

Letter

RECENT BUDGET CUTS have raised serious questions about the future of the Leopold Center. It is a challenging environment, but we are still working for a sustainable agriculture, our charge from the Iowa Legislature in 1987. This special issue addresses what has happened in recent months, what we're doing, and where we are headed.

Vital signs

• **Research continues.**

Thanks to judicious budget management, we have the funds to continue all research projects that were in progress when the fiscal year began July 1, 2002. This includes 37 competitive grants - 24 in their second or third year, and 13 first-year projects that we had already made commitments to before the budget cuts occurred.

• **New projects begin.**

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a \$100,000 grant to start work on the first phase of a food systems project in which the Leopold Center has a leadership role.

The grant is one of eight in the United States.

Discussions are taking place on some "big-picture" projects, too. The Leopold Center aims to become a national player for long-term change in agriculture.

• **Supporters speak out.**

More than a dozen environmental and sustainable agriculture organizations gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the Leopold Center at a dinner in Des Moines. The October 21 event also launched a major fundraising effort for the Leopold Center in cooperation with the ISU Foundation.

Iowa State University President Gregory Geoffroy has pledged his support to restore funding to the Leopold Center. In his September 23, 2002, convocation address, Geoffroy said the Center's programs have some of the "greatest potential for improving Iowa's economy."

Progress on programs

During the past two years, we have listened to and worked with the people of Iowa to develop a new vision for Iowa agriculture. This agriculture would enable farmers to retain more value on the farm while restoring the natural resources on which all agriculture depends.

Achieving this vision will require:

- more effort, not less,
- directed research to "connect the dots" between what we already know and where we want to go,
- more partners, not fewer, in the university, agricultural and broader communities to move new ideas into practice, and
- additional funds beyond those from the Groundwater Protection Fund, to provide our partners with adequate resources to do the job.

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Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.
 - Mark Twain



"I do not think that we would be in the pork business if it were not for the workings of the [Leopold Center's Hoop Group] team... They looked at the economics of the farm but also investigated the welfare of the animal and the effect that this kind of facility had on the farm family."

*Tom Frantzen,
 New Hampton farmer,
 letter of support,
 October 2, 2000*



THE RENEWED LEOPOLD CENTER

OUR LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

The Leopold Center was created by the Iowa Legislature as part of the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act of 1987. The Center is mandated to:

Identify and reduce negative impacts of agricultural practices,

Contribute to the development of profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources, and

Cooperate with Iowa State University Extension to inform the public of new research findings.



BUDGET DRAIN

On May 28, 2002, the Iowa Legislature voted to transfer \$1,000,000 out of the Leopold Center's account in the Groundwater Protection Fund to the state's General Fund. The transfer removed 86 percent of what the Center had received from that account in previous years. The fund is replenished annually by state fees on sales of nitrogen fertilizers, and on registration and use of pesticides.

The Leopold Center also receives nearly \$500,000 directly from the legislature's education appropriations. This funding source received the same percentage cut as other Iowa State University units - about 10 percent.

Over the past two years, budget reductions in both sources of funding for the Leopold Center have totaled about \$1.3 million.

"The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture is a beacon of hope to farmers and communities who are fighting to survive. The center provides leadership and direction to those who resist becoming serfs on their own land, refuse to pollute their neighbor's water and air, and reject trading their community's future for short-term gain."

Mary Swalla-Holmes, Madrid, May, 2002, letter to the Des Moines Register

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture explores and cultivates alternatives that secure healthier people and landscapes in Iowa and the nation.

The Leopold Center believes that agriculture in Iowa can support families on farms, contribute to a healthy environment and maintain resilient communities. New ways of thinking about agriculture must involve new markets for Iowa farmers, a better understanding of local ecosystems, public policies and economic practices, and partnerships with consumers.

To bring about this kind of agriculture, the Leopold Center has identified three program areas:

Marketing and food systems

- promotion, development and discovery of markets for food, fuel and fiber that support vibrant local communities and protect natural resources,

Ecology

- development of ecologically friendly systems that are more resilient and less costly to farmers, communities and to the environment, and

Policy

- analysis and development of new food, agricultural and natural resource policies that are community, farmer and environment-friendly.

This direction is the result of a planning process that started in 2000 and involved hundreds of farmers, educators, researchers, business people and national leaders in sustainable agriculture. The Leopold Center began its transition in September 2001 by issuing its first call for projects and partners.

Many of the Center's original programs are being tailored to better fit the needs of each program area. We're still involved in conferences, workshops and research as they relate to our three program areas. We are continuing to work with partners and issue teams to leverage our funds for projects.

For more information, contact the program leaders in your area of interest:

Marketing and food systems:
Rich Pirog, (515) 294-1854,
rspirog@iastate.edu

Ecological systems:
Jeri Neal, (515) 294-5610,
wink@iastate.edu

Policy:
Mike Duffy, (515) 294-5715,
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"The Leopold Center has provided a safe haven for scientists to carefully and rigorously study what makes a successful and sustainable farm tick ... The systems-based, farmer-driven research that is the hallmark of the Leopold Center will become even more valuable to farmers in the years ahead."

Chuck Benbrook, former director, National Academy of Sciences Board on Agriculture, May 22, 2002, letter to Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack



“Working on a Leopold Center issue team has changed the way I do things, resulting in research that I never would have considered. We’ve looked at whether or not we could do winter grazing in Iowa, what happens to soil properties and subsequent crop production when cows graze cornstalks, and the effects of spring pasture conditions on seasonal forage production. All were questions posed by members of the issue team, which included scientists, extension and agency personnel, as well as farmers and others close to the land.”

Jim Russell, ISU researcher, grazing field day, Winter 2001

PENNY WISE, POUND FOOLISH?

IOWA WILL DEVOTE less than one penny of every state dollar this year to water quality, soil conservation, environmental education, natural areas, wildlife habitat and trails. According to the Environmental Council of States, **Iowa ranked last** in staffing per capita for environmental programs, 40th in expenditures, and 37th in spending per capita (based on 1998 figures, the most recent available).

A CRITICAL POINT FOR IOWA

AMONG ALL STATES,
Iowa ranks

- third in income from farms,
- second in the number of farms, and
- first in percentage of land under cultivation.

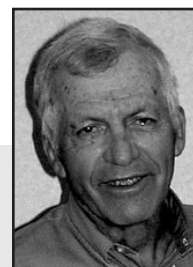
With the most altered landscape in the world, Iowa is a good starting place for initiating change in agriculture. What works here also may work in other regions or farming systems. Many people believe that the impact the Leopold Center and its partners are capable of making in Iowa is transferable on a national scale.

We also may be at a critical time for changes in the landscape. Fossil fuel resources are becoming depleted, and there’s a growing awareness of the environmental damage caused by 50 years of industrialized farming practices. The Leopold Center and eleven other sustainable agriculture institutes in the land grant university system know more about sustainable land practices than they did 10 years ago.



“In times of crisis it is even more “vitally necessary,” as you say, to work proactively to create a vision for a better future. Agriculture has been in crisis for years; all the old formulas for successful farming are failing. The only real ray of hope is coming from the vision and leadership of people like the folks at the Leopold Center, who are working to create an Iowa agriculture that is sustainable—economically and environmentally.”

Francis Thicke, Fairfield farmer, May 28, 2002, letter to Iowa legislator



“The use of hoop buildings in the last five to six years in the Midwest has been a revolution in alternative swine production ... The driving force has been the Leopold Center initiative.”

Dave Williams, Villisca farmer, letter of support, Oct. 9, 2000

POINTS OF PRIDE

A local food project in the Cedar Falls area generated more than \$8 of income for local food producers for every \$1 invested by the Leopold Center. In four years, nine institutions and restaurants purchased approximately \$590,000 of locally grown and processed fruits, vegetables and meat.

The Leopold Center’s \$900,000 investment in the Bear Creek Demonstration Watershed over 10 years has attracted more than \$3.7 million of federal, state, and private funding. It is now a national model for protecting water quality on farms.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship used wetlands research initiated by the Leopold Center to develop Iowa’s new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in 2001. CREP is

providing \$38 million over three years to construct and restore up to 8,000 acres of wetlands and buffers in 37 targeted counties.

The Leopold Center built three hoop barns in 1996 to study alternative swine production and management options to help producers faced with declining markets. By 2001, 770 Iowa farmers had built more than 2,100 hoop barns that housed more than a million hogs. In 2002, the Leopold Center secured \$187,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the ISU hoop research team to continue its work.

The Leopold Center’s investment of \$10,000 and leadership in forming the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG) in January 2002 has leveraged an additional \$208,000 from other partners and grant sources.

“In the months ahead, our place in the world may be even more critical. Experts here in plant sciences, in the National Animal Disease Center or in the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture are just the kinds of people who can help to feed populations, to put foreign economies back on their feet, to guard against threats from enemies, or reduce our dependence on foreign oil supplies.”

Ames Tribune editorial, September 11, 2002



LEOPOLD CENTER
FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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“We have come to value the Leopold Center’s leadership and innovative research as it has worked with farmers to illustrate to Iowans and the rest of the country that food can be produced in ways that do not jeopardize people’s health or diminish the capacity of future generations to feed themselves.”

Margaret Mellon, Union of Concerned Scientists, May 24, 2002, letter to Iowa legislator

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To be effective, the Leopold Center needs a more secure foundation. We need your help to maintain our legislative funding. We will use the money designated for the Leopold Center in the Groundwater Protection Fund to leverage the additional resources needed to be successful in fulfilling the mandate given to us by the Iowa Legislature. We will continue to develop partnerships in Iowa and beyond to create programs and projects that enhance Iowa’s economic development and provide for a stable and secure agriculture.



During the observance of the 50th anniversary of Aldo Leopold’s death in 1998, biographer Curt Meine reflected on the Leopold Center’s connection with the land ethic. He said:

“A hundred years from now, we may look back and see this as the Leopold Center’s most significant contribution:

helping us to learn and to live well on the land that produces not only our food and fiber, but our sense of place and our sense of belonging; helping us to find ways to live not as conquerors of the land, but as citizens with, and within, the land. If this be the legacy of the Leopold Center, then it has truly lived up to the vision of Aldo Leopold.”

