

Letter

A NEWSLETTER OF THE LEOPOLD CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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Creston producer Ron Dunphy, holding his grandson Austin, has been contract farming for many years.



Production contracts steer change for Iowa farmers

By Laura Miller
Newsletter Editor

Mention agricultural production contracts at a coffee shop or grain elevator these days and you're liable to get an earful.

Production contracts and a guaranteed price when markets collapse may be the only things keeping some farmers in business. Production contracts also may be driving others off the farm if contracts limit competition and lead to corporate consolidation and ownership. Then again, signing a contract to grow something for another company is no big deal for producers who began custom farming years ago when contract production wasn't such a controversial issue.

One thing is certain—more Iowa farmers are operating under

production contracts. At least 60 percent of all livestock raised in Iowa is by contract, a trend rapidly expanding into grain production, especially with the uncertainty surrounding genetically modified (GMO) crops.

A livestock production contract can be defined as an agreement under which a producer agrees to feed and care for livestock owned by a contractor in return for a payment. A grain production contract is an agreement under which a producer raises a crop for a contract company in return for a premium paid at harvest. Production contracts should be distinguished from marketing agreements, cash forward contracts, and futures contracts, which involve the sale of

CONTRACTS (continued on page 6)

Center organic initiative offers lift to producers

By E. Anne Larson
Communications Specialist

With commodity prices scraping bottom, Iowa farmers are looking for options to boost their profitability. Organic crops may be one way to augment that margin, and a Leopold Center-funded organic research initiative may help answer some of the questions surrounding organic production in Iowa.

The Long-term Agroecology Research initiative (LTAR) is led by Kathleen Delate, Iowa State University's first specialist in organic agriculture, working in the departments

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"A lot of independent producers are bitter toward contract feeders, thinking they are the enemy.

Decisions about whether or not to feed on contract, however, can be agonizing. Often it's the last resort." See pages 6 and 7.

Special projects address critical agricultural issues

Measuring air quality in alternative and conventional swine production systems, helping farmers deal with financial stress, and building networks for local food systems in northwest Iowa are the focus of special projects funded by the Leopold Center.

The Leopold Center staff has been working with partners to develop the following projects that will run from two months to more than a year.

Air quality

The Center is supporting a 15-month research project that will look at air quality and exposure to contaminants around and downwind of both swine hoop buildings and conventional confinement systems. The joint project is being conducted by the ISU Department of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering and the Center's sister

organization, the University of Iowa Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination. For more information, contact Peter S. Thorne at the U of I, (319) 335-4216.

Farm stress

Funds are being used to sponsor follow-up work to the "Together in Tough Times" initiative of the Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa (EMI). This project is designed to encourage community conversations that address stressful issues facing rural Iowans. Other partners are the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives, Iowa Association of School Boards, and ISU Extension. For more information, contact Sarai Beck, EMI, (515) 255-5905.

Rural crisis

Funds will provide scholarships for

parish nurses to attend a Rural Ministry Conference March 12-14 in Dubuque. Parish nurses combine ministry with health care, meeting patients in their homes to provide information about various services. The conference is sponsored by the Sharing Help Awareness United Network (SHAUN), which is affiliated with the Iowa Center for Agricultural Safety and Health in Iowa City. For more information, contact Michael Rosmann, SHAUN, (712) 755-1516.

Local food systems

Sioux Rivers Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) will connect producers in northwest Iowa to hospitals, hotels, colleges and convention centers that want to buy locally-grown food. For information, contact Darrell Geib, (712) 943-7882.

NEWS & NOTES

An updated fact sheet on composting dead livestock has been published as a result of recent changes to Iowa Department of Natural Resources requirements on the practice. The revised publication, *Composting dead livestock: A new solution to an old problem* (SA8), is online at the Leopold Center's web site (<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/SA8.pdf>), or available from Iowa State University Extension's publication distribution center, (515) 294-5247. The fact sheet is based on work done by Tom Glanville from ISU's Department of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, a portion of which was supported by the Leopold Center.

* * *

ISU Extension's sustainable ag program has a new web site with a calendar of events, news items, and contacts. Visit the site at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/sustag/>.



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The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture seeks to identify and reduce adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts of farming practices, develop profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources, and create educational programs with the ISU Extension Service. It was founded by the 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act.

The *Leopold Letter* is available free from the Leopold Center at 209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-1050; (515) 294-3711.

Editor: Laura Miller

having inquiries concerning this may contact the Director of Affirmative Action, 318 Bearshear Hall, (515) 294-7612.

A farmer's guide to direct marketing

The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing

Neil Hamilton

Drake University, 1999 235 pp. \$20

As a Drake University agricultural law professor and member of the Leopold Center Advisory Board, Neil Hamilton is a fervent proponent of taking agricultural education to the fields. While many readers of this book will recognize him from his frequent and savvy musings in *The Des Moines Register*, Hamilton has aimed this effort toward direct-market-oriented farmers and/or their advisors.

Farming is obviously a business, but what might be understated at times is the fact that all business endeavors require a certain level of legal acumen. For those new to the world of direct farm marketing, Hamilton presents a valuable primer, pointing out opportunities and the accompanying "challenges" to be expected if one follows this

alternative that cuts out the veritable "middleman."

What follows are questions on anything and everything involving the legal ramifications of going the direct farm marketing route. And the answers—not spoken in "legal-ese," readers will be relieved to discover—are presented as well. Issues of zoning, employee relations, insurance and medical law are among the many topics that Hamilton meticulously analyzes through the agricultural and legal microscope. For the farmer or producer who has read this thorough book and still needs to consult a legal professional, he provides various contacts.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program was wise to provide Hamilton a grant to assemble this complete volume. One only hopes that Hamilton will be encouraged to keep producing valuable resources for beginning and seasoned farmers



Hamilton also raises chickens at his Sunstead Farm outside Des Moines.

alike. He takes the mystery and trepidation out of what might be unfamiliar terrain. — John Lane, Leopold Center

Copies can be purchased from Drake University Agricultural Law Center, Des Moines, Iowa 50311; (515) 271-2065.

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Iowans appreciate gift copy of *A Sand County Almanac*

When Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* turned 50 last fall, the Leopold Center staff thought the best way to celebrate would be to encourage Iowans to read or revisit these often-quoted essays.

To that end, the Center mailed a copy of the book and a commemorative poster to 573 public libraries, 436 high school libraries, 107 libraries in communities colleges, universities and prisons, as well as the offices of 91 conservation boards, 117 soil and water conservation districts, and 100 county extension units. The mailing brought many warm letters of thanks.

"The majority of books we receive are donated," writes the librarian for the women's correctional facility in Mitchellville. "We were elated to receive such a classic to place among our other reading materials."

Karen Parmer, media specialist at Grinnell Community High School, thanked the Center for the book and said it would be useful for students. "[A] front-page headline, 'Fewer Iowa farmers practicing soil conservation' is a reminder that there is still a need to promote sustainable agriculture and to continue Aldo Leopold's work to restore and preserve the land," she writes.

The Center also mailed the book to anyone who requested it, an offer that appeared in the state's largest newspaper and was mentioned in our fall newsletter. Staff members responded to requests for an additional 176 books, some from scientists as far away as West Africa and New Delhi who receive the newsletter. Other requests came from teachers, conservation students, as well as

people simply interested in the environment.

"I think it would be helpful as a resource guide as our rural church community begins to focus on becoming sustainable, which is not the direction we're moving now," writes a reader from Eldora.

Some people couldn't believe that we were serious about the offer. "Is this offer true? For free? Really?" writes one reader. An out-of-state agronomist said he was embarrassed to admit he had read only portions of the *Almanac*, and would be delighted to have his own copy.

Any doubts about the mark that Aldo Leopold leaves on his home state have vanished. His words are appreciated as much today as when they were written 50 years ago.

Experimental plots begin third growing season

ORGANIC

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of horticulture and agronomy. The Center provided \$30,000 for start-up costs and also supports three competitive grants related to organic production. Former center director Dennis Keeney says the initiative holds promise for agriculture. "We view organic production as a great opportunity for Iowa farmers to expand their market base and provide value-added and value-retained production for Iowa communities, and offer high-quality and healthy alternative foods for Iowa markets."

The initiative has been fashioned out of input gathered through 1997 listening sessions. Discussions were held at six sites to gauge the needs of producers interested in organic agriculture. By conducting replicated experiments at sites throughout the state over a dozen or more years, Delate believes reliable best management practices can be developed to suit Iowa conditions.

The plan is to eventually have LTAR sites at up to five locations throughout the state. The first site, established on 17 acres at the Neely-Kinyon Research Farm south of Greenfield, produces organic soybeans, oats, alfalfa and corn. Rotations being studied include conventional corn-soybean, organic corn-soybean-oats (with alfalfa), organic corn-soybean-oats (with alfalfa)-alfalfa, and organic soybean-winter rye (spring plow-down).

Other research is being conducted at the Southeast Research Farm in Crawfordsville and the Muscatine



Kathleen Delate leads the Center's organic initiative.

Island Research Farm, as well as on farms of private cooperators. Delate also oversees research projects at eight sites that include work on organic soybeans, vegetables and herbs (page 5).

Information gleaned from this research will have an eager audience, judging from the burgeoning interest in organic production in Iowa. Delate says premiums for organic crops can range from 20 to 300 percent. Organic acreage in Iowa has increased dramatically from 13,000 acres in 1995 to 120,000 acres on nearly 700 farms in 1998. Iowa organic crop production has become a \$200 million industry, part of a \$4.2 billion industry nationally. International demand for organic products is also on the rise, especially

from Japanese and European markets.

While economics is one reason farmers are interested in organic production, enhancing environmental quality and consumer concerns about food safety are also considerations. Delate believes that over time, differences will emerge between the conventional and organic systems, including decreased pest pressures and increased soil quality under the organic regime due to longer rotations and additions of organic matters from compost and cover crops.

Data from the first two years of the project showed comparable yields between the systems, despite a very wet spring in 1999. Second-year results also seem to indicate that spring-plowed land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) yielded the same as fall-plowed land, while reducing soil erosion. Soil health also seems to be improving, as evidenced by an average 128 percent greater microbial biomass-carbon supply than conventional crops, indicating a greater nutrient-cycling capacity. For the coming season, expanded organic crops research will include growing onions and tomatoes. Another project, for which Delate is a consultant, is planning production of organic apples at the Homestead Orchard near Runnells.

While results continue to roll in, Delate is kept extremely busy with managing the many facets of the organic initiative and making scores of presentations, conducting field days, and sharing information with media.

R_x for aging soils?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article was excerpted from a story written by Andy Napgezok that first appeared in the Feb/March 1999 edition of the NPM Field Notes, a newsletter of the University of Wisconsin Extension Nutrient and Pest Management Program. The late Professor William Pierre, long-time head of the ISU Department of Agronomy, led similar research in the 1970s, but the long-term negative effect of nitrogen on soil quality needs more study in Iowa.

Thirty-eight years of data collected from a plot at the University of Wisconsin agricultural research station at Arlington are yielding alarming results: acidification from excess nitrogen inputs is wearing out the soil.

The Wisconsin research began in 1962. The plot has been planted to tobacco and soybeans, as well as 15 years of continuous corn, mirroring many of the state's fields rotated among a variety of crops. Initial work dealt mainly with crop response to alkalinity

SOILS

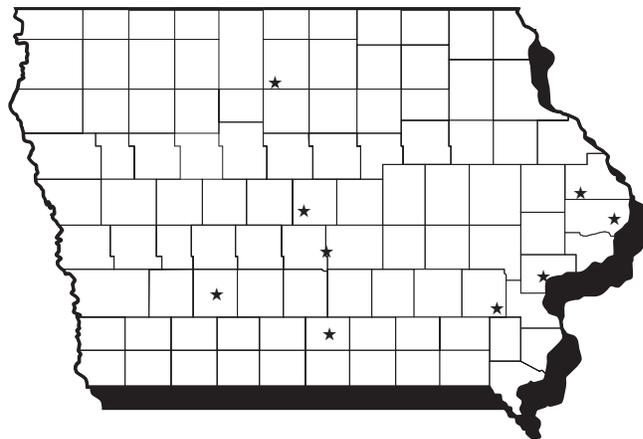
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Three competitive grants also focus on organics

In addition to the initiative efforts, the Center is sponsoring three competitive grants projects.

• **Feasibility of Organic Soybean Production Following Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Land**, \$12,500; Kathleen Delate, (515) 294-7069—By evaluating yield, pest status, soil health indicators, and economics of conventional and organic soybeans on CRP ground, the project will document biological and economic outcomes of the two systems and explore implications for management practices.

• **Organic Farming Demonstration Projects** (eastern Iowa), \$13,000; Warren Johnson, Limestone Bluffs RC&D, Maquoketa—Three demonstrations are being established at New Melleray Abbey, one for weed control methods for organic row-crop production, one for use of compost as a soil amendment for fertility and to improve soil tilth, and a third for nitrogen-producing cover crops for organic corn production. Organically managed demonstrations also are being established at the Andrew Jackson Demonstration Farm with three acres of white corn, four acres of clear hilum soybeans, and one-quarter-acre plots of direct-seeded and transplanted echinacea, St. John's Wort, Anaheim peppers and basil.



Sites of LTAR and competitive grant projects

• **Evaluation of Organic Soil Amendments for Certified Organic Vegetable and Herb Production**, \$12,500; Kathleen Delate, (515) 294-7069—After analysis for macronutrients, moisture and carbon/nitrogen ratio, several composts will be applied to production systems and the composts compared through an evaluation of their impact on product yields, pest status, soil health indicators, product quality and economics. On-farm sites have been established near Kanawha and Ames, and a research farm site has been established in southeast Iowa at the Muscatine Island Research and Demonstration Farm. Amendments tested include poultry litter, feathermeal, Bio-Cal® and conventional fertilizer.

Farmers can help prevent 'accelerated soil weathering'

SOILS (continued from previous page)

because crops such as alfalfa suffer from acidic soil conditions. Researchers found that acidity reduces the soil's cation exchange capacity—its ability to hold onto calcium, magnesium and potassium needed for crop growth. The change is irreversible.

Soil becomes more acidic when nitrogen sources, whether from urea, legume plowdown or commercial fertilizer, are not completely taken up by the crop. This excess nitrogen becomes nitric acid, which then reduces the soil's cation exchange capacity. Because the soil is unable to hold calcium, magnesium and potassium, these nutrients can move into the groundwater. Unlike nitrogen, these nutrients are harmless, but to replace them can cost up to 20 percent of what farmers normally spend on nitrogen fertilizers.

Unneutralized nitric acid can age

Researchers estimate that soil at a Wisconsin site has, in 30 years of "normal" agricultural acid inputs, aged the equivalent of 5,000 years with natural source acid inputs.

soil very quickly, according to Phillip Barak, UW soil chemist and plant nutritionist who has been working on the project. He estimates that the soil at the Arlington test site has, in 30 years of "normal" agricultural acid inputs, aged the equivalent of 5,000 years with natural source acid inputs. "Keep in mind these soils have only been in existence for 10,000 years," he said.

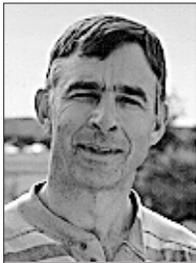
One preventive measure is to use nitrogen more efficiently. Producers should credit all on-farm sources of this nutrient, and adjust their commercial inputs accordingly. Excess nitrogen not

only acidifies, it can leach into groundwater or run off into surface water.

This second remedial measure is agricultural liming. Through this practice, farmers can neutralize the damaging acid and protect their fields. "Ag liming has been known for 3,000 years," Barak said. "Use it. It's like TUMS® for the soil." By closely monitoring pH levels and appropriately applying agricultural lime, farmers can greatly retard what Barak refers to as "accelerated soil weathering."

Barak describes the fine soils of Wisconsin as "tender," and claims that the very qualities that make them fertile also make them vulnerable. They are easily dissolved by acidity. He warns that, should excess nitrogen inputs continue unneutralized, northern soils might soon become like the sandy, less productive soils of the southeast region of the United States.

Opinions mixed on meaning



"It sounds like there's a lot more interest in growing specialty crops but that's always in proportion to commodity prices,"
—Keith Sexton

EDITOR'S NOTE:
The downfalls of agricultural contracts were presented in an earlier issue of the Leopold Letter by Iowa State University economist Neil Harl. Look in the Winter 1998 issue for his commentary, "Contract agriculture: Will it tip the balance?"

CONTRACTS

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commodities produced and owned by the farmer.

Production contracts may involve many types of contract companies, including large corporations, farmer-owned cooperatives, and individuals. Historically, the most common type of production contract in Iowa was with a company to grow corn or soybeans under specified conditions for the following year's seed. In recent years, however, production contracts have taken on a variety of sizes and shapes.

Contracts for seed, specialty crops

Ron Dunphy farms 900 acres of row crops near Creston in southwest Iowa, of which about one-third to one-half are grown under contract. Dunphy has operated under production contracts since he began farming in 1972. He says his father and uncle were among the first farmers in Iowa to grow soybeans for a seed company.

"Our farm is unique and so is the mindset," says Dunphy. "Some of it is because we are so visible, located right along Highway 34 outside of town, and what we do or don't do gets a lot of interest. I grew high-oil corn the first year it was available to plant. My contract was with DuPont."

Dunphy grows other specialty crops including white corn, non-GMO soybeans for a local cooperative, and experimental varieties. The premiums he receives for his crops have remained relatively constant over the years, an additional 40 to 60 cents per bushel above market prices. He said he is fortunate, however, to have numerous storage structures so he can separate various crops.

Dunphy says it's important to have confidence in the contract company. He suggests that farmers talk to crop consultants, extension specialists, their attorney and "others whose opinions you respect" before signing new production contracts. "Always look at the downside before you sign anything," he added, which for him could include delivery of the crop at inconvenient times.

Keith Sexton farms 1,000 acres in a corn-soybean rotation near Rockwell City in north central Iowa. For the past four years, he has raised food-grade soybeans for a private company that ships the grain to Japan where it is made into tofu. The contract accounts for 15

to 20 percent of his total soybean production.

"It sounds like there's a lot more interest in growing specialty crops but that's always in proportion to commodity prices," Sexton says. "If prices rebound to 25 percent above where they are now, the interest in contract production will go down. It takes a lot of work to identity-preserve grain during and after production."

Contracts for survival

Custom feeding pigs for a larger company was the only way that Franklin County producer Therron Miller could diversify yet stay full-time on the farm. Miller contracts with Heartland Pork and two smaller local producers to finish hogs in three confinement buildings and other outside conventional structures. He also runs a 1,000-acre corn/soybean operation, some of which are contract acres.

"Having diversified my operation with contract feeding is what keeps me on the farm, otherwise I would have to supplement my income by keeping a job in town," he said. "If I owned all my own hogs, the way the market has been the last year, I probably would be bankrupt by now."

Miller began farming in 1992 after working 10 years for a construction company, the last four as superintendent. With very little start-up capital, he saw hog production contracting as one way to diversify his operation in pork production.

Harlan Grau of Newell buys 5,000 head of hogs every year from Land O' Lakes. He advises producers to gather as much information as they can before signing a contract.

"The more information the producer has to work with, the better," he says. "But I wonder how these contracts will affect the open market. Contract feeding doesn't cause elimination of the open market, but it fuels concentration in an industry."

Feeling the contract crunch

Activists Jim and Pamela Braun, however, see production contracts as a corporate takeover of independent farms.

Jim is a third-generation farmer who until December raised hogs and grew corn on an 800-acre farm near Latimer. At one point, their \$1.5 million operation produced 12,000 hogs annually. Refusing to sign contracts with large hog processors that guaranteed a set price regardless of market fluctuations, they decided to get out of hog production when market prices

of contracts

began to fall in 1998. The last of their herd was sold in December. Both now work with Friends of Rural America, a lobbying group they helped found in 1995. "A lot of independent producers are bitter toward contract feeders, thinking they are the enemy," explains Pamela, who is secretary of the group. "Decisions about whether or not to feed on contract, however, can be agonizing. Often it's the last resort."

Jim Braun would like to see the Iowa contract law changed even more. He said he doesn't think producers should be totally liable for present and future environmental damage; that



Jim and Pamela Braun of Latimer refused to sign contracts with large hog processors. They decided to get out, and sold the last of their hogs in December.

responsibility should be shared with the contracting company.

He said he would like to see contract growers talking to one another and organizing for their own interests.

"I can't condemn my neighbor contract grower," he added. "But I really don't want them to get into a contract bind that could lead to them losing their land."

New law offers farmers more contract protection

The growing number of Iowa farmers producing commodities under contract now have additional protection under a new state law. Changes in the Iowa contract law approved by the legislature last spring provide two new forms of protection for farmers holding such contracts.

The first major change, according to state assistant attorney general Steve Reno, is that such production contracts may not include confidentiality clauses. In the past, violations of confidentiality clauses could void the agreement if the farmer shared any information about the contract, such as the amount of payment, with others.

"Confidentiality clauses worked for the benefit of the contracting company but gave farmers little or no flexibility to compare prices or terms," Reno explains. "Without that information, farmers are unable to make good business decisions. Now they can fully discuss contracts before they enter into them."

The new law also makes null and void both confidentiality clauses in existing contracts and waiver provisions that make any part of the contract confidential. The Iowa

Know what to look for in a production contract. See related story on next page.

Attorney General's office is responsible for enforcing the law.

The second major change in the law is a contract grower's ability to file a lien for his or her services under a production contract. The lien would give contract growers secured status—the opportunity to recover more assets owed to them—if the contract-holder files for bankruptcy.

The way Reno explains it, the new lien law "puts farmers at the front of the line," ahead of banks and previously filed security interests. Historically, secured creditors have recovered more than 75 percent of the amounts owed them in bankruptcy proceedings, compared to less than 10 percent for unsecured creditors.

The lien law, however, specifically exempts contracts for production of grain for seed. Contracts to produce specialty grains can be protected by a lien.

Since July, the Attorney General's Office has hosted more than two dozen meetings throughout the state about the changes. "It was surprising the relatively small number of farmers who came to these meetings," Reno said, "but they were very well attended by bankers, who want to protect the farmer's interests in many of these contract situations."

Liens are filed with the Secretary of State's Office on new, simplified forms written specifically for custom cattle feeders and contract grain producers. The filing fee for each turn of animals or crops planted under contract is \$10.

The one-page forms have instructions on how to complete them. They can be found at the Iowa Secretary of State's Office web page (under Business Services/Forms), at <http://www.sos.state.ia.us>. Producers also may contact the Iowa Secretary of State, Second Floor Hoover Building, Des Moines, IA 50319, (515) 281-5204. Ask for the "Registration of Lien" form, specifying whether it is for a contract grain producer or custom cattle feedlot.

For lien forms, see the Iowa Secretary of State's Office web page: <http://www.sos.state.ia.us> (Business Services/Forms)

What to look for in an ag contract

EDITOR'S NOTE: This information comes from a presentation available to groups upon request from the Environmental and Agricultural Law Division of the Iowa Attorney General's Office.

The biggest issue is whether the contract is a good marketing decision. Producers must compare their estimated returns under a given production contract with expected returns under other production contracts and with returns under traditional grower-owned and controlled production. This decision must be considered in the time frame of the agreement, since some production contracts can be for terms as long as 10 to 15 years.

Producers also need to consider the amount of risk they are assigned in a production contract. Risk is a given, especially in agriculture, but it shifts under contract production. Producers need to make sure their portion of risk under any production contract reasonably relates to their potential for economic return under that agreement. Usually the greater amount of risk, the greater potential for return.

Other legal issues often addressed in the "fine print" of a contract:

- **Cancellation:** Under what conditions can the contractor terminate the contract? Who determines whether those conditions are met? Are there objective standards or is termination at the discretion of the contractor?
- **Quality:** What is the protocol for measuring the quality of the commodity? Whose machine is used to

make that determination and when?

- **Delivery:** Where is the commodity to be delivered? Who pays the transportation cost?
- **Dispute resolution:** How are disputes resolved? Where will the process take place? Who will decide who wins? In Iowa, disputes under livestock production contracts must first go through mediation before anything can be filed in district court.

In 1996, Attorney General Tom Miller formed a Production Contracts Task Force that developed the *Livestock Production Checklist*, an information sheet to guide farmers in contract production decisions. In addition to the bulleted points above, the checklist asks producers to also look at facility requirements (construction, approval, access, financing), operational issues (feed, health, manure management, record-keeping, and insurance), payment terms and incentives, credentials of the contracting company, contract renewal, and how the contract might affect a producer's long-term goals or relationships with neighbors and cooperatives.

The task force also has developed a *Grain Production Contract Checklist*. Both checklists and samples of actual contracts are available at the web site of the Environmental and Agricultural Law Division of the Iowa Attorney General's Office, <<http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/farm.html>> or by calling the office at (515) 281-5351.

What others are saying ... "Intensive mechanized agriculture has taken the soul out of farming. It has turned farmers into tractor-drivers. Food is more than just the combination of proteins, carbohydrates and fats, or vitamins and other micronutrients. It is an emotional, aesthetic experience. To really do us good, we have to know that our food is produced, not just without agrochemicals, but also without exploiting our fellow human beings, without cruelty to animals, and without destroying the earth. Most of all, we want to know that it is produced with love and creativity of farmers who are poets and artists at heart, who know how to work with nature to make both human beings and nature prosper. That is the real agenda for civil society."

—Mae-Wan Ho address to the Consumer Choice Council, Seattle, December, 1999

NEWS & NOTES

Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) presented its Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award to **Mark Honeyman**, associate professor of animal science at Iowa State University, during their annual meeting in January. Honeyman is a member of the Center's swine systems (hooped buildings) initiative and directs the ISU Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station's 11 research and demonstration farms.

Education coordinator **Rich Pirog** represents the Leopold Center on the 100-member Iowa Watersheds Task Force. Task force work groups began meeting last summer to look at various aspects of Iowa watersheds. They will issue their recommendations for soil conservation, water quality protection, flood control and natural resource issues in an interim report this spring.

"We had more campers this year than ever before and one of the best outdoor education staffs ever assembled," wrote Shelly Gradwell, who coordinated the three-day **Youth and Family Camp** last June at the Des Moines YMCA Camp. Now in its fifth year, the camp focuses on building bridges between rural and urban youth, and teach them about sustainable agriculture. The camp is supported by camp fees, Practical Farmers of Iowa's Field to Family project, the Leopold Center and Iowa State University's sustainable agriculture program. Locally grown meals were served, along with dinnertime activities that explained where the food came from. The camp had the smallest amount of food waste of any group at the YMCA last year.



Top award goes to Dennis Keeney

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) will present its top achievement award to former Leopold Center director Dennis Keeney at its winter board meeting March 23 in Arlington, Virginia.

Keeney will receive the Charles A. Black Award, named for Iowa State University professor emeritus of agronomy and member of the founding council of CAST. The award is presented annually to a food or agricultural researcher who has made significant contributions to a scientific field and communicates the importance of this work to the public, policymakers and news media.

Keeney was nominated for the award by the president of the American Society of Agronomy and six colleagues. In their recommendations, Keeney was called a "pioneer environmental scientist" in water quality, an international and national expert in sustainable agriculture, and someone who brought this knowledge to the farm through his work at the Leopold Center.

"We need more scientists like Dennis Keeney who communicate broadly, both within the scientific community and beyond it to the public and to public officials," said John Pesek, distinguished professor emeritus and retired head of the ISU Department of Agronomy. "Dennis Keeney has had a tremendous positive effect upon the people of this state and upon the future direction of agriculture."

Keeney now consults for several nongovernmental organizations and is president of the Iowa Environmental Council.

New CSA directory

A new directory of community supported agriculture (CSA) farms is now available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. To find CSA farms in your state, write to CSA/CSREED, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Stop 2207, Washington, DC 20250-2207, or go to the website at <www.sare.org/san/csa/index.htm>.

Steve Hopkins (left) greets Dennis Keeney during his retirement reception in December. They met at the University of Wisconsin and Hopkins went on to farm in Iowa and has cooperated on several Center projects.



Research ... the quest for something seldom found

Iowa Department of Natural Resources chief Paul Johnson read the following quote at Dennis Keeney's retirement reception in December. The passage is from a letter written by Aldo Leopold to his friend Judge Botts comparing the perfect research project to a fox hunt—"a perpetual quest for something seldom found."

The quest must lie in no single field of science. Like a cold trail laid at random across a thousand hills, it must transect with contemptuous abandon all those little patches which the priests of knowledge have labeled, fenced, and pre-empted as separate "sciences." Should by any chance the fox be one day run to earth, no bureau or department or learned society must strut or crow as the successful master of hounds. Rather should men marvel at how little each had known or done, over what wide horizons a single quest can lead, and even then be but a single spider's skin, laid on the panorama of the unknown hills.

"You've laid a spider's skin at least," added Johnson, referring to Keeney's 11 years as director of the Leopold Center and initiation of several interdisciplinary issue teams. "I know there were times you wished you could change the world, but your wanderings have inspired us all."

For a more complete version of the quote, see pp. 347-348 of Curt Meine's biography, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*.



Keeney's retirement reception brought together a number of sustainable agriculture leaders including Dave Williams (above center), farmer and Leopold Center Advisory Board member, and ISU sociologist Paul Lasley.



Above right, Iowa DNR chief Paul Johnson visits with Dick Levins from the University of Minnesota.

Center begins leadership transition

With the new millennium comes a change in leadership at the Leopold Center.

The Center has a new interim director, ISU Distinguished Professor and animal scientist Allen Trenkle. Trenkle will fulfill the duties of Dennis Keeney, who retired December 31, until a new director is named by Iowa State University President Martin Jischke. Trenkle, a member of the Center's advisory board since 1989, was named to the interim post in December.

Also in December, agricultural economist Mike Duffy resigned as the

Center's associate director. He had been with the Center since 1991 while working with extension and outreach programs in the ISU Department of Economics.

"Iowa agriculture in general, and the Leopold Center in particular, have greatly benefited from Mike Duffy's work," said Jeri Neal, who coordinates the Center's competitive grants program.

"His research and perspectives on the economic aspects of agricultural sustainability have been invaluable in helping to frame meaningful questions and conduct successful research,



Allen Trenkle



Mike Duffy

education, and demonstration projects," she added. "Although we will miss him, we appreciate Mike's outstanding service."

Neal serves on an 11-member search committee that began on-campus interviews in January of five finalists for the Center director. Also serving on the search committee are advisory board members Kurt Johnson, Mary Jane Olney, Jim Penney and Robert Sayre. Board member Wendy Wintersteen chairs the committee.

The Leopold Center Advisory Board will consider the search committee's recommendations in forwarding three candidates to President Jischke, who will make the final appointment.

A new director had not been named as of press time.

Finalists for the Leopold Center director

- **William Wilcke**, professor of biosystems and agricultural engineering at the University of Minnesota
- **Ann Sorensen**, assistant vice-president for research at American Farmland Trust, DeKalb, Illinois
- **Charles Francis**, professor of agronomy and director of the Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems at the University of Nebraska
- **Fred Kirschenmann**, president of Farm Verified Organic Inc., Windsor, North Dakota
- **Jean Steiner**, research leader and director of the Natural Resource Conservation Center, Agricultural Research Service, Watkinsville, Georgia

New annual report highlights Center work

If the Leopold Center had any links with ancient gods, the Roman deity Janus would have been the Center's patron for 1999. Janus is identified with doors and gates, and is represented artistically with two faces—one looking forward and one looking back.

Such was the view of the past year at the Leopold Center—balanced in the doorway between past and future, between retiring director and successor—as summarized in the new Leopold Center 1998-1999 Annual Report. The 40-page, spiral-bound publication follows "The Journey" theme, with Dennis Keeney's reminiscences of the journey he and the Center have taken over the past 11 years.

The spiral-bound publication



summarizes 54 competitive grants, educational and outreach activities, and other programs in which the Center was involved during the 1999 fiscal year. Also highlighted is research by the Center's multi-

disciplinary teams and initiatives on hooped buildings, rotational grazing, buffers, weed management and organic agriculture. There are accounts of the Center's ongoing partnership with Practical Farmers of Iowa, work in local food systems, and a statewide survey of farmers' attitudes about sustainable agriculture.

The new annual report was written and edited by Mary Adams. Design and production were provided by Juls Design of Ankeny, the company that created last year's award-winning annual report.

To receive a copy of the Leopold Center 1998-1999 Annual Report, contact the Center office.

WHERE HAVE YOU FOUND LEOPOLD?

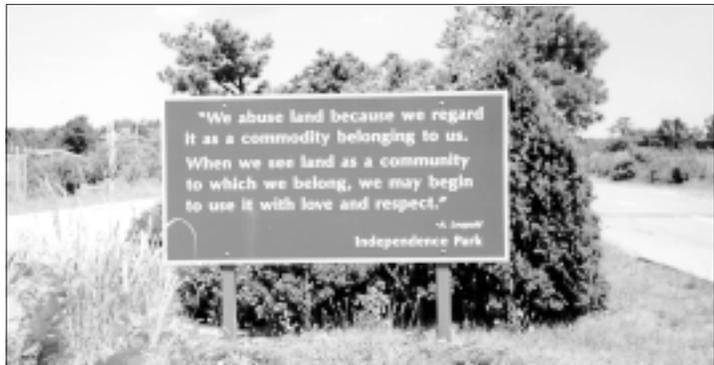


In Guthrie County ...

Iowa's roadside managers have been inspired by the words of Aldo Leopold, emblazoned on a t-shirt (see inset) worn by Kirk Henderson at Nations Bridge Park in Guthrie County. The occasion was a conference for state and local officials who work with the University of Northern Iowa's Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management program in Cedar Falls.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last summer we made an offer to our readers: We'll send five copies of *A Sand County Almanac* to your favorite library if you send us a picture of someplace where you've found the words of Aldo Leopold.

Here is what we heard from two of our readers. By the way, our offer still stands. Send your photos in a sturdy envelope to the Leopold Center at 209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-1050. Make sure you tell us when and where the photo was taken, who's in the photo, and where the five *Sand County Almanacs* should be mailed.



In Massachusetts ...

Gary Laib, who teaches biology and conservation classes at Poynette High School in Wisconsin, spotted this sign in a park near the Cape Cod Potato Chip Factory in Massachusetts. The park board chose an Aldo Leopold quote about seeing land as a community that we treat with love and respect.

NEWS & NOTES

Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI), a long-time Leopold Center partner, had one of 23 organic farming research projects funded in 1999 by the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) of Santa Cruz, California. PFI received \$7,630 to study control of gastrointestinal parasites in livestock with organic management and materials. Since 1990, OFRF has awarded nearly \$630,000 to support 114 organic farming research and educational projects. **Jerry DeWitt**, former Leopold Center Advisory Board member and coordinator of Iowa State University Extension's sustainable agriculture program, chaired the OFRF committee that evaluated the grant proposals.

Leopold Center Advisory Board member **Neil Hamilton** was appointed to a 19-member Advisory Committee on Small Farms by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. Hamilton, director of the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University, is the only Iowan on the committee, which builds on the work of the National Commission on Small Farms.

A report that gives an Iowa perspective on the grape industry will be available from the Leopold Center in late March. Information in the report is being collected by education coordinator **Rich Pirog**, who also looked at apple production and its implication on local

food systems last fall. Watch the Center's web site (<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu>), where the report will be posted as soon as it's available (hard copies of the report may be requested from the Center). Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge also has formed an Iowa Viticulture Advisory Council to encourage grape and wine production in the state.

Progressive Farmer named **Aldo Leopold** one of the "100 most influential people in agriculture" over the past century. An article in the January 2000 issue also mentioned the Leopold Center as a place where "Leopold's ideas are preserved and fostered."



LEOPOLD CENTER

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IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
AMES, IOWA 50011-1050

LEOPOLD

Letter

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 14—Clear Creek Watershed Enhancement Project, Iowa City. Contact: Dale Shires or Wendell Jones, Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District, (319) 337-2322 ext. 3.

March 15—Tri-State Grazing Conference, Dubuque. Contact: Larry Tranel, ISU Extension, (319) 583-6496.

March 17-18—Upper Midwest Organic Farm conference, LaCrosse, Wisc. Contact: Faye Jones, (715) 772-3153.

NOTE: All events receive partial funding from the Center's conference and workshop program, or Center staff are involved in planning or presentations.

March 18—Grape pruning seminar and tour, Onawa. Limited registration. Contact: Golden Hills RC&D, (712) 482-3029.

April 6—Seminar: Candleworks, Iowa's shining example of sustainable commerce, Ames. Contacts: James Werbel, Murray Bacon ISU Center for Business Ethics, (515) 294-2717, or the Leopold Center.

May 1—Habitat Improvement Workshop, Iowa City. Contact: Dale Shires or Wendell Jones, Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District, (319) 337-2322 ext. 3.

June 20-22—Environmental Workshop, ISU 4-H Annual Roundup, Ames. Contact: Wendy Powers, ISU Animal Science, (515) 294-1635.

August 25—Grape harvest seminar and tour, Indianola and Baldwin. Limited registration. Contact: Golden Hills RC&D, (712) 482-3029.

August 29-31—Carbon: Exploring the benefits to farmers and society, Des Moines. Contact: Jim Cooper, Chariton Valley RC&D, (515) 437-4376.

September—Field days for third graders, master gardeners, McNay Research Farm, Chariton. Contact: Sue Delaney, ISU Extension, (515) 932-5612.