

Letter

We'd like to hear from you ...

Dear Readers,

Since I came to the Leopold Center four years ago this month, I've been eager to help the many forward-thinking people in Iowa develop a vision for agriculture that supports farmers, keeps rural communities strong, and enhances our natural resources.

This task has required a lot of work – conversations with hundreds of farmers and community leaders, meetings with our researchers, partners and many other organizations. To make this vision come about, we've changed how we do business at the Leopold Center – how we support conferences and events, how we focus research on initiatives in policy, marketing and ecology.

Now it's time to look at another aspect of the Leopold Center — how we communicate with you, particularly with this newsletter.

We want to hear what you think about the *Leopold Letter*. Does it have the kind of information you want and need?

To help us in this effort, we've developed a short questionnaire. In the next several days, we'll be mailing it to a scientifically selected random sample of readers. If you receive the survey, please take a minute to answer the questions and return it to us.

If you don't receive the questionnaire, we'd still like to hear from you. Call us and we'll send you a copy in the mail (responses will be kept separate from the random sample), or you can go to our web site to answer our questions on-line, www.leopold.iastate.edu/survey.htm. We need all responses by September 15.

We'll use your responses to improve the newsletter and develop articles to serve the diverse interests and needs of our readers. In the process, we'll seek to live up to the mission set out nearly 15 years ago for the *Leopold Letter*:

To inform diverse audiences about Leopold Center programs and activities; to encourage increased interest in and use of sustainable farming practices; and to stimulate public discussion about sustainable agriculture in Iowa.

Instead of a regular newsletter for our Summer 2004 issue, we're doing the readership survey – it's that important. The last time we surveyed our readership was in 1995. It's time to hear from you again.

Richard Kuehn

Marketing initiative asks for new project ideas

The Leopold Center's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative has issued a request for pre-proposals (RFP) for research and education projects. The RFP invites researchers and educators at educational or nonprofit organizations in Iowa to submit a brief concept paper describing their project by August 24.

The RFP lists directed research and education topics that will be priorities in selecting projects to fund. Areas of inter-

est include documentation of the benefits of local and regional food production in Iowa, consumer understanding of ecolabels, and case studies in which farmers share equally in the rewards across a value chain.

For copies of the RFP, contact the Leopold Center or send an email to Rich Pirog, rspirog@iastate.edu. The RFP also is available on the Center's web site, www.leopold.iastate.edu.

2004 Spencer Award goes to Thompsons during Iowa State Fair

You're invited to join the Leopold Center in honoring Dick and Sharon Thompson when they receive the 2004 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture on August 14 during the Iowa State Fair.

The Thompsons, who have a 300-acre crop and livestock operation in Boone County, are pioneers in sustainable agriculture. They began experimenting with alternative farming methods in 1968 and in 1985 helped start Practical Farmers of Iowa. They have traveled extensively to share their results.

They will receive the award at 4 p.m., August 14, in the Pioneer Livestock Pavilion on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The short ceremony precedes the Iowa Governor's Charity Steer Show in the same location.

The Spencer Award recognizes farmers, researchers and educators who have made a significant contribution toward the stability of mainstream family farms in Iowa. The award honors Norman A. and Margaretha Geiger Spencer, who farmed near Sioux City for 40 years, and includes a \$1,000 gift. The award has been presented annually since 2002, and is funded by an endowment from the Spencer family.



Dick and Sharon Thompson



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HIGHLIGHT EVENTS

Hoop Group plans international conference September 14

Iowa State University's Hoop Group, that began nearly a decade ago as a Leopold Center-funded research team to explore alternative swine production systems, has gone international. The group is planning an international conference September 14 about using hoop barns and bedded systems for hogs as well as dairy and beef cattle and other animal species.

At the conference, participants will have the opportunity to step inside a virtual hoop structure developed at ISU as a tool for housing design. Speakers from Australia, Canada, England, The Netherlands and Ukraine will share how hoops and bedded systems are used in those countries. Other sessions will cover animal welfare, process-verified or niche market livestock production using hoop structures and other bedded systems.

The conference will begin at 7:30 a.m. at the Gateway Center, located at U.S. Highway 30 and Elwood Drive in Ames.

To register, go to the conference web site, www.abe.iastate.edu/ABLS/, or contact Beth Weiser at (515) 294-0557 or weiser@iastate.edu.



Cost is \$25 before Sept. 1 and \$35 after that date. The registration fee includes lunch, breaks, all sessions, access to the virtual reality display, exhibits and a CD and printed copy of the Hoop Barn Manual, produced by Midwest Plan Service.