Leopold Center research teams and initiatives, the Hoop Group takes a multidisciplinary approach in its work.

The USDA funds will launch or sustain projects in several ISU departments:

• Tom Richard, agricultural and biosystems engineering, and Jim Kliebenstein, economics, will look at hoop barns as a total production system to develop a planning and assessment tool to optimize agroecological sustainability.

• Steve Lonergan, animal science, will continue his meat quality study of hogs finished in hoops.

• Clare Hinrichs, sociology, will examine the linkages between producers and small to medium meat processors.

• Mark Honeyman, ISU Research and Demonstration Farms, and Jay Harmon, agricultural and biosystems engineering, will compare the effects of group gestation in bedded hoop structures to conventional confinement systems, and set up a demonstration hoop for finishing beef cattle.

• Brad Thacker, from the ISU College of Veterinary Medicine, will complete his study of the use of hoops for finishing disadvantaged swine, an alternative intervention strategy for reducing mortality.
Kellogg project

### KELLOGG (continued from page 1)

issues related to new bio-based businesses in Iowa.

In July 2002, Value Chain Partnerships received a $100,000 planning grant from Kellogg. A portion of those funds went to the new PNMWG for its activities.

The planning grant also was used to bring together a Value Chain Partnerships advisory board, which met to determine goals and a work plan. The project team has worked with the ISU Colleges of business and agriculture to establish graduate assistantships that combine an MBA degree with a minor in sustainable agriculture. The latest Kellogg grant will fund assistantships for two graduate students to help the working groups.

The Kellogg grant will continue through July 2005. It does not offset cutbacks in the Leopold Center’s operating budget handed down by the 2002 Iowa Legislature.

Leopold Center director Fred Kirschenmann said the Value Chain Partnerships project is vital if Iowa farmers are going to compete in a rapidly changing food industry.

“We’re seeing more demand for foods raised by farmers who practice the principles of sustainable agriculture,” Kirschenmann said. “But we need the networks to supply those markets, with a fair return back to the farmer. We’re thrilled that the Kellogg Foundation recognizes and supports this new direction in agriculture.”

ISU is one of 10 colleges and universities with projects in the Kellogg Foundation’s Higher Education-Community Partnership that is part of the Kellogg Food and Society Initiative. The initiative seeks to enhance the capacity of universities and colleges to work with non-profit, government, community-based and private sector partners on critical food systems issues.

### Hoop Group plans national workshop to showcase work

### HOOPS (continued from page 1)

In 2002, the Hoop Group received its first federal support, a $187,000 USDA grant to further the development and adoption of hoop structure technology. The grant was used to begin work on a producer manual, explore how the technology is being used by farmers in other areas of the United States, interview hoop producers about animal care and welfare issues, and lay the groundwork for the disadvantaged swine and meat quality studies. A national workshop on hoops is planned for 2004.

Work by the Hoop Group is summarized in a new fact sheet, *Hoop Barn Swine Production*. To get a copy, contact the Leopold Center at (515) 294-3711, leocenter@iastate.edu, or view it on the Center’s web site, http://www.leopold.iastate.edu.

### Agroecology Team gets top ISU College award

The Iowa State University College of Agriculture has given the Agroecology Issue Team its annual Team Award. This interdisciplinary issue team was established by the Leopold Center in 1990 to develop local watershed management systems that increase the sustainability of agriculture. The team has partnered with landowners, businesses, resource management agencies and non-governmental organizations to establish conservation buffers and restore wetlands. One of its major accomplishments has been the Bear Creek Watershed project, chosen in 1999 as one 12 national restoration demonstration projects. Members of the team are Dick Schultz, Tom Isenhart, Joe Colletti, Jim Raich and Bill Simpkins.
Can we save ‘agriculture of the middle’?

I first ran across these words by Wendell Berry when I read his book, What Are People For? in 1990. As a farmer who managed a 3,500-acre grain and livestock farm in North Dakota, I couldn’t deny the impeccable logic of his thesis. But neither could I escape the demands of the industrial farming culture, of which I was a part. That culture imposed on me the singular requirement of producing more commodities cheaper than anyone else—regardless of the cost. I felt caught between my long-term goal of maintaining the productivity of my farm by ensuring the ecological health of my land and the social health of my community, and the short-term requirements to produce as much as possible. Almost every farmer I know feels caught in the same dilemma.

Ecologists and farmers alike have understood for some time that natural ecosystems can be managed well only by having people live in those ecosystems long enough and intimately enough to learn how to manage them well. We must, as author Barry Lopez reminds us, live in our neighborhoods long enough to know the “local flora and fauna as pieces of an inscrutable mystery, increasingly deep, a unity of organisms.”

This is the strongest—and perhaps the only—argument for maintaining our independent family farm system of agriculture in which land is passed from generation to generation. As I have come to know such landed farm families in Iowa and listened to them describe their farms, I have been struck by the fact that they always talk about their farms as members of the family. That is as it should be. That is what it must be if we are going to remain productive.

We have now reached a point where that kind of agriculture is about to disappear. Since about 1960 the demands of our industrial farming culture have required farmers in Iowa to spend all of their gross income (including government subsidies) to pay the bills associated with producing that income. The result has been that farmers’ net income has remained flat, leaving no money to pay for living expenses, let alone investment in land care or community well-being. Meanwhile, farmers are under enormous pressure annually to add more units of production (more animals and/or more acres) just to generate the additional income to pay last year’s bills. Little attention has been paid to motivating farmers to use their land well, or even allowing them time to get to know it well.

At the same time, corporations that purchase farm commodities want to reduce transaction costs and, therefore, tend to give preferential contracts to the largest producers, placing smaller farms at a competitive disadvantage. Very small farms have gravitated toward various direct marketing schemes to survive, selling produce direct to customers through farmers markets, community-supported agriculture and other direct market arrangements.

Farms in the middle—a time between the direct markets and the markets available through vertically integrated, multi-national firms—are most at risk. This is not strictly a farm-scale issue, although it is highly scale-related. There are very large, multi-family units that still retain some of the principles in Berry’s premise of a farm that can use the land well. But increasingly it is precisely the farms that fit Berry’s description that we are losing.

A study prepared by Mike Duffy at the Leopold Center shows that the greatest percentage loss of Iowa farm operators (in acres and total sales) between 1987 and 1997 was among farms of 100 to 900 acres. Meanwhile, the total percentage of sales for farms under 100 acres and over 1,000 acres increased between 40 and 55 percent. Clearly we are losing these “middle” operations, which make up more than 80 percent of Iowa’s farms.

As farms consolidate, land continues to be farmed, likely with less labor, and this transformation has been welcomed by many in the agricultural economy. Indeed, some see it as a necessary “correction” in the market. But Berry reminds us that we stand to lose something much more important—the capacity of the land to remain productive.

At the Leopold Center we believe that the loss of “agriculture in the middle” is not inevitable. We see new opportunities—in alternative production systems and new market resources—that can create a comparative advantage for these farms.

At this year’s Practical Farmers of Iowa conference, SYSCO Corporation chairman and CEO Rick Schnieders told the audience that “markets for sustainably produced products are there—what is needed are supply chains to deliver those products to the consumer.” Building those supply chains is an opportunity for economic development in Iowa’s rural communities.
Living in a world of wounds

By Nina Leopold Bradley

It has been more than 50 years since my father’s A Sand County Almanac was published. Each time I read these essays, I am changed anew by his words as I discover new depths of feeling and understanding. I am touched by his written words about “living in a world of wounds.”

As you know, my father said, “A thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community.” In his philosophy, it is right when an act “strengthens and re-knits the web of relationships, and so tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the community.”

My father was warm, affectionate and awesome, and his very presence demanded a kind of respect, yes, an atmosphere of “love, respect and admiration.” He wrote of his intense love of the land. Surely these feelings made him vulnerable and personally damaged as the land was being abused on all sides.

Love of the land, for my father, was deep and complicated. Through his ecological understanding of the interrelationships of the natural systems, grew his joy and his grief and his passion. His grief is evident as he writes, “one of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.”

In today’s society I cannot help but ponder my father’s “world of wounds.” What would he see had he lived another 60 years? How many landscapes – how many deep and mindless ecological catastrophes have our land and our people endured? Where would be his grief today and where would be his joy?

David Orr writes, “Imagine a world in which our leaders would be knowledgeable people who would speak not just about economic growth (and a war to sustain it), but about ecological and human health; about love and respect for the land.”

Imagine a world in which our leaders read widely, and thought deeply about the directions of technology, ethics and political philosophy as they relate to the human future.

Imagine a world in which those who lead us would have to understand fundamentals such as how the earth works as a physical system, the integrity of the planet, the biological system, ecology and economics suitable for a small planet.

Bill Vogt in 1948 suggested that “if man will find a harmonious adjustment … as he surely can, this adjustment should make possible a greater flowering of human happiness and well-being than the human race has ever known.”

Our problem now is to find a way to live in an ecologically sound manner, even as we are buffered by earth-damaging policies of our contemporary world of wounds.

Is it possible to reconcile Leopold’s call to connect with the land with the need to connect with each other? Especially at this time of uncertainty, we need to connect with one another for a deeper appreciation and understanding of the complex choices we make. With effective leadership skills we could develop perceptive attitudes and a sense of stewardship toward the rest of the world and the land that sustains us.

This piece was excerpted from a lecture by Nina Leopold Bradley, one of five children of Aldo and Estella Leopold. It was presented at the Iowa Conservation Education Council’s 2003 Winter Solstice conference, “The Leopold Legacy: Conservation Wisdom Past and Present.” A retired plant ecologist, she lives on the Leopold Memorial Preserve in Wisconsin where she continues her research and family tradition of living close to the land.

Aldo Leopold’s other children also have pursued careers in the natural sciences. Carl is a plant physiologist, Starker became a wildlife ecologist, Luna studied geomorphology (study of geology and hydrology), and Estella worked as a palynologist (the study of living or fossil spores and pollen).
A 1939 Leopold family photo shows (back row) Aldo and his wife Estella, and son Luna; and (in front) their other children Nina, Estella and Starker. Photos courtesy Aldo Leopold Foundation.

‘As we transformed the land, the land transformed us’

planted a mosaic of conifers, hardwoods and prairie to restore health and beauty to the community.

In winter we banded resident birds. We recorded daily, weekend, seasonal events on the land – tracks of animals in the snow, arrival of migratory geese, courtship of woodcock. Here in reality Father’s statement rang true – “keeping records enhances the pleasure of the search, and the chance of finding order and meaning in these events.”

Here in the sand counties, my father initiated a different relationship with the land, at once more personal and more universal. From his own direct participation he was to come to a deeper appreciation of the ecological, ethical and aesthetic understanding of land. He gained a new sense of belonging to something greater than himself, continuity with all life through time.

What happened involved the senses, the memory, the history of family. It came from working on the land in all weather, suffering from catastrophes, enjoying its mornings or evenings or hot noons, valuing it for the very investment of labor and feelings.

Family weekends at our Sand County Farm turned out to be a place where my father put these two concepts into practice – the relationship of our family members to each other and their relationship to this piece of land. These two interests became more of a way of life than simply interests. New values were developing somewhere within us.

As we transformed the land, it transformed us … As the land was restored, it was grounded in caring relationships among our family members – of living in webs of relationships.

My father’s writing and the very way he led his life makes me realize that today we need a new ethic of connection, built not only on caring for people or caring for places, but on both, and the intricate and beautiful ways that love for places and love for humans nurture each other and sustain us all.

How the Leopold Center has helped ‘agriculture of the middle’

In crops
- Helped farmers evaluate switchgrass on CRP land for use as a new energy source (co-firing) as part of the Chariton Valley Biomass power project
- Evaluated delivery and distribution uniformity of anhydrous ammonia manifold outlet ports and recommended performance improvements
- Researched bio-control methods for white mold in soybean
- Supported soybean cyst nematode surveys in several Iowa counties
- Worked with agencies and farm groups evaluating use of buffer strips to preserve water quality
- Explored the differences between various kinds of soil phosphorus (P) tests.
- Supported the development and maintenance of new and existing food supply chains, opening new markets for Iowa farmers
- Explored composted swine manure/weed/corn/soybean interactions; compost tends to increase competitive effects of common waterhemp, especially when weed emergence coincides with crop emergence
- Assessed farmer risks/gains for adding zinc fertilizer as yield insurance; showed that it is effective only if tests say soil is lacking zinc

In livestock
- Established management strategies for farmers who are trying to graze beef cows for niche markets; including guidelines on stockpiled grazing to help reduce winter feed costs, improve cattle condition scores, and decrease soil compaction
- Funded first extensive studies showing effectiveness of low-cost hooped hog houses for use by Iowa producers
- Evaluated uniformity of solid manure spreader rates to determine how to improve spreader patterns
- Opened value-added marketing grid opportunities for southern Iowa beef producers through support of the Chariton Valley Beef Initiative
- Funded on-farm research carried out by several Iowa producer groups
- Supported local food projects that encourage institutions and restaurants to purchase locally grown and processed fruits, vegetables and meat
Concentration in agriculture: How much, how serious, and why worry?

Leopold Center policy sessions

More than 200 people attended the Leopold Center’s agricultural concentration conference in Ames on February 4. The event was one of the first activities of the Leopold Center’s new policy initiative led by associate director and economist Mike Duffy.

The conference featured five leading national experts who provided an overview of the problem and possible future consequences, legal and political solutions, and farmer responses.

“I think the good attendance is an indication of the level of concern that people have about concentration,” Duffy said. “Although people are concerned, no one’s talking about it in a systematic, non-emotional way.”

In recent months, agricultural concentration issues have headlined numerous news reports. A federal court ruling struck down an Iowa law that had banned meatpackers from owning livestock. A similar ban has been proposed at the federal level but has failed to receive Congressional approval.

Duffy said he wanted the sessions to be educational rather than divisive. Evaluations indicated that the approach was well received.

Here’s what they said:

Current level of concentration in production, processing, and retailing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five corporations are involved in genetic re-</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>search and seeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meatpackers and processors: 81 percent of the</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>market share in beef is held by five corpora-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>tions; 59 percent in pork, and 50 percent in</td>
<td></td>
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<td>broilers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In grains/milling, 61 percent of the market</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<td>share in terminal grain-handling facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>is held by four corporations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In 2000, 42 percent of the market share in U.S.</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>food retailing was held by five retailers:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kroger, Wal-Mart, Albertson’s, Safeway and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahold. Their market share had nearly doubled</td>
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<tr>
<td>since 1997, and she expects market share to</td>
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<td>rise to 54 percent in 2003.</td>
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“Retailers can now dictate terms to food manufacturers, forcing changes back through the system to the farm level. As the balance of power shifts to the retailers, smaller entities in all parts of the food system are being left out. Rural areas and inner urban areas are most likely to be left out of the retail revolution.”

Economic impact and impacts of continuing to proceed as we are now

Neil Harl, Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor in Agriculture and director of the Center for International Agricultural Finance, Iowa State University

“The evidence is overwhelming that the agricultural sector is undergoing the greatest structural transformation in the history of the sector.”

“In Russia, they are trying to restore competition as quickly as they can. The irony is that we’re moving in the opposite direction.”

“When ownership is concentrated, you don’t have to share the gains you get on the other side from being less than fully competitive. If the United States wants to keep its independent entrepreneurs, they need to have access to meaningful competitive outlets.”

“Without much doubt, the greatest economic threat to farmers as independent entrepreneurs is the deadly combination of concentration and vertical integration. Producers are vulnerable to a combination of high levels of concentration in input supply and output processing, and high levels of vertical integration from the top down.”
draw a crowd

who are left behind by the mergers. And attitude is paramount: Do we consider other producers as competitors or colleagues? Competitors beat each other, while colleagues support each other.”

Representatives from the offices of Senators Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) also offered their perspectives, and explained recent efforts at the federal level to alleviate some of the problems.

A concern for the future of rural communities brought Andrea Jensen to the conference from Litchfield, Minn., where she is a strategic planner and facilitator.

Jensen described a recent meeting in her community to talk about ways to attract businesses whose workers could make a decent wage. “Not once was agriculture or farming ever mentioned and this is a farming community,” she said. “What are the alternatives to this kind of business model [that leaves out farmers]?”

Kathleen Clark of Ames also is concerned for farmers. Clark, a retired United Methodist minister who recently moved back to Iowa, said she had worked with many farmers during the 1980s farm crisis. “I wanted to catch up on these issues,” she said, adding that farmers probably need to rely on off-farm income to survive.

Duffy said the conference provided a good beginning for the Leopold Center’s policy initiative, and that it would help determine future activities in this area.

“I think it showed the external environment in which farmers work every day,” he added. “All too often we focus on the production aspects of agriculture and its problems, but there are things at all levels of agriculture that need to be considered.”

Here’s what they said:

**Anti-trust actions: History and current situation**

Doug Ross, Special Counsel for Agriculture, Antitrust Division, U.S. Department of Justice

“We are very much aware of the trends toward increasing concentration in some agricultural sectors. In particular, the steer-heifer side of the cattle slaughter market has been highly concentrated for some time, with four meatpacking firms now controlling over 80 percent of the market.”

“High concentration in a market is not in and of itself a violation of the antitrust laws. On the other hand, a high level of concentration increases the potential for antitrust scrutiny. Monopolization requires demonstrating that the conduct is harming competition, not just that it is disadvantaging rivals.”

**Alternative policy options: Federal and state**

Doug O’Brien, Counsel for Senate Committee on Agriculture and aide to Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa); and Mark Reisinger, agricultural legislative aide to Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)

Both discussed recent measures that would have helped alleviate some of the problems — the meatpacker ban, mandatory price reporting and payment limits — and why these options face political challenges. They also discussed the potential of the Capper-Volsted Act to increase bargaining rights for farmers, and laws at the state level to regulate production contracts (Iowa is one of 17 states with such laws).

**Farmer responses: Collective bargaining, new generation coops**

Richard Levins, professor of applied economics, University of Minnesota, St. Paul

“You need a vehicle appropriate to the conditions you are in. Only in farming are prices not negotiated. Farmers do not have to be price-takers.”

“When people talk about negotiating, they tend to think only about supply management and all the things that have been used in the past to control supplies, like pouring out milk and plowing down a field of cotton. This is a big misunderstanding about negotiation.”

“Sometimes the solution to being lost is not to drive faster down the same road, but to find a different road. We are so busy looking for help on the supply management road that we have overlooked the negotiating road.”
Farmers learn strategies to supply new markets

Rink DaVee has little trouble getting chefs in Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison to buy locally grown produce, but the challenge is creating a system for farmers to supply those restaurants.

DaVee shared some of his strategies with more than 75 Iowa farmers and others who attended a one-day institutional marketing workshop in January co-sponsored by Practical Farmers of Iowa and the Leopold Center. The workshop focused on economic opportunities for farmers who want to sell fruits, vegetables and meat to restaurants, food service vendors, cafeterias and schools.

“Chefs in Chicago tell me that every year more and more of their customers want locally-grown food,” said DaVee, who operates Homegrown Wisconsin, a marketing group for 25 farm families in southern Wisconsin. “I think this farmer-chef relationship will be increasingly important in the future.”

Homegrown Wisconsin farmers already sell about 70 percent of their produce at farmers markets, through community supported agriculture (CSA) enterprises, and directly to customers. However, DaVee said the cooperative has given its members a high-paying market that they would not have the time or expertise to reach individually.

Farmers deliver their produce to a central warehouse in Madison, where food is loaded onto a truck bound for 30 restaurants. Chefs order from a weekly list of available fruits and vegetables, compiled from information supplied by each farmer. The cooperative generated about $300,000 in sales in 2002.

DaVee shared a session with Michael Rozyne of Red Tomato, a Massachusetts-based broker who distributes sustainably raised fruits and vegetables to five supermarket chains and retail cooperatives in three states. Before he started Red Tomato in 1996, Rozyne co-founded Equal Exchange, which is now the largest seller of fair-trade coffee in North America.

At the workshop Rozyne talked about the challenges of establishing and supplying specialty markets and the “false peaks” that accompany the business. But he said there is a silver lining in highly concentrated distribution networks that offer year-round supplies of produce shipped thousands of miles.

“One of the few advantages of this global economy to farmers is that the quality of food has gone down,” Rozyne said. “Your main opportunity is to provide produce that is the best in quality, taste and freshness.”

Another opportunity is for brand identity for products unique to a region. Rozyne has been successful in its “Born and Raised Here” campaign that features apples from trees native to the region. The fruit is sold only in season.

Challenges include setting up a reliable transportation and delivery system, providing customized service, dealing with products with seasonal availability, matching low prices of much larger distributor and, as Rozyne put it, “the emotional impact of fighting the system.”

Also helping with the workshop were the Risk Management Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Iowa State University Extension. Other workshop sessions included information about legal requirements, forward contracts, liability issues and other successful marketing efforts. All participants received a reference manual.

Corporate CEO to PFI farmers: ‘Your product fits the bill’

The chief executive of North America’s largest food service distributor offered plenty of encouragement to Iowa farmers who want to tap into the burgeoning market for sustainably raised food.

Richard Schnieders, chairman and CEO for SYSCO Corporation, presented the keynote address during the 2003 Practical Farmers of Iowa annual conference in Ames. The conference followed a day of workshops, including the sessions about restaurant markets.

“I see enormous opportunities for sustainably raised products in the food service business,” Schnieders said. “Food service operators are always looking for new products to set themselves apart, so there’s a constant demand for differentiated products.”

SYSCO serves 415,000 customers in the United States and Canada, including hospitals, restaurants, schools, colleges, hotels and motels. The company employs 47,000 people at 149 distribution centers. Sales last year topped $23 billion.

“We welcome working with farmers who work in an environmentally and ethically sensitive manner,” Schnieders said, adding that SYSCO recently began marketing a premium line of fresh strawberries. The corporation works with California growers to follow specific production practices.

The biggest problem for sustainable agriculture is building its own supply chain. He said that groups like PFI and the Leopold Center are needed to help build the infrastructure that could supply and deliver the product.

“In the area of food service, your product fits the bill,” he said. “Once you have the infrastructure to supply and deliver it, your product can be connected to our network. Our customers want your product and we can get it to them.”

Schnieders, a native of Remsen where his father owned a small grocery store, confirmed his support of the Leopold Center during his presentation. SYSCO Corporation is one of the funding partners in the Value Chain Partnerships for a Sustainable Agriculture project. One project looks at the feasibility of establishing a premium line of pork products for food service use.
Hope’s Edge: A conversation with Frances Moore Lappé

The 2003 John Pesek Colloquium on Sustainable Agriculture in March featured author and social activist Frances Moore Lappé, who presented “Food, Farming, Fear: The Power of Ideas to Create the World We Want.”

Lappé’s first book, Diet for a Small Planet, was released in 1971 and was instrumental in helping people rethink issues on food and hunger. In 1975, she founded the Institute for Food and Development Policy, now known as Food First. Her most recent work, Hope’s Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet, is a narrative of small-scale democratic movements working to solve hunger problems.

In keeping with the colloquium’s purpose – to stimulate discussion about food and agricultural issues – we’ve asked Lappé to share her ideas with you. The colloquium is an activity of the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture; the Leopold Center is a co-sponsor of the annual event.

You have devoted your life to understanding and eliminating the causes of hunger. The biggest obstacle you have found is not food scarcity – our planet has enough natural resources to produce enough for everyone – but in our belief systems. You talk about primitive marketism and the role that it plays. What is primitive marketism and how has it affected agriculture?

Primitive marketism is a market driven solely by the logic of highest return to existing wealth. It is an arbitrary premise that concentrates wealth and excludes millions of poor from the market altogether. It is based on the simplistic notion that if the market is left to its own devices, it will create beneficial outcomes for us all.

Moreover, primitive marketism undermines the power of elected governments to solve problems by doing away with limits on corporate concentration and reducing more and more of life’s essentials to commodities for sale, from farmers’ seeds to drinking water. This mindset, what President Reagan called the “magic of the market,” has led to massive concentration, benefiting fewer and fewer corporations.

Today only a few companies control the meat packing industry, and 10 multinational corporations account for one-half of the food items in a typical American supermarket. But this incredible concentration is invisible to the average consumer.

What can we do about it? Isn’t concentration inevitable in our economic system?

Absolutely not. The market is just a tool: it’s what we make it. There are many ways to organize the market with values and boundaries, which have always been there, but gradually these limits have been allowed to erode.

The choice of what should be left to the market and what is essential to life is for us to decide. We’ve already determined in this country that education is not a commodity, and we have laws to make education available to every citizen. Other Western countries have decided that health care is essential to life.

Where are the citizens making the market work to help eliminate hunger?

In researching Hope’s Edge, my daughter and I traveled five continents to see where people were following alternate paths than the one to global corporatism. We visited Brazil’s fourth largest city, Belo Horizonte, which in 1993 declared food a basic right of citizenship. Patches of city-owned land were made available at low rent to local organic farmers as long as they would keep produce prices within the reach of poor, inner-city dwellers. The city redirected the 13 cents provided by the federal government for each school child’s lunch to buy local organic food. Manioc leaves and eggshells, always tossed out as waste, were processed into a nutritious additive for bread for school children. These efforts, we were told, use only one percent of the municipal budget.

Farmers in the United States are living under tremendous pressure to be more productive, cut costs, remain competitive, yet lessen the impacts of practices on neighbors, land and water. How can they go against powerful market forces?

I believe that a new mental map is emerging, one that puts market back into community. For example, the number of farmers markets has grown 80 percent since 1994 to more than 3,100 nationwide. Community-supported agriculture (CSA), in which farmers and consumers share the risks and the harvest, has increased to more than 3,000 groups that serve 30,000 families.

Iowa also is at the forefront with the Leopold Center, the Iowa Food Policy Council and an endowed chair devoted to sustainable agriculture. For one thing, the Leopold Center has raised public awareness by featuring Iowa-raised food at its events and conferences. It also led the Center to explore the impact of food purchasing decisions by Iowa schools, state government and businesses, and recommend state policy supporting local purchases.

Policies encouraging local buying, farmers markets and CSAs all reflect a letting go of primitive marketism. They acknowledge the community’s need to set values and parameters within which the market works. In this way, the market returns to its function as a means to healthier communities, not an end in itself.

What hope do you offer the people of Iowa?

Within a year and a half after we returned from our trip, two movements that were facing overwhelming odds helped bring about enormous political change. In Brazil, the landless workers’ movement helped elect a new president whose major goal is to eliminate hunger. In Kenya, the leader of a grassroots effort to turn back the encroaching desert is now deputy minister of the environment.

We ourselves would never have predicted these changes. Hope, I am learning, does not come from just assessing what is possible and striving for that. It is in the awareness of possibility itself – the limits of which are always unknowable – that we are free to focus on creating the world we want. Hope is not something we seek out and find in evidence, but what we become as we take action.

Get a copy of the entire presentation from the Wallace Chair office, (515) 294-6061, or read it at: www.wallacechair.iastate.edu.
New member links agricultural health, sustainability

Sustainable agriculture is more than just caring for the land; it is also caring for the people who care for the land, says the newest member of the Center’s advisory board.

Kelley Donham, director of the Iowa Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), was appointed in January to represent the University of Iowa on the advisory board. He succeeds one of the Center’s original board members, U of I professor Leon Burmeister.

“There are a lot of important natural resources on our farms and sometimes we overlook the people who do the work,” Donham said. “The objective is to keep our family operations alive and well by keeping our people healthy and safe, which has a lot to do with the economy and whether you have a viable operation. An economically shaky operation can lead to stress and more injuries, so everything ties together.”

A professor of occupational and environmental health at the University of Iowa’s College of Public Health, Donham specializes in research on agriculture’s occupational and environmental hazards, particularly the effects of concentrated livestock facilities on human and animal health. In 2001 and 2002, he was part of a group of scientists at ISU and the U of I asked to look at current research on air quality related to large-scale animal feeding operations. The group’s April 2002 report has led to statewide discussion on a number of issues.

“Politics has entered the picture so much that you get labeled as being on one side or the other,” said Donham, who was the practicing veterinarian for a 150-member hog producer cooperative in Kentucky for three years during the late 1970s. “My concern is about the nature of the problems, how common they are, and how to prevent them.”

Donham, a native Iowan, grew up on his family’s farm in Johnson County. He helped his father and grandfather on the 400-acre farm, which included row crops, a 5,000-head hog operation and a cow-calf operation. Donham left the farm when he was 30 to pursue a career in medicine and environmental health. Iowa City annexed the farm in 1980.

Four years ago, however, Donham decided to return to farm life. He purchased 300 acres in southeast Mahaska County, 60 miles from his Iowa City office.

“The farm is my other job and my passion,” he said. “I manage the farm but I rely on my neighbors to do the contract work that I do not have time to do.”

He’s planted 17 acres of native prairie, established four ponds to slow down water runoff, added buffer strips, and rejuvenated old bromegrass on idle ground by interseeding with legumes, and replacing much of it with native prairie grasses. “I’m trying to farm it but reduce the erosion and misuse this piece of ground has seen over the years,” he said. “The thin soil was row-cropped too extensively in the past and we’re trying to build it back to some sort of production that is more sustainable.”

Longtime member retires from board

Paul Whitson, who represented the University of Northern Iowa, announced his retirement from the board in November. Whitson is a professor of biology and has taught classes in ecology, biogeography, and environmental technology at UNI.

Whitson has been a member of the advisory board since 1992. UNI is in the process of naming another representative for the board.

News & Notes

The final report of a consumer focus group study that looked at how to best market specialty meat, poultry and dairy products from grass-fed or pasture-raised animals is now available from the Leopold Center. An independent market research consultant conducted six focus groups last fall in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The report showed that consumers want to see general standards to define pasture-raised products. The report is posted on the Leopold Center web site, http://www.leopold.iastate.edu, or can be ordered by contacting the Center, (515) 294-3711, leocenter@iastate.edu.

Farmers who want to know more about selling to restaurants, hospitals and food services can check out a new publication, Selling to Institutions: An Iowa Farmer’s Guide. This 24-page free booklet includes a checklist and answers to common questions about insurance and equipment requirements, and how to find state programs that offer assistance for small businesses. The publication, written by attorneys Robert Luedeman and Neil D. Hamilton and published by the Drake University Agricultural Law Center, was funded in part by a grant from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Copies can be downloaded from the Iowa Food Policy Council web site, http://iowafoodpolicy.org, or requested from the law center at (515) 271-4956.

Got questions about federal farm programs? The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture has a new web site with information on a range of programs and policies related to sustainable agriculture, including provisions in the latest Farm Bill. The web site, called the Federal Sustainable Agriculture Program Primer, includes information about each program, who administers it, how to access the program, how it is funded, the program’s status, and where to get additional information. The Federal Sustainable Agriculture Program Primer is at: http://www.sustainableagriculture.net/primer.php.

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LC project links producer with restaurant market

Jean and Steve Moseley raise 3,000 hogs and nearly 500 acres of corn and soybeans each year on their family farm near Hudson. But it’s the harvest from their newest venture – tomatoes from a 2.5-acre vegetable operation — that has earned them the most local notoriety.

The couple’s picture appears on table tents at Rudy’s Tacos in Waterloo, which uses their tomatoes exclusively during the growing season. They also grow a variety of peppers, herbs, sweet corn, cucumbers, squash and other vegetables. They sell to other restaurants, two managed care facilities and three weekly farmers markets.

The Moseley’s are among 10 to 15 farmers who make up a growers network for 10 institutional food buyers in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area. The network is operated by the University of Northern Iowa Local Food Project, partially funded by grants from the Leopold Center. Like other growers, the Moseleys have found that sales to universities, hospitals and restaurants help stabilize the rest of their operation.

“About four years ago we realized that we had to quit farrowing pigs because we couldn’t make any money,” said Jean Moseley. “I used to have a large garden after we were married, and growing vegetables was something we felt we had the background to do.”

They knew that growing the produce was only half of the work.”My husband is our sales manager,” she said. “He thought that if we were going to grow it, we needed to find someone to buy it, so he contacted UNI and a few restaurants. But it’s really hard to do cold calling.”

They learned about the UNI Local Food Project from Allen Memorial Hospital. Being part of the growers network has helped them establish a steady customer base. They estimate that nearly half of their sales are in the local institutional market.

“During the season, the owner of Rudy’s will buy only our tomatoes,” she said. “He pays $1 a pound the entire season to guarantee the freshest that we have.”

Locally grown tomatoes fetch double the price if they are ready before or after the normal July-through-September season. Hoping to capture this market, the Moseleys have invested $10,000 in a high-end greenhouse to extend the season.

“A lot of farmers have realized that they need to diversify and this is the way we’ve decided to go,” she said. “We’re pleased to have people in our community excited about local foods.”

Leopold Center annual report focuses on ‘A Year in the News’

The Leopold Center got plenty of press in the past year. Unfortunately, much of it dealt with budget cuts and retrenchment. The newly published Leopold Center annual report for fiscal year 2002 shows how the Center coped with these financial difficulties and continued to maintain support for its three research initiatives, outreach activities, and collaborative efforts with other groups.

Carrying out the “news” theme in layout and design, the report has been scaled back from previous years to indicate that it was not “business as usual” at the Center this year. Feature stories cover the pork niche market working group, the agricultural policy conference, local food systems research, community conversations, and the creative ways the Center chose to deal with the loss of $1 million in revenue.

The concluding year of funding for the various issue teams and initiatives, and the partnership with Practical Farmers of Iowa are covered in detail. A lively section describes some of the ways that Center staff continued to spread the word about sustainable agriculture at Iowa State University and around Iowa.

One-fourth of the annual report is devoted to recapping the work of the investigators in the competitive grants program — those embarking on new projects, ongoing work, and projects that concluded their efforts at the end of the year.

The 24-page report is now available from the Center office. It was compiled and edited by Mary Adams, with graphic design provided by Juls Design of Ankeny.
Environmental groups establish I-CALL

More than 700 Iowans have volunteered to be part of a new advocacy effort for stronger conservation and environmental policies and programs in the state. The Iowa Conservation Advocates’ and Leaders Link, or I-CALL, is a communications tool for citizens who would be willing to contact their legislators about key policies or issues. The network is a project of the Iowa Environmental Council and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

More information is posted at: www.iowacall.org. To sign up, call (515) 309-3152, or e-mail ICALL@iowacall.org.

The goal is to involve at least 2,000 Iowans in this effort.

Leopold Center plans Iowa visit for ecologist Jules Pretty

Plans are underway at the Leopold Center to bring noted sustainable agriculture scholar and author Jules Pretty to Iowa in June.

Pretty is director of the Centre for Environment and Society at the United Kingdom’s University of Essex. The author of more than 150 research papers and eight books, Pretty looked at more than 200 sustainable farming projects on 70 million acres in 52 countries. His analysis showed that sustainable practices can lead to substantial increases in production – as much as 150 percent for some root crops.

In 2001, he published Agri-Culture: Reconnecting People, Land and Nature, a book that shows how sustainable agriculture practices have transformed communities and landscapes in many parts of the world. His newest book, Guide to a Green Planet, has just been published.

In addition to his academic activities, Pretty is deputy-chair of Great Britain’s Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) and has served on a number of government advisory committees. A frequent speaker and contributor to media reports, he has worked with the BBC on several nationally-broadcast programs. A member of the Institute of Biology and British Agricultural History Society, he also edits the International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability.

Watch the Leopold Center website for details about the June 2003 Jules Pretty visit.

This event is an activity of the Leopold Center’s new ecology initiative.