



2026

Annual Conference



Program



Welcome to the 2026 PFI ANNUAL CONFERENCE!

January 9-10, 2026

Community Choice Convention Center at the Iowa Events Center
833 5th Avenue | Des Moines, IA

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Visit our website for the online version of the conference schedule, session and speaker information and more!

practicalfarmers.org/annual-conference



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rotations. Come dive into how crop production budgets, cost of production and whole-farm economics influence a crop plan that contains a diverse array of crops and breaks weed, pest and disease cycles.

Wesley Rieth is the farm manager for LongView Farms, a row-crop grain operation in central Iowa that specializes in seed corn, commercial corn and soybean production using a range of conservation practices. Wesley previously managed the row crop operations at Granor Farm, a multienterprise diversified organic farm in southwest Michigan.

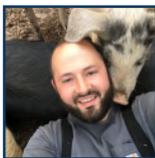


Farming for Quality of Life

Rm 312-313 | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

Farming can be exhausting and draining as well as rewarding and life-giving. It can be all of these at the same time! For the long-term sustainability of your farm life, it's important to be practical about how you approach the work and set goals for yourself. Join Ben as he shares strategies for looking at your business as a tool to achieve the life you want, rather than an endless chore list.

Farmer **Ben Grimes** of North Carolina has been in the pastured poultry business since 2013 on his farm, Dawnbreaker Farms. Since then, he has raised, processed and sold 50,000 birds through retail and wholesale channels. In 2020 he started Carolina Pastures, a collective of local pasture-based meat farmers, to scale and aggregate products to make a larger impact on the food system.



Artificial Insemination, the Basics

Rm 314-315

Join Sara Shepherd in this session to learn the basics of cattle artificial insemination. She'll discuss the benefits of using AI in your herd, along with issues you'll need to consider. You'll learn about cattle synchronization protocols and heat detection, semen handling, storage and maintenance, AI gun loading procedures and more. You'll walk away with handouts, the knowledge you need to take the next steps with AI in your herd and where to learn more.

Sara Shepherd came back to the family farm in west-central Iowa after a career in marketing and nonprofits. Starting with four head of cattle, she has expanded to include a purebred Charolais and Angus cow-calf operation with spring and fall calving herds. Each year, she uses artificial insemination on both cows and heifers.



Mesa redonda de agricultores

Rm 301 | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

¿Has reflexionado sobre la temporada de cultivo de 2025? ¿Sabes qué quieres hacer diferente o igual para 2026? De cualquier manera, únase a Virginia para una discusión con apoyo y comunidad.

El amor y el aprecio de **Virginia Buenos** por las verduras y frutas comenzó a una edad temprana e impulsa sus aspiraciones actuales de ser agricultora de frutas y verduras en Red Oak, Iowa. Actualmente está estableciendo su vivero de maracuyá, durazno, manzano, peral y cerezos. Le encanta cuidar las plantas en macetas llenas de chiles, limas, aceitunas y nísperos.



Cleaner Water Through Conservation: Quantifying Water Quality Impacts of Edge-of-Field Practices

Ballroom B | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

Join Lee Tesdell, a fifth-generation Polk County farmer and Soil and Water Conservation District member, as he shares his 13-year journey to improve water quality. He has adopted no-till, cover crops, prairie strips, saturated buffers and a bioreactor. Partnering with Iowa State researchers, he tracks nitrogen removal in tile-fed water by comparing inflow and outflow at bioreactor control boxes and saturated buffer test wells. With four years of data, Lee will highlight his farm's progress and the need to scale these practices for healthier watersheds within Polk County and beyond.

Lee S. Tesdell is the owner of Tesdell Century Farm in Polk County, Iowa. His ancestors came to Iowa as farmers. Lee and his neighbors, the Helland brothers, work together to farm his row crop acres sustainably. Lee is retired from Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he taught courses in the technical communication program. In November 2022, Lee was elected to the Polk County Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District as a commissioner. His latest project is learning to grow and market Kernza for grain and forage.



FRIDAY SESSION 2
11:15 A.M. - 12:15 P.M.

Panel: Vegetable On-Farm Research With PFI's Cooperators' Program

Ballroom B | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

One of PFI's core programs is farmer-led, on-farm research through our Cooperators' Program. During this session, hear from three vegetable farmers about how participating in on-farm trials has helped them make production decisions and ask better questions. They'll share their favorite trials, the benefits (and challenges!) of

research and what research ideas they hope to implement in the coming years. This session is part of the SARE Farmers Forum.

Lee Matteson grew up on a small farm in southeast Iowa, where he worked with his parents and grandparents in the summer growing fruits and vegetables. He owns and operates Lee's Greens, LLC near Colo, Iowa, with his wife, Kelly, and four children. The farm's main focus is off-season crops in 2 acres of heated greenhouses, and another 5 acres of outdoor production. Lee has a bachelor's degree in horticulture from ISU.



Carmen Black, with her sister, Maja, own and operate Sundog Farm and Local Harvest CSA near Solon, Iowa. On the diversified operation they raise vegetables, lamb, goat and eggs that they direct market through their CSA business. They partner with a local nonprofit to offer a youth employment program on the farm. Carmen is PFI's current board president. This talk is part of the SARE Farmer's Forum.



Jill Beebout runs Blue Gate Farm with her husband, Sean Skeeahan. They steward 40 acres of family land in southern Marion County, Iowa, where they raise Certified Naturally Grown produce, hay and alpacas, marketing through CSA and VegEmail custom sales.



Timing and Executing Vegetable Succession Planting for Key Crops

Rm 304-305 | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

Succession management is vital to meet consistent demand for Featherstone Farm's 1,400 summer CSA shares, 700 winter CSA shares and wholesale markets. Achieving this is done through staggered plantings, multiple varieties and managing the harvest of cut-and-come-again crops. Abby will share how Featherstone plans for managing and selling their many successions, particularly sweet corn, broccoli, cabbage, kale and hoophouse crops. She'll also discuss how they make decisions when the timing gets off track or a planting fails.

Abby Benson is the production coordinator at Featherstone Farm, an organic veggie farm in Rushford, Minnesota. Featherstone's enterprises include about 140 acres of vegetables, a small organic apple orchard and pastured pigs. Abby loves growing brassicas, especially cabbages!



Research on Improved Management Practices for Cereal Rye Ahead of Corn

Rm 302-303 | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

The Robertson Lab has been trying to understand factors that contribute to reduced corn yields following cereal rye. This session will share research results from various field trials done over the past few years, including those evaluating planting green, skip-row planting and cereal rye variety. Factors that may contribute to reduced yields will also be discussed.

Alison Robertson is a professor and extension field pathologist in ISU's department of plant pathology, entomology and microbiology. Her research program focuses on oomycete pathogens of corn and soybeans that cause seedling disease. She is particularly interested in how crop production practices, like cover crops, affect the soil oomycete community. A goal of Alison's program is to develop best management practices for cover crops in corn-soybean production.



Spill the Beans! Opportunities and Challenges Growing and Marketing Edible Beans in Iowa

Rm 310 | CCAs: 1.0 CEU credit approved

There are many edible bean varieties that offer an alternative to soybeans, offering nutritional benefits to humans and the soil. Chris Henning and Jason Grimm have both explored growing lesser-known bean varieties in Iowa, including black, adzuki and garbanzo beans. Learn from their experience about special equipment needs, marketing strategies and the unique opportunities and challenges of adding various edible bean varieties to rotations.

Jason Grimm owns Grimm Family Farm near Williamsburg, Iowa. The family produces dry beans, potatoes and pastured poultry that are marketed to restaurants, grocers, school districts, food hubs and directly to consumers. Jason has extensive experience with on-farm poultry processing and has recently built a new plant to accept poultry from other farms. When Jason isn't on the farm, he is the executive director for Iowa Valley RC&D, leveraging over 16 years of experience working in Iowa with local, state and national partners.



Chris Henning is a landowner from Cooper, Iowa, who works with her farmland tenant to incorporate conservation practices. In the early 2000s, she was the executive director of the Greene Bean Project, which brought together farmers and landowners to produce and market several edible bean varieties.



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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the organizations, business and agencies who provided support for the PFI Annual Conference:

- The Builders Initiative
- Cargill
- The Cedar Tree Foundation
- Hearst Foundation
- Lifeline Foods
- McKnight Foundation
- PepsiCo
- Roger Ross Gipple on behalf of BeWildReWild and BIG RIVER CONNECTIVITY. Bewildrewild.org
- Unilever
- Walmart
- Walmart Foundation
- Walton Family Foundation
- This project is supported by The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research. Any reference to specific products or technology does not constitute or imply an endorsement by FFAR for those products or technology.
- This project is made possible through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number 2004.22.075401.
- This project is supported in part by the Conservation Innovation Grants through the Natural Resources Conservation Service no. NR223A750013G028 through a subaward with Pheasants Forever.
- Funding for 2026 PFI Annual Conference was made possible by a grant/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.
- This project is supported in part by The Nature Conservancy
- This project is made possible through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, with support from NRCS, Cargill, Inc, and Nestle USA. Award number 2004.24.081651.
- This work is supported by Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program Sustainable Agricultural Systems (SAS) grant no. F9000315202081 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.
- This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number NR233A750004G053.
- The North Central Region-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Farmers Forum is a traveling annual event giving farmers, ranchers, researchers and others the chance to share information about sustainable agriculture practices with a national audience. These presentations focus on research, demonstration, and education projects that promote profitable practices that are good for the environment and community. The projects highlighted in these presentations and the Farmers Forum are funded by grants from NCR-SARE, a USDA funded program that supports and promotes sustainable farming and ranching by offering competitive grants and educational opportunities.

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