

Letter

INSIDE

*From the Director:
How can we help close the
cultural divide?* 3

A look at Asian soybean rust 5



Charlevoix lamb labeling 6



*Economic development strategies
that start at the farm gate* 7

*What we learned about our
newsletter readers* 8



Iowa's geography of taste 11

SEE POSTCARD ON BACK COVER

Leopold Center begins new grass-based focus

By Laura Miller
Newsletter editor

A south central Iowa farmer has been selected to coordinate activities and research that will be part of a new grassland agriculture program area at the Leopold Center.

John Sellers, Jr., of Corydon, will work with the Leopold Center Ecology Initiative to create new opportunities for Iowa farmers in forage production, grassland and grazing.

"It's really an exciting focus area for the Leopold Center," said Jeri Neal, who leads the Center's Ecology Initiative. "There is a desperate need for higher visibility of grass-based systems and for these systems to play a much larger role in working agricultural lands."

Neal said she hopes the program can create new partnerships and collaborations and help bring together grass-related

research and work already being done by many landowners in Iowa and surrounding states. She said the time is right for such an effort, noting growing consumer interest in grass-fed meat products, and research that has identified efficiencies in intensive rotational grazing systems.

Grass-based agriculture emphasizes grasses, forages and legumes that preserve the best qualities of productive agricultural land. Although grazing is key to grass-based systems, there are roles for other crops. Potential benefits include improved income opportunities, restoration of wildlife habitat, hunting, erosion and flood control, renewable energy, groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration.

"Currently, we have more than four million acres of grass in Iowa, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres are a big part of that," Neal said.

GRASS (continued on page 4)

White paper explores global ag policy

**By Mike Duffy, Associate director and
Policy Initiative leader**

The debate over the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill has already begun. Several groups and organizations are proposing and analyzing alternatives. The condition of the farm economy during the deliberations will have significant impact on the legislation that emerges. The federal budget and the deficit also will be driving forces that shape the debate and resulting bill.

In addition to the condition of the farm economy and the overall U.S. economy, the state of the world economy will impact the negotiations. The Brazilian government announced a lawsuit against the United States earlier this year regarding a portion of our current cotton subsidy programs. At a recent World Trade Organization

meeting, there was considerable discussion and disfavor was expressed, especially by the Third World countries, over U.S. subsidy policies.

Finally, a recent announcement has signaled a shift in the U.S. position related to balance of agricultural trade. The 2005 forecasts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that the United States will have a neutral or negative trade balance for the first time since 1959. The gloomy trade balance forecast is a result of a 10 percent drop in the value of U.S. exports (wheat, corn, soybeans and cotton) and a 6 percent increase in the value of our agricultural imports.

The change in the balance of trade is due in large part to the reduction in the price of U.S. crops. Regardless of the cause, the facts that a) it is occurring at

POLICY (continued on page 2)

Policy Initiative convenes group to think about future ag policy

POLICY (continued from page 1)
all, and b) that agricultural trade has been used to help offset our trade deficits in other areas mean the change in status will be receiving a lot of attention.

First step: What to consider

The Leopold Center's Policy Initiative has a keen interest in the looming debate over the farm bill and its provisions. While we do not promote specific pieces of legislation, we will provide information to clarify the debate.

As a first step in the process, the Policy Initiative convened a group of experts to examine the possible directions and considerations for the next farm bill. Representatives of several organizations were involved, including Traci Bruckner, Center for Rural Affairs; Neil Harl, Iowa State University; Paul Johnson, farmer; Daryll Ray, University of Tennessee; and Mark Ritchie, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. Fred Kirschenmann and I represented the Leopold Center. We met for the first time in April and gathered again in May. The group discussed far-ranging aspects of agriculture, environmental, and trade policies and decided to write a

The white paper, "Toward a Global Food and Agricultural Policy," is in a second draft version and available on the Leopold Center web site. Please contact Mike Duffy at the Center if you have comments or want to discuss the paper.

Iowa farmland values rise

The average value of an acre of farmland in Iowa increased \$354 to an all-time high of \$2,629, according to the 2004 Iowa Land Value Survey conducted by extension economist Mike Duffy (also associate director at the Leopold Center). The survey has been conducted annually since 1941, and is the only statewide survey that collects information on land values in each of Iowa's 99 counties.

For more information on the survey, an historical perspective and county-by-county data, go to the web at: www.extension.iastate.edu/emms/lvs2004/

paper proposing a new approach to agricultural policy.

Second step: Look to the future

It is a timeworn cliché to refer to "being at a crossroads." Agriculture, however, really is at one of those life crossroads, which is one of the themes expressed in the policy group's paper. Before we can have a meaningful debate regarding the next farm bill, we must recognize that agriculture is entirely different from when the current farm programs were conceived.

The Policy Initiative group tried to look at many critical issues and how they shape agricultural policy. What we saw was a strong need to approach agricultural policy more broadly than in past. Henry Wallace was met with considerable doubt when he was trying to establish a national agricultural policy in the 1930s. Similarly, any discussion of a world agricultural policy today is met with skepticism and

a list of reasons why it won't work. Yet we definitely need to start thinking of a world agricultural policy that includes energy (both production and use) as a key element.

Our group doesn't pretend to have the answers to craft a comprehensive global agricultural policy. We only hope that the paper will contribute to the discussion. Like it or not, we are part of a global society and we need to start thinking and acting like one. Agriculture is the best place to start.

The draft paper that we developed looks at the current U.S. price and income policy and the structural transformation that is occurring not only here but also in the rest of the world. And the paper calls attention to the need for more rural community policies. We considered resource and conservation needs in a global ag economy. If we are going to have a truly sustainable system, we must consider the all ramifications of our actions.



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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.

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Overcoming the Great Divide

Some analysts see ordinary, working-class Americans in a backlash against a liberal, out-of-touch elite, sometimes putting universities with the elite and farmers on the other side.

As I write this column in the post-election season I am painfully aware that we are deluged with post-election analyses, most of which purports to tell us what went right or wrong—depending on your political persuasion—with the election. One of the re-occurring themes suggests that we are a nation deeply divided, and usually the divisions are described as blue versus red states, retro versus metro, or right versus left.

One of the more interesting analyses came from the pen of Thomas Frank. In his book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, Frank provides us with a witty and insightful hypothesis that describes our current cultural divide. Frank argues that we are experiencing a backlash on the part of ordinary working-class Americans who are tired of being marginalized by a class they consider liberal, elite, overbearing and increasingly out of touch with reality. Occasionally Frank makes reference to the fact that the university community gets lumped in with the elite class and that farmers increasingly side with the backlash.

Since land grant universities were created to serve working-class Americans, it is important to explore whether a divide between the university community and farmers exists, and if so, why.

I have had the good fortune of being both a farmer and a member of the university community. When I left a university career in the 1970s to manage operate our family's farm in North Dakota, my neighbors were deeply skeptical about my ability to manage a farm.

"He will lose his shirt" was a common phrase heard around the neighborhood. Their skepticism was not based on what I may have been learning at the university; it was based on the fact that they believed I

had been part of an "ivory tower" world that likely made me unfit to deal with life on the farm.

In this context, I think Frank is correct. There is a cultural divide between the university and farmers that has existed for a long time. In fact, it could be argued that the split may have been rooted in the very fabric of the university system. One underlying assumption holds that the research community generates wisdom, which is then transferred to the farmer (the passive recipient) by the Cooperative Extension Service.

Based on their experience, farmers bring insights that give depth to research. Working with researchers, farmers gain a new appreciation for the importance of testing assumptions against measurable data.

A famous Norman Rockwell painting is a poignant metaphor of that cultural divide. In the foreground an extension agent measures the girth of a calf for the enthusiastic children (the future farmers) while their father watches unconvinced from the barn and the grandfather, even further from the action, peers over the farm wife's shoulder.

The implication is that wisdom is only generated in the university while devaluing the knowledge generated by experience on the farm. But such an approach not only deprives both farmer and researcher of valuable information, it also contributes to the cultural divide.

Our tendency to favor reductionism—easily quantifiable research that tends to analyze the parts rather than the whole—further nurtures a cultural divide. This approach to solving problems tends to provide really good information about a small, isolated part of a

very large, complex whole. Consequently, research tells us a lot about ingredients—how many units of nitrogen will stimulate how much of a yield increase, or how much oat bran contributes to a specific health benefit. But this approach can seldom tell us how those ingredients contribute to a profitable farm or a healthy family, let alone a healthy food system or a healthy landscape. One suspects it is by these latter realities that many working people evaluate research.

Some people argue that we are moving from an industrial era to an ecological era and in so doing, more attention is being paid to the interdependence and emergent properties of everything within nature. That may

be one of the reasons new research models are being explored, such as the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. The SARE program requires farmers and researchers to

work together from design to evaluation, moving us toward more whole-systems, reality-based projects. Based on their experience, farmers bring insights that give depth to research. Working with researchers, farmers gain a new appreciation for the importance of testing assumptions against measurable data. And since both farmer and researcher are appreciative of what they are learning from each other, there is little to divide them.

For many years, the Leopold Center has followed this model. We encourage researchers to work with their counterparts in other departments, even other colleges, and to include farmers in their project planning and evaluation and certainly in their educational and outreach efforts.

Perhaps we could begin to explore further steps in healing the divide.

- Could we consider appointing experienced farmers as adjunct faculty to enrich our research with the benefit of on-farm experience?
- Should we consider conducting

ON THE WEB: www.leopold.iastate.edu

See Norman Rockwell's 1948 painting, "The County Agricultural Agent," now housed at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

DIRECTOR

(continued on page 4)

Forages offer options in all types of farming systems

GRASS

(continued from page 1)

“When these acres begin to leave the program in 2007, we need to have viable, forage-based alternatives for landowners.”

In September, the Center issued a targeted request for proposals for a plan to establish, coordinate and lead a statewide grass-based research program at the Center. Sellers was one of three people interviewed for the position, which will be half-time through 2006.

Sellers said he wants to build an awareness and appreciation among farmers and others about what forages can do for farms and farmers in all parts of Iowa. “From the way I see it, every acre that we can turn green part of the year is a victory,” he said.

He said that forages could be used in a corn/soybean rotation, either as a third crop or as a cover crop for weed control. Such practices can interrupt a cycle of diseases inherent in monoculture systems and decrease soil erosion. Other farmers may find that by growing small grains they can serve an increasing horse population in the urban fringe areas. By adding grass, absentee owners and their farm managers can protect fragile areas that are now cash-rented for row crops. Grass-based systems also provide a lower risk way to enter agriculture or invigorate an existing operation, Sellers added.

Sellers owns 520 acres in northern Wayne County.

New program area complements other Leopold Center work

The Center has completed 22 projects that relate directly to grass, grazing and keeping animals on the land.

Most of the work focused on feed and forage options for performance, such as switchgrass and bluestem grazing, CRP grazing, publication of a user-friendly pasture management guide, instructional videos for beef grazing, rotational grazing for beef and dairy, berseem clover feeding trials, increasing first-year alfalfa yields, evaluation of forage collected from permanent pastures, oat variety blend performance, and early summer pasture management. Other work has been wide ranging, including breaking seed dormancy of Eastern gamagrass and beef production grid marketing.

In addition, the Leopold Center has funded numerous research projects conducted by Iowa State University professor Jim Russell, who headed the Center’s Animal Management Issue Team for more than a decade.

Russell and ISU forestry professor Dick Schultz, who led the Leopold Center’s former Agroecology Team, are now collaborating with farmers and scientists to study the sediment and phosphorus losses for a number of management variations on cattle grazing systems in and around riparian areas. Their research is being conducted on university-owned and private farms, expanding on work done in an earlier Leopold grant. The goal is to better track phosphorus movement associated with pastures and grazing systems. Among the many partners are Iowa State University, USDA-ARS National Soil Tilth Laboratory, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Iowa the Beef Center and Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge.

The Leopold Center also has five ongoing projects that relate to forages and grazing, including work on leafy spurge, integration of hunting and grazing in the Loess Hills, forage double-cropping, and winter grazing of stockpiled grass.

Although he grows some corn, oats and hay for a small cattle operation, most of his farm is used for switchgrass, a native crop he began growing more than 20 years ago to improve wildlife habitat and reduce soil erosion.

Until earlier this year, Sellers was field coordinator for the Chariton Valley Biomass project, helping 70 farmers grow switchgrass to burn with coal at a power plant in Ottumwa. At one time, switchgrass was planted on as many as 7,000 acres in five counties. Alliant Energy currently is planning its third test burn to determine long-term efficiencies.

Sellers began management intensive grazing 12 years ago. He has 16 paddocks on about 100 acres, and was the first recipient of a federal grant in Wayne County to install a rotational grazing system on CRP land.

“One practice doesn’t fit all farms,” he added. “There’s an enormous need for forages to become a part of the Iowa landscape again.”



John Sellers

Many people blame science for our surpluses of farm products. They say the trouble is that science taught us how to grow two blades of grass where one grew before. I think the trouble is that that is exactly what science did not teach us. Instead it taught us how to grow something else where two blades of grass grew before. – Henry A.

Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, June 21, 1940, “The Strength and Quietness of Grass”

Closing a cultural divide

DIRECTOR

(continued from page 3)

regular faculty seminars out on operating farms to obtain consistent feedback and to remember the daily realities that farmers face?

- Could we make a case, in cooperation with farm organizations, to restore some of the formula funds that have been lost in recent years, to conduct locally-relevant research, freeing researchers to work more closely with farmers instead of spending all of their time chasing research dollars?

In this newsletter we announce that we have hired a farmer to direct our new grass-based research project. The search committee, consisting of researchers, farmers and other stakeholders, was insistent that what we needed most was on-the-ground experience to guide our work. We agree.

Some years ago Herman Daly and John Cobb suggested that we not only need to study problems in the context of disciplines, but that we also needed the disciplined study of problems in the world. And so we welcome John Sellers, farmer extraordinaire, to lead our grass-based research project.

Science Behind the News: Looking at Asian soybean rust

EDITOR'S NOTE; In upcoming issues of the newsletter, we will focus on a current topic of interest to Iowa producers by posing questions to a panel of experts. The current topic is the discovery in November of the first incidence of Asian soybean rust in the continental United States.

What is the potential impact of Asian soybean rust on organic production? What kinds of strategies should growers consider?

Iowa has approximately 60,000 acres of organic soybeans and growers are concerned about the prospect of rust appearing in Iowa in 2005.

Their concern is understandable because this disease has caused extensive yield losses in other parts of the world. Soybean rust also is aggressive and can travel quickly through infected areas depending on environmental conditions. The disease pathogen prefers prolonged wet and cool weather. Symptoms usually appear on lower leaves at or after flowering as large tan lesions or smaller red-brown lesions.

All existing soybean cultivars grown for commercial use are susceptible to rust. While a number of synthetic fungicides can effectively manage this disease, organic management strategies have not yet been studied sufficiently due to the absence of soybean rust in the United States.

Starting in 2005, all available organically-approved materials (copper, sulfur, hydrogen peroxide, and other naturally based materials) will be tested for efficacy against soybean rust. Tests will be conducted with cooperator states where the disease already has been detected.

However, the chance of finding a material as effective as the already identified synthetic fungicides is not good. Should the disease be found in Iowa, conventional soybean farmers will need to assess the economic risks and benefits of spraying, and Iowa State will help determine costs of materials and best methods for organic producers to deal with this disease. Longer crop rotations and compost applications can help with general disease management, but the long-term effect of these strategies for soybean rust is still unknown.

It's important to remember that the rust pathogen does not over-winter in Iowa and reproduces only on live plants. The spores must travel from the south every season. It's too early to predict how often we may see rust in Iowa because so much is determined by weather systems and conditions.

Growers who want to learn more about Asian soybean rust and what it means to Iowa soybean growers should consider attending one of a dozen Crop Advantage Series meetings being held in January 2005. Additional information about the series can be obtained on-line at www.aep.iastate.edu/cas/homepage.html or by calling the Agribusiness Education Program at Iowa State University, (515) 294-6429.



Kathleen Delate
Organic Agriculture
Iowa State



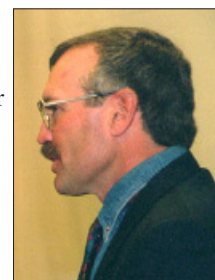
Greg Tylka
Plant Pathology
Iowa State

First and foremost, it is not a certainty that Asian soybean rust will cause widespread and serious yield losses to soybeans growing in Iowa in the 2005 growing season (or any other growing season, for that matter). The only thing that seems to be fairly certain is that the pathogen that causes soybean rust, a fungus named *Phakopsora pachyrhizi*, will most likely be able to sustain itself on the weed kudzu in parts of the southern United States.

Whether or not Asian soybean rust becomes a serious factor in reducing soybean yields in Iowa in 2005 depends on three things:

- how well the fungus survives over winter, which will influence the quantity of spores that are present in the beginning of the soybean growing season in the U.S.,
- if the prevailing winds are such that spores are blown up to Iowa fairly early in the growing season, an occurrence which would cause more yield loss than if the spores did not arrive until late in the season, and
- whether the prevailing temperature and moisture conditions are favorable for rust to thrive once spores arrive in the state.

Cool temperatures (68-75 degrees F) and prolonged moist conditions (frequent rains) are favorable for development of the disease. Hot, dry growing conditions, which are fairly common during the growing season in Iowa, will not lead to widespread development of the disease.



Ron Rosmann
Organic grower
Harlan

I am participating with a USDA group that is looking into possible strategies for organic soybean growers to deal with soybean rust. What I have learned so far is that it appears that there are no known varieties that exhibit any significant resistance to the disease. The W.K. Kellogg Biological Station in Michigan will test organic compounds that are on the National Organic Program approved list for efficacy in treating the disease.

There also has been some attempt to find out how organic growers in countries already infected with the disease are coping.

At our farm, we're taking some steps to plan ahead for the possible arrival of soybean rust. We will be planting fewer acres of organic soybeans this next year, mostly because that is how it works out with our rotation sequence. We also intend to plant a new alternative organic crop, flax. The net profit for flax appears to be very competitive with organic soybeans and we are excited about the possibility of adding a new crop to our rotation.

With the possible problem of soybean rust on the horizon, we will evaluate from year to year the probability of rust reaching us in Iowa. Since it apparently does not over-winter here, this will amount to a "guessing game." What I and other organic growers need as soon as possible is a renewed effort in public plant breeding programs at Iowa State University to develop rust-resistant varieties that also perform well under organic growing conditions.

Quebec's Charlevoix Lamb

Connecting a premium product with farmer profits

By Mary Adams
Editor

What do farmers from Quebec have in common with Iowa farmers? They both produce unique food products—and they would like to increase their profitability for doing so.

Iowa farmers may find some hopeful lessons in the story of a group of producers from this eastern Canadian province who banded together to link their region's very special lamb to higher prices for the producers.

The unique Canadian lamb program was the subject of an October seminar at Iowa State on "Surviving Globalization by Producing Differently: Charlevoix's Lamb Label." The Leopold Center's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative co-sponsored the presentation by Charlevoix Agritourism coordinator Mario Duchesne and local development counselor Nancy Chabot. They are working with the area's farmer-innovators to integrate the promotion of Charlevoix products and tourism. As program coordinator, Duchesne is trying to build a program that markets Charlevoix lamb as a branded product that also rewards the region's producers, restaurateurs and consumers.

Protecting the Charlevoix cachet

Farmers along the St. Lawrence River had a proud tradition of producing a very high-quality, local forage- and grains-finished Charlevoix lamb that was prized by local chefs. Lamb producers at the Eboulmontaise Farm, Lucie Cadieux and Vital Gagnon, had spent more than 10 years developing their unique product and working with other producers to increase the number of lambs available to market. However, dishes labeled "Charlevoix lamb" started turning up in far flung and highly improbable places. Concerned that the value of their product was being diluted with inauthentic substitutes, the area's farmers banded together to protect their specialty meat.

Duchesne and Chabot have helped producers set up a program with strict rules for production and certification of lambs raised by participating farmers. The program allows farmers to control the quality of the product with standards that distinguish their lamb from the conventional product. Producers determine

Farmers along the St. Lawrence River in Quebec have had a proud tradition of producing a very high-quality, local forage- and grains-finished lamb that was prized by local chefs.



before slaughter whether the animal meets those standards, then the meat is tested and inspected by the processor. If it passes, the meat can be certified by the Quebec government as official Charlevoix lamb and sold for a premium to area chefs. "The best way to compete is to have a high quality and different product," according to Duchesne.

Selling points for Charlevoix-branded lambs are simple:

- Lambs are raised and fed according to conditions of the area. Lambs must be nursed at least 60 days and, when they are weaned, they must be kept inside and finished with local forages, oats and barley (the area is too cold for farmers to grow corn.) The meat is aged for a minimum of seven days.
- The meat that results has a different taste, color and texture than conventionally raised lamb.
- Farmers receive a price premium of nearly 25 percent for the certified product.

Farmers used their production regimen and geographic region's assets as the basis to file for brand protection from the Canadian government and won the right to the exclusive use of the Charlevoix label on a pilot basis. Their lamb was the first North American agricultural product to obtain legal protection similar to the geographical indicators (GIs) used to brand products in the European Union. (GIs identify a product or good as originating in a locality where its quality, reputation or other characteristics are clearly attributable to its geographic region, offering farmers a way to expand their offerings and retain more of the profit from the product.)

Chabot works primarily on development issues related to agricultural

production and counsels the local agritourism industry. Duchesne, who produces meat goats on his farm, is directly involved in the Charlevoix lamb project as coordinator. Both have no illusions about the importance of their project to area farmers.

Since 1961, the number of farmers in the Charlevoix region has fallen from 1,052 to 200. While there are a few large operations, many of the farmers now work at jobs off the farm. Those who want to stay on the land are looking for options to remain profitable in farming.

When the lamb project began a decade ago, producers were openly skeptical. This year at a marketing conference sponsored by a local university, producers were asking, "What can we do?" Chabot says, "We have conventional agriculture in the region, but now it is a matter of survival for farmers."

How can their success story be applied to Iowa farmers? Marketing program leader Rich Pirog sees several ways that the Charlevoix experience could be adapted to support unique products grown or raised in Iowa.

"The Iowa Hawkeye-Delicious apple, Muscatine melon, Maytag Blue cheese, and region-characteristic wines are all examples of place-based foods that could increase economic benefits for Iowa farmers, processors and rural communities," he said. The United States has product quality protection through certification marks that can serve a purpose similar to that of the GI protection that will grace official Charlevoix lamb products in 2005.

ON THE WEB: www.leopold.iastate.edu

Learn how the Charlevoix Lamb label is cultivated through innovative programs and marketing in the region.



“If a region is defined as the intersection of land and people or culture and environment, then local food and agriculture together constitute a profound expression of place.”

- Duncan Hilchey



Lake Erie wine

In the grape-growing region in western New York and eastern Pennsylvania, farmers are working with local businesses to emphasize their agricultural heritage.

New York grape growers look at heritage development

By Laura Miller
Newsletter editor

Amazing things can happen when farmers and economic development groups work together, says Duncan Hilchey, a regional planner for the Community, Food and Agriculture Program (CFAP) at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Hilchey came to Iowa in November to present seminars for the Leopold Center’s Marketing and Food Systems Initiative, Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa State Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture.

From his tool box of rural economic development strategies, Hilchey shared a number of successes. Many are outlined in *Growing Home: A Guide to Reconnecting Agriculture, Food and Communities* that he co-authored with Joanna Green in 2002. Successes include:

- The Farmer’s Diner restaurant in Vermont, where 70 percent of the food served comes from neighboring farmers. The investment was paid back within the first year, and now the owners are looking to franchise the business.
- Farmer-owned grocery stores in France, where farmers sell products and answer customer questions.
- A Connecticut program to buy locally grown food for the state’s inmate population. Hilchey said officials are discovering that paying more for local food keeps money in the community and is more beneficial to the state in the long term.

Hilchey and his colleagues at CFAP have developed a two-year “Growing Home Certification Program” for the estimated 100 agriculture development professionals in New York. Eleven people from extension and a number of

nongovernmental organizations have taken a pilot course that looks at the social, political and economic aspects of rural local agriculture and food system development. Participants learn different strategies, then apply their skills in a final project.

Hilchey is working on a project of his own as part of “A Place at the Table,” a New York development program that began in 2003. The Concord grape-growing region along Lake Erie in western New York and eastern Pennsylvania was identified as an area in which farmers and local businesses could benefit from what Hilchey calls “heritage development.”

The region is only 50 miles long and up to six miles wide in places, but the gravelly soil and milder climate next to the lake make it ideal for growing grapes. Historically, the grapes were used in the production of Welch’s grape juice, but the company no longer operates an office in Chautaugua County.

“It’s a beautiful place, a world-class viticultural area yet nobody outside the region knows about it,” Hilchey said. “This is where Mr. Welch developed the first nonalcoholic juice beverage in the world but the local aspects were lost in modern marketing. Grapes were basically a mainstream commodity that we took for granted.”

Hilchey worked with the grape-growing community to establish the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association, which hopes to receive heritage area status from the New York state legislature. This designation could open the door for agritourism and additional resources, such as eligibility for state and federal grant programs. The association is planning an interpretive trail that links local businesses and farms, history displays in local storefronts, tours of local

vineyards and wineries, and possibly labeling and branding local products.

Agricultural heritage areas recognize a place-based product and are geographically bounded. They also celebrate the communities that have evolved with the product and protect unique agricultural landscapes. Hilchey said these areas also can reward unique traditional production practices and encourage stewardship of local resources.

The key to rural economic development, he adds, is the idea of food as an expression of a specific place or location, which must include farmers and agricultural enterprises.

“If a ‘place’ or ‘region’ is defined by what most scholars of regionalism argue is the intersection of land and people or culture and environment, then local food and agriculture together constitute a profound expression of place,” Hilchey says. “For it is in the toil of human activity on the local landscape that food and other tangible products are created that reflect the cultural uniqueness of a place.”



ON THE WEB: www.leopold.iastate.edu

View Duncan Hilchey’s overheads from his presentation, *Growing Home: Community development strategies for sustaining local agriculture*. Above, cover of the book on the same topic.

Leopold Center gathers – and listens to – newsletter feedback

By Laura Miller
Newsletter editor

Leopold Letter readers are very diverse, but there seems to be something for everyone in the newsletter.

At least that's what readers told us in a recent survey. In July, we mailed questionnaires to a randomly selected sample of people who received the Spring 2004 issue of the *Leopold Letter*. We asked for thoughts on a lot of topics, including how readers use the newsletter, how they want to receive it, where they get information about sustainable agriculture, and topics they would like to see in future issues.

We received many good ideas and, most importantly, readers' opinions. The survey generated 173 responses, 155 by mail and 18 completed on our web site. We also appreciated hearing from other readers who were not in the scientific sample.

Over the past year, the Leopold Center has been looking at how we can communicate better with various audiences. We began with a re-design of the web site, launched in March 2004. The new design makes the web site easier to use and several features were added, including a search engine and summaries of every research and education project that has been published in our annual *Center Progress Report* since 1992.

The last time we surveyed newsletter readership was in 1995. Readers

Percentage of survey respondents by group

Group	2004*	1995**
Farmer/rancher	21	24
Scientist/researcher	16	14
Extension staff/educator	13	19
Government employee	12	13
Retired	10	NA
Other ag-related business	7	5
Nonprofit organization staff	6	NA
Non-ag business	4	NA
Professional farm manager	2	NA
Media representative	2	2
Crop consultant	1	NA
Other	5	6
Landowner	NA	6
Conservationist	NA	6
Interested individual	NA	4

* 173 responses, 29 percent survey response

** 123 responses, 31 percent survey response

wanted more information about economics, research projects and farmers' perspectives, and said the newsletter was reliable and useful.

Reader demographics

By occupation, people who responded to the survey fall into five groups (see list above). Farmers make up the largest group, followed by scientists and researchers, extension staff, government employees and retired people.

The majority of readers are male, 92 percent among readers who are farmers. More than two-thirds of our readership is middle-aged with 68 percent between the ages of 40 and 65. There are 11 percent under 40 and 21 percent over 65.

We like the diverse readership and think it is important to offer different perspectives in the newsletter. We also will be looking at ways to bring the newsletter to new groups and expand readership.

Publication schedule

The *Leopold Letter* has been quarterly since publication began in 1989. A majority (68 percent) of survey respondents liked this schedule, while 21 percent had no preference, 3 percent wanted longer, less frequent newsletters, and 6 percent wanted shorter, more frequent newsletters.

The Leopold Letter will remain a quarterly publication. We'll continue to use the Center's web site to offer timely information and additional resources as needed.

BE SURE TO RETURN YOUR POSTCARD IN THIS ISSUE. MORE ON SURVEY, NEXT PAGE.

Electronic vs. print

Although most of the survey respondents use e-mail (82 percent), they were split on how they would like to receive the *Leopold Letter*. When we asked if they would prefer receiving the newsletter by e-mail, 38 percent said yes, 38 percent preferred a printed copy and 20 percent said either way was acceptable.

Beginning in 2005, we'll offer electronic distribution of the Leopold

Letter. Readers can sign up to receive an e-mail alert with links to each article on the Leopold Center web site. E-mail addresses will not be available to other groups or be used for any purpose other than to send the newsletter alert.

To get the newsletter by e-mail, return the postcard on the back page of this issue. Note that you can get a printed copy and an e-mail alert. The postcard also has a place to indicate a change in mailing address.

Other information

More than half (54 percent) of the survey respondents reported that they had never visited the Leopold Center web site, and only 16 percent went to the web to follow up on something in the newsletter.

We hope to change this by offering more links in the newsletter to our web site, where you can find additional resources or discussion on a topic. We're also pleased to offer an e-mail alert for people who want to receive the newsletter electronically.

We had many responses to the three open-ended questions that asked for suggestions for future newsletter topics, where we should make im-

provements and general concerns. Some people wanted more topics and less information, while others wanted more information on fewer, focused topics.

Many readers offered great ideas for future stories, which we'll try to follow up on them. We appreciate the many words of encouragement.

As one reader writes, "I work on farm issues and I mostly read the *Leopold Letter* to see what's going on in the Midwest. It's a good snapshot of important regional topics and I look to the Leopold Center as a leader in sustainable agriculture. You provide a balanced and pragmatic approach. Keep up the good work."

Use and perception

More than half (56 percent) of the farmers said they considered a change in their farming practices as a result of information relayed in the newsletter. Nearly half (43 percent) of the respondents overall had visited with others about something they had read about in

the newsletter, or sought more information on a topic (42 percent).

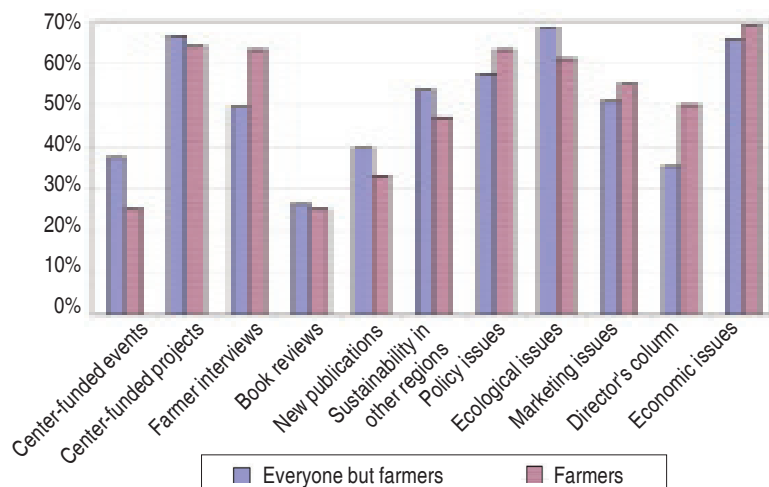
Just over half of the survey respondents, both farmers and the general audience, reported reading newsletter articles of interest and skimming the rest. Approximately one-third of the farmers and a fourth of the general

audience reported reading most of the articles in their entirety. About a third of the respondents said they shared the newsletter with other people, and 42 percent said they saved at least some of the articles.

We asked survey respondents about the value of various newsletter departments or topics (see chart). Most valuable are discussions of ecological issues, results of Center-funded projects and economic studies of agriculture. Only one of four readers rated book reviews as valuable or extremely valuable.

We also asked readers to give us a letter grade on various aspects of the *Leopold Letter*. Respondents gave the newsletter an A or B in readability (88 percent), newsletter in general (86 percent), usefulness and reliability of information (84 percent), and educational value (80 percent). Fourteen percent gave us Cs in depth of coverage and design. There were few D's and no F's.

We are considering a new look, complemented by additional resources on the Leopold Center web site.

Newsletter features ranked as valuable**FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD****Southwest Iowa farmer represents Farm Bureau on board**

Helping farmers adapt to change and remain profitable are two interests that southwest Iowa educator and farmer Doug Beckman hopes to bring to the Leopold Center Advisory Board. He was selected in September by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation to be one of four farmer representatives on the 17-member board.

Beckman is a director for the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, representing 12 counties in southwest Iowa. He said his Farm Bureau work and similar involvement in other organizations will help him as a member of the Center's advisory board.

"The organizations I belong to have given me the opportunity to work with farmers and agriculture specialists from all over Iowa and the United States," he said. "I have a broad view of how policy, regulation, infrastructure, technology and other things affect the profitability of farming."

In addition to operating a 280-acre farm in Mills County, Beckman serves as county soil and water commissioner and is a member of the Loess Hills Alliance, Iowa Quality Grain Producers Alliance, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Glenwood/Mills County Economic Development Board and the Iowa Soybean Association.

Beckman said he is interested in serving on the Leopold Center Advisory Board because of the role that the Center plays in helping farmers adapt to change.

"Change has always been a constant to civilization," he said. "What people need, desire or demand in relation to food and the environment changes over time and we must adapt to those changes. What was profitable in the past may not be today."

Born in Worthington, Minnesota, Beckman has farmed in Iowa since 1968 with his wife Jeanette. They raise corn and soybeans using a no-till system.

He also taught vocational agriculture, life science and earth science for 28 years in the Glenwood Community School District. His vocational agriculture degree is from South Dakota State University and he has a master's degree in elementary school administration from Creighton University in Omaha.

Beckman said that the mission of the Leopold Center to contribute to the development of profitable farming systems is an important one. And the answer may not be the same for everyone.

"We need to resist the one-size-fits-all attitude," he said. "What works in one area or community may not work in another area or community."

Board to see other changes

The Leopold Center Advisory Board will be welcoming another new member in early 2005. John Sellers, who will be working with the Center on its new grassland agriculture program, resigned his position at the end of the board's December 9 meeting. Sellers had been an advisory board member since 2002, when he was appointed by the Iowa State Soil Conservation Committee. Sellers will chair the state committee until April 2005.

**Doug Beckman**

New report explores Iowa's food stories, heritage

Iowa is best known for its corn, soybeans and hogs, but a closer examination reveals many fascinating food stories that feature an array of products once raised here.

A new Leopold Center report explores how the integration of Iowa's history, ecology and culture has created unique food products that may hold economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities in today's changing markets.

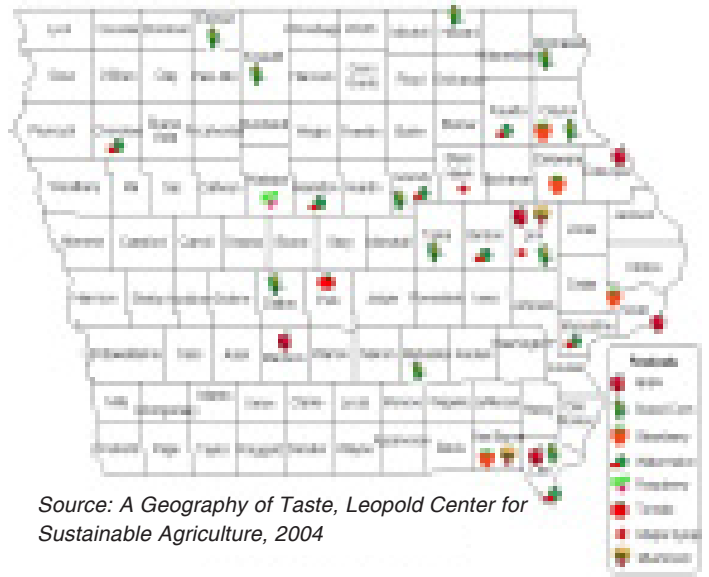
"Iowa has a rich food heritage and many cultural traditions," says Marketing and Food Systems Initiative leader Rich Pirog who wrote the 45-page report. "A reexamination of this heritage may provide potential to create niche markets and new food enterprises tied to rural development and agritourism."

Pirog and intern Zach Paskiet document Iowa's food heritage using maps to show historical concentrations of various crops, counties where historical and recent immigrant groups have settled, topographical and ecological features that favor certain kinds of production, and locations of nearly 30 community food festivals. Pirog said he hopes the report fosters more research on place-based foods – highly differentiated food products with strong ties to where and how they are grown or processed.

"Europe has already started work in this area with the use of certification marks or geographic indications, a type of certification for quality-assured products that originate in a specific region or locale," Pirog said. "Farmers who participate in these markets are receiving premiums for their products. They also have some control over the amount of product that enters the market."

Pirog cited examples such as Radicchio Rosso di Treviso, a type of red chicory grown in Italy's Veneto region, and Sweden's Hushallsost cheese, a semi-hard cheese made from cow's milk. In the United States, onions grown in a 19-county area around Vidalia, Georgia, are protected with the Vidalia onion certification mark, which is a type of trademark. Ameri-

Iowa Food Festival Locations for Selected Fruits, Vegetables and Forest Products



Source: *A Geography of Taste*, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2004

can Viticultural Areas (AVAs) also define grape-growing regions distinguishable by their geographic features.

"In Europe there's a strong link between the marketing opportunities offered by these place-based products and the amount of rural development and agritourism going on in these communities," Pirog said. "Similar efforts are underway in the grape-growing region along Lake Erie in New York and Pennsylvania and in southeastern Missouri along the Mississippi River. With development, Iowa could do the same."

Although the report looks at Iowa's food history, Pirog suggests using the information to build Iowa's future.

"This report is not a call for Iowa to return to its earlier agricultural heritage by competing with other states in producing an array of conventional foodstuffs," he said. "We were looking at what is unique and different in Iowa that we can capitalize on in today's marketplace."

More food tidbits from Iowa's past

- Iowa once led the world in canned sweet corn production. In 1924, Iowa processed locally grown sweet corn at 58 canning factories in 36 counties.
- Madison County farmer Jesse Hiatt discovered the Delicious apple near Peru, Iowa, in the 1870s. He called apple variety Hawkeye, but the name was changed to Delicious when he sold the propagating rights to the Missouri-based Stark Brothers nursery in 1894.
- In the 1920s, the Jonathan apples grown on bluffs along the Mississippi River in Harrison County were thought to be some of the best in the country.
- Germans who settled in Scott County near the Mississippi River began growing onions after the Civil War, making this one of the two most prolific onion-producing areas in Iowa.
- Moraine-type soils in Sac and Ida counties produce high-quality popcorn, a crop first grown commercially by an Odebolt, Iowa farmer in 1888. The counties became leading popcorn producers in the 1920s.
- The acorn squash, once called Table Queen and the Des Moines squash, came to Iowa from Copenhagen, Denmark, thanks to Iowan Robert Fullerton.
- In the 1930s, southeastern Iowa was one of three primary sweet potato growing regions in the United States. Mitchell County in north central Iowa was best known for its potatoes.

To get a copy of the report, "A Geography of Taste: Iowa's Potential for Developing Place-based and Traditional Foods," contact the Center at (515) 294-3711, or by e-mail, leocenter@iastate.edu. The report also is available on the Center's web site, www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/taste/taste.htm [found under Publications/Staff Papers].



Another food story investigation

Georgia may be home to the sweet Vidalia onion, but Iowa can boast some of the sweetest, juiciest melons.

As a special project of the Leopold Center's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative, consultant Sue Futrell and ISU Extension farm management specialist Craig Chase looked at the Muscatine melon and its 120-year history of production in southeastern Iowa. They also looked at ways to capitalize on the geographic identity of one of Iowa's most popular crops and support producers in a fast-changing market.

Two areas in Muscatine County are well-suited for growing melons – the Muscatine Island area along the Mississippi River that is protected by levees built in 1845, and along the Cedar River valley near Conesville. The soil is sandy and well-drained, groundwater is close to the surface and the melons and other produce grown there are sought-after throughout Iowa and beyond.

In 1921, 750 carloads of watermelons grown on 2,000 acres of land and 100 carloads of muskmelons grown on 500 acres were shipped from Muscatine County. The 2002 Census of Agriculture showed only 12 commercial growers producing muskmelons and watermelons on 107 acres in Muscatine County.

"Economic analysis suggests that melon farming in Muscatine County can still be profitable, but increasing labor costs, price competition from imports and limited shelf-



This photo shows crates of melons at the railroad depot, ready to ship in 1920. From the Oscar Grosheim Collection, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa. To view this and other photos, go to www.muscatinelibrary.us.

life and processing options present significant challenges for producers," the report states. "Without a marketing program that builds on the unique qualities and identity of this traditional crop, melon production most likely will continue to decline in southeast Iowa."

The report, "Muscatine Melon: A Case Study of a Place-based Food in Iowa," is available on-line at: www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/grants/files/2004-MSP9_melon.pdf, or contact the Leopold Center for a copy at (515) 294-3711.

We need to hear from you!

We are verifying our *Leopold Letter* mailing list and offering all of our subscribers electronic distribution with the next issue.

Please check the appropriate boxes on the back of this postage-paid card and drop it in the mail or fax it back to us at: (515) 294-9696. (International readers: please affix correct postage.)

We appreciate your help!

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
209 Curtiss Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011-1070

Letter

HIGHLIGHT EVENTS

Mark your calendars

January 14 – Iowa's Potential for Place-based Foods and Ecolabels, 12:30-4:45 p.m., Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines. The Leopold Center and Food Alliance Midwest are hosting this workshop that will look at opportunities to grow and label unique food products. The workshop is part of the 2005 Practical Farmers of Iowa annual conference. To register, contact: Sandra Trca-Black, (515) 232-56661 ext. 101.

January 17 – "Science, policy and feedback loops: Applying ecological principles to sustainable agriculture policy," Seminar by University of Maine economist Stewart Smith, Noon-1 p.m., Pioneer Room, ISU Memorial Union, Ames.

March 9-10 – The 2005 John Pesek Colloquium on Sustainable Agriculture will feature Hunter Lovins, founder and president of Natural Capitalism, speaking on sustainable energy.

March 31 – Deadline to submit nominations for the 2005 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture administered by the Leopold Center.



Voices of Iowa Farm Women

Laura Krouse of Mt. Vernon is one of six Iowa women profiled in an 18-minute program, a project of the Women, Food and Agriculture (WFAN) network. To learn more, go to the Leopold Center web site, www.leopold.iastate.edu.



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