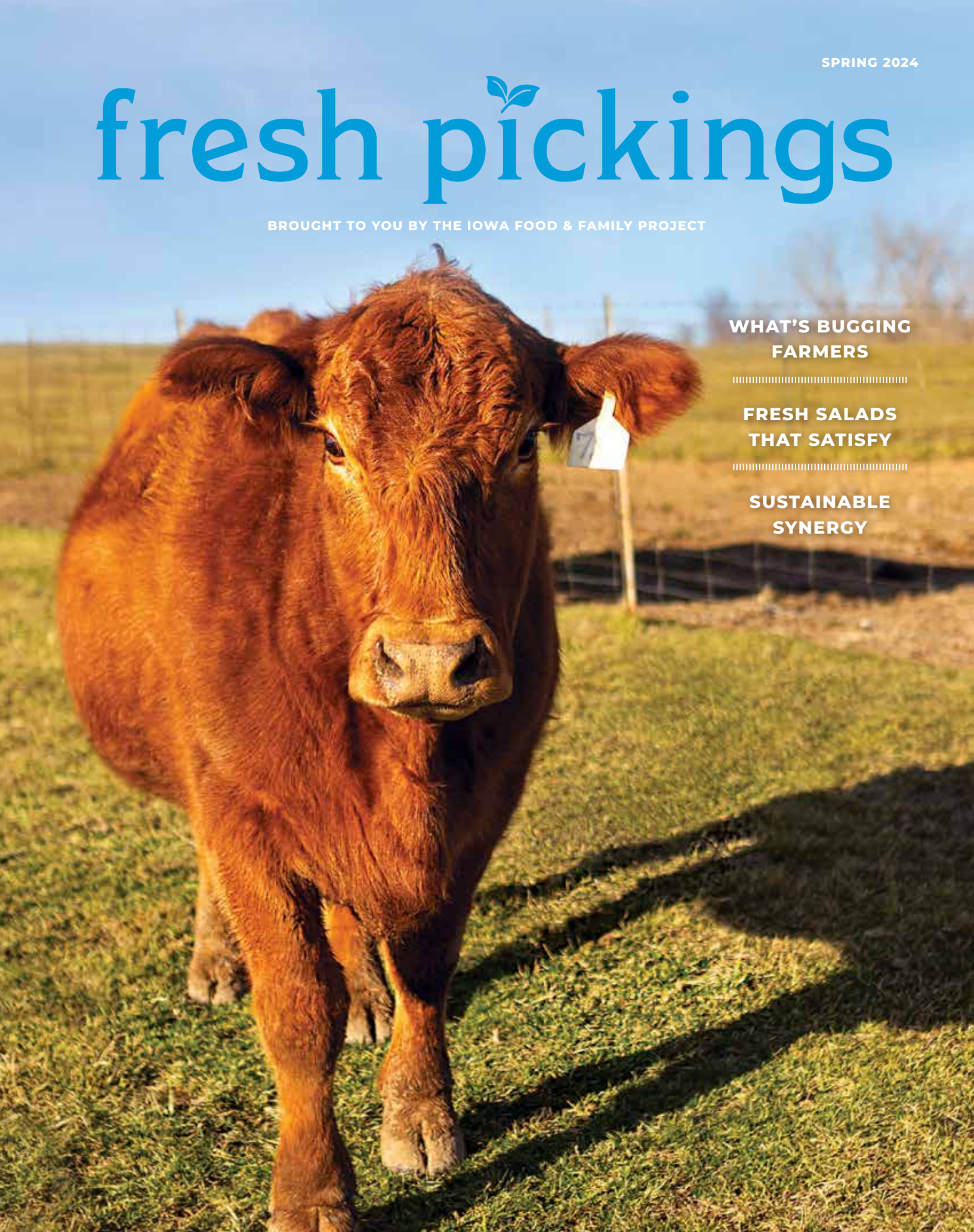
SPRING 2024

fresh pickings

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT



WHAT'S BUGGING FARMERS

FRESH SALADS THAT SATISFY

SUSTAINABLE SYNERGY

Welcome

IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF **FRESH PICKINGS** MAGAZINE, YOU'LL FIND STORIES THAT CELEBRATE THE INCREDIBLE FOOD, FARMS AND FAMILIES THAT MAKE IOWA A SPECIAL PLACE TO LIVE.

THIS QUARTERLY PUBLICATION IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT. WE ARE AN INITIATIVE THAT INVITES IOWANS TO EXPLORE HOW FOOD IS GROWN AND RAISED AROUND THE STATE AND MEET THE FARMERS WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN; 24/7, 365 DAYS A YEAR.

WE NETWORK WITH NEARLY 35 FOOD, FARMING AND HEALTHY LIVING ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE PROUD OF IOWA'S HOMEGROWN FOODS AND HOMETOWN VALUES. YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PARTNERS ON PAGE 5.

IOWA FOOD & FAMILY Project

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

Features

16 WHAT'S BUGGING FARMERS

Iowa farmers work to ensure the safety of themselves and consumers when they decide to use a pesticide on their crops.

22 COON RAPIDS, HOMETOWN TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Experience a west-central Iowa town renowned for its stewardship of the land, rich natural beauty and legacy in agriculture.

28 FRESH SALADS THAT SATISFY

Explore the art of creative flavor pairings. From crisp greens and nutrient-rich proteins to mouthwatering toppings, embrace a world of savory and wholesome satisfaction.

32 TERRIFIC TURF

Discover the history and sustainability of a family-owned sod farm. From planting and caretaking to harvest and delivery, the operation may look similar, but is distinct.

Photo credit: Ashley Dean, Iowa State University

36 RAISING THE STEAKS

Knowing where your food comes from makes it taste better. Find out how history and hard work culminated in Grand View Beef.

42 EGG ROLLS FOR BREAKFAST

As one of the original vendors at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market, Mao's Egg Rolls started a movement with a big impact, lasting over three decades.

46 SUSTAINABLE SYNERGY

Iowa farmers and multi-national corporations work together through the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund to protect the environment.

In Every Issue

7
EDITOR'S NOTE
ODE TO THE COLOR GREEN

8
FAMILY TABLE
FAR BEYOND FESTIVE FEASTS

11
GROWING TIPS
BLADES OF GREEN

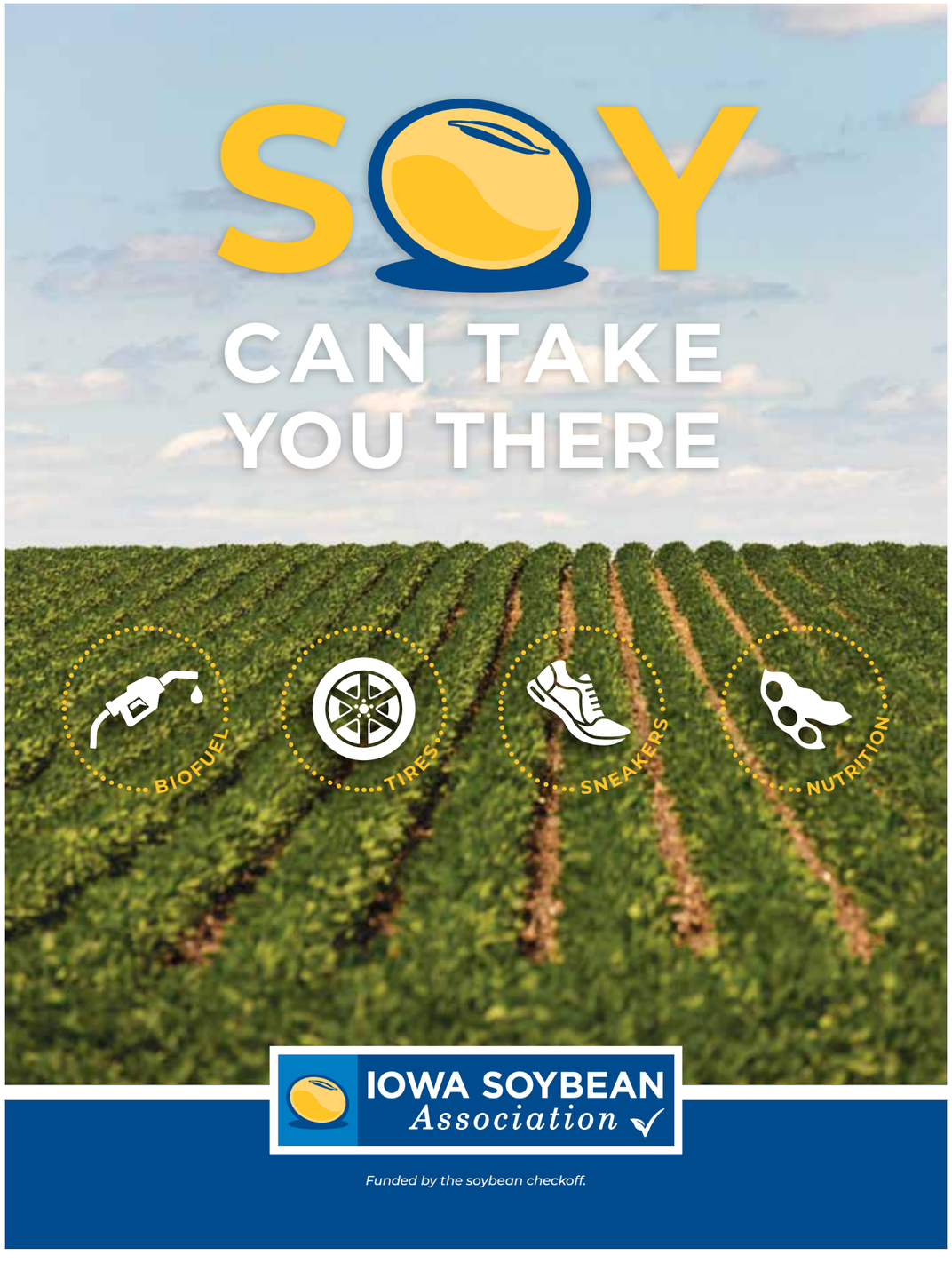
12
POINT OF INTEREST
GRACE ON MAIN

52
FRESH PICKED
ROOTED AMBITIONS: NURTURING DREAMS BEYOND THE FIELDS

ON THE COVER

A Red Angus cow from Matthew and Ashlynn Jones' herd enjoys a warm spring day in their pasture near Fairfield.

SPRING 2024 | ISSUE NO. 21



fresh pickings

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT

FRESH PICKINGS MAGAZINE

EDITOR
LYDIA ZERBY

PHOTOGRAPHER
JOCLYN BUSHMAN

DESIGNER
BRIANNA SCHECHINGER

CONTRIBUTORS

APRIL PEARSON
April Pearson Creative

CRISTEN CLARK
Food & Swine

DARCY MAULSBY
Darcy Maulsby & Co.

HALEY BANWART
Farm Roots & Chore Boots

SKYLAR VANDEN BOSCH
Wixted & Company

GRETCHEN WESTDAL-CENTERS
GWC Creative

KERRI BELL
CommonGround Iowa

IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT

FOUNDERS
Iowa Soybean Association
Iowa Beef Industry Council
Iowa Pork Producers Association
Midwest Dairy
Iowa Corn Growers Association
Iowa Poultry Association
Iowa Egg Council
Iowa Turkey Federation
The Soyfoods Council

SUPPORTERS
Anderson Erickson Dairy
Cargill
Cookies Food Products
Corteva Agriscience
Earl May Garden Centers
Farm Credit Services of America
Heart of America Group
Hy-Vee
Iowa Grocery Industry Association
Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant
Iowa State Fair
Key Cooperative
Latham Hi-Tech Seeds
Live Healthy Iowa
Subway

REQUEST YOUR MAILED SUBSCRIPTION AT
IOWAFOODANDFAMILY.COM/MAGAZINE/SUBSCRIBE

Thank you to the Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa Beef Industry Council, Iowa Pork Producers Association, Midwest Dairy, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Egg Council, Iowa Turkey Federation, Farm Credit Services of America, Cargill, Corteva Agriscience, Key Cooperative, Latham Hi-Tech Seeds, Live Healthy Iowa and Earl May for the financial investment that makes this publication possible.

Fresh Pickings is published four times a year by:
Iowa Soybean Association, 1255 SW Prairie Trail Parkway, Ankeny, Iowa 50023

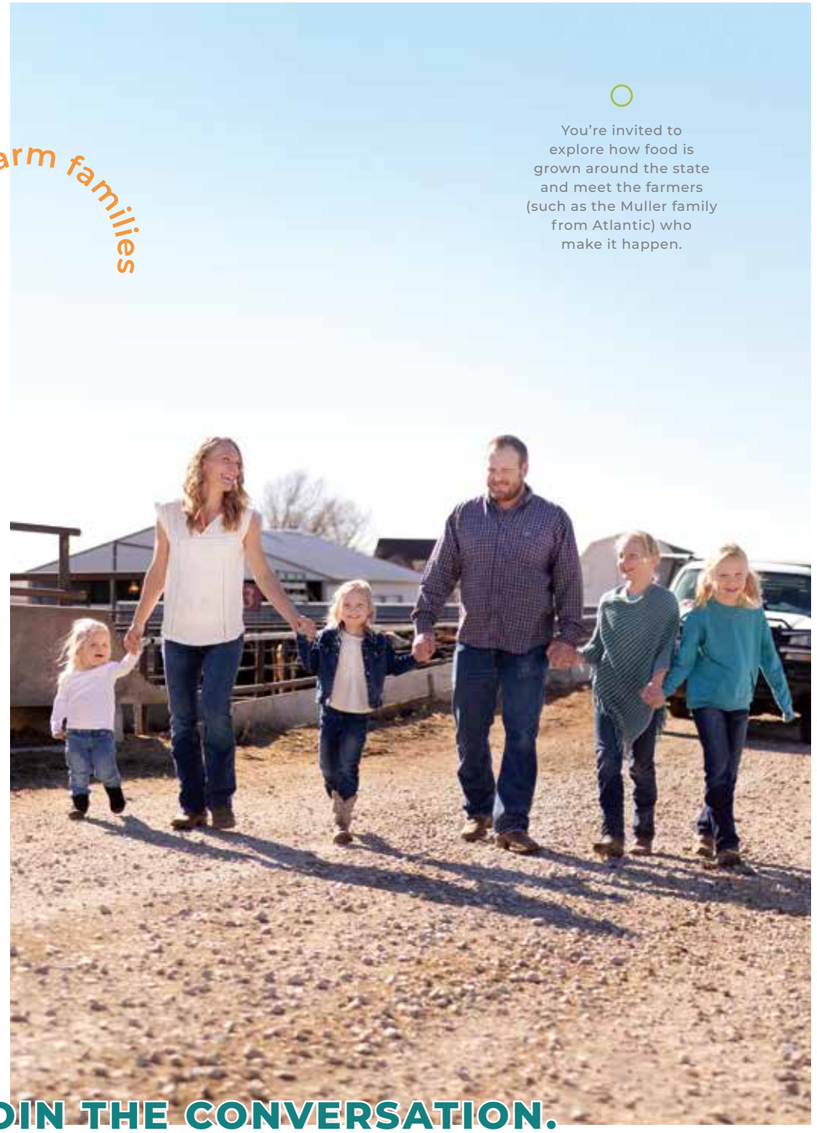
For advertising information, complete the form at iowafoodandfamily.com/magazine/feedback

Advertising space reservations must be made through the above form. In consideration of the acceptance of the advertisement, the agency and advertiser must, in respect of the contents of the advertisement, indemnify and save the publisher harmless against any expense arising from claims or actions against the publisher because of the publication of the content of the advertisement.

Comments: iowafoodandfamily.com/magazine/feedback

celebrating farm families

You're invited to explore how food is grown around the state and meet the farmers (such as the Muller family from Atlantic) who make it happen.



Funded in part by the soybean, pork, corn, beef dairy, egg and turkey checkoffs.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION.
LEARN ABOUT MODERN AGRICULTURE.
MAKE INFORMED FOOD CHOICES.

@FoodnFamilies iowafoodandfamily.com

IOWA FOOD & FAMILY Project

Ode to the Color Green

Green is often associated with nature, growth, freshness and tranquility. It's a color commonly found in the natural world, from lush fields and grassy meadows to leaves on trees and plants. Green symbolizes life, renewal and fertility.

In various cultures, green can symbolize different concepts. For example, it's often associated with luck, hope and the environment in Western cultures. In some Eastern cultures, green can represent life, youth and prosperity.

Green is considered a calming and soothing color. It's often used in interior design to create a sense of relaxation and balance. Additionally, being surrounded by greenery or spending time in nature positively affects mental well-being.

Green may be best known in farming for its use on John Deere equipment. There are several theories on why the company chose green as its signature color. One is that green stood out from the competition, whose tractors were painted red and blue.

Another theory is that the competition needed their tractors to be painted red so maintenance specialists could quickly locate them when they broke down and got stranded in a field. Clearly, John Deere felt their tractors wouldn't have this problem and went with green.

My favorite theory is that John Deere strategically chose its classic green-and-yellow color combination for what those colors represent — green is the verdant vibrancy of growth and yellow is the ripening and harvest of a crop.

When it comes to agriculture and farming in Iowa, green reigns supreme. It signals the start of spring and good things to come. When you drive on rural roads, green fields mean growth, vitality and economic prosperity for farmers and communities.

In this issue, you'll find many stories celebrating the love of green and the emotions it invokes. Meet an Iowa-based company in the business of growing beautiful lawns, discover a cattle-farming family dedicated to cultivating grass on their land, and find recipes for hearty salads using green lettuces and veggies as base layers for Iowa-inspired ingredients.

Just as the seasons change, green returns to show its beauty across the state and provides feelings of growth, renewal and hope.

Enjoy the issue,

Lydia Zerby

GIVE AWAY

WIN $100 TO EARL MAY GARDEN CENTER
to purchase yard and landscaping supplies. Enter to win at **iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/spring-earl-may**.

Far Beyond Festive Feasts

TURKEY AS A FAMILY DINNER STAPLE

By Cristen Clark

Cristen Clark is a pig farmer, creator of the Food & Swine blog, and an award-winning baker and cook. She lives on a farm near Runnells with her husband Mike and children Halle and Barrett.

As spring approaches, culinary focus tends to shift toward lighter, healthier fare that doesn't compromise on flavor. Iowa-raised proteins, whether tasty turkey, flavorful pork or savory beef, embody a commitment to quality, sustainability and the rich agricultural heritage of our state.

Not just for the holidays, turkey is worthy of a year-long spotlight in your kitchen repertoire. These tips will help you master the art of cooking turkey so you're ready for any springtime soirée.

Turkey Cooking Tips

Grilling Greatness: Embrace the great outdoors and fire up the grill for a turkey experience beyond Thanksgiving. Marinate turkey breasts or tenderloins in a zesty, citrus-infused marinade for a refreshing kick. Grilling imparts a smoky flavor, and with a meat thermometer on hand, you can achieve succulent perfection.

Bright Brines: Balance the smokiness of the grill by incorporating brining into your turkey preparation. A bright, refreshing brine of water, salt, citrus fruits and herbs not only imparts moisture but infuses subtle flavors.

Spring Salads: Light and vibrant salads take center stage as the days get warmer, and turkey can be a stellar addition. Toss leftover grilled or roasted turkey slices with fresh greens, seasonal fruits and a tangy vinaigrette for a light, protein-packed meal.

Burgers and Sliders: Utilize ground turkey to make burgers and sliders. Add diced herbs, garlic, and your favorite seasonings to ground turkey, then shape into patties. Grill or pan-sear for a delightful twist on the classic staple.

A Go-To Protein

Versatile and Adaptable: From grilling and roasting to stir-frying and slow-smoking, turkey adapts to various cooking methods, allowing you to experiment with flavors and techniques.

Quick Cooking: Aim for quicker cooking methods like grilling or sautéing, allowing you to spend less time in the kitchen and more time enjoying the sunshine. Our family's go-to is reminiscent of the grilled turkey tenderloins popular at the Iowa State Fair. Simply marinate tenderloins in Italian dressing for a few hours in the refrigerator. Remove from marinade, sprinkle with seasoned salt and grill to a perfect 165 degrees F.

Zesty Marinades: Infuse the essence of sunshine into turkey dishes with citrusy, herby marinades. Fresh lemon, lime and a medley of herbs like basil, mint and cilantro elevate turkey to a whole new level of seasonal delight.

Whether you're grilling, incorporating it into a refreshing salad, whipping up enchiladas or a quick burger, turkey effortlessly enhances your family's dining experience.

Turkey Enchiladas

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 small onion, peeled and chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pounds boneless skinless turkey breasts, diced into ½-inch pieces
- 1 can (4 ounces) diced green chiles
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, rinsed and drained
- 6-8 large flour tortillas
- 3 cups shredded cheese
- 1 can (10 ounces) red enchilada sauce
- Optional toppings: fresh cilantro, chopped red onions, diced avocado, sour cream, crumbled cotija cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

In a large sauté pan, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic, diced turkey and green chiles. Sauté the mixture for 6-8 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until the turkey is cooked through. Add in the beans, salt and pepper, then stir until evenly combined. Remove pan from heat and set aside.

Spread two tablespoons of sauce over a tortilla, add a large spoonful of the turkey and bean mixture down the middle of the tortilla. Sprinkle a handful of cheese on top, roll up the tortilla and place, seam side down, in a greased 9x13-inch casserole dish. Assemble the remaining enchiladas. Then, spread any remaining sauce and cheese over enchiladas.

Bake at 375 degrees F, uncovered, for 20-25 minutes. The enchiladas will be cooked through, and the tortillas will be somewhat crisp on the outer edges. Remove from oven and serve warm. Garnish with fresh cilantro, chopped onion, diced avocado, sour cream and cotija cheese.

GET MORE WITH

Earl May

At your local Earl May Garden Center, you'll find more than just plants. Friendly helpful experts can guide you to enhance your outdoor living space. At Earl May, our #1 goal is to ensure our guests are successful with their lawn and garden purchases. We back our product 100% with our No-Hassle Guarantee.*

*Effective from the date of purchase and is valid only upon presentation of the original sales receipt.

HEATHER EWIG *Manager, Earl May Garden Center, Ames*

EARL MAY GARDEN CENTERS
earlmay.com

Scan code for expert advice on a variety of lawn and garden topics.

Blades of Green

Discover how to create and maintain a beautiful lawn

By Lydia Zerby

Growing a full, lush lawn can be tricky, even for the most experienced homeowner. There are many factors to consider, including soil type, amount of sun available and the variety of grass species desired. The experts at Earl May Garden Center share how you can create and maintain your yard, causing neighbors to become green with envy.

Top-of-the-Line Seed

Choosing the best and most appropriate seed for your lawn helps to ensure growing success. Earl May purchases and packages the highest grades of hybrid grass seed currently on the market for Midwest lawns.

Look for grass seed with very little dust and inert matter, such as Marvel, a blend of Earl May's best turf-type tall fescues. Marvel lawn seed grows in full sun to part shade, has an 18-inch root system (versus the 4- to 6-inch root system of bluegrass and ryegrass), is drought resistant and is not as susceptible to diseases. Other grass seed blends cater mainly to the amount of sun available in your yard.

Prepare for Success

If the area you're seeding or sodding is low, start by filling it in with topsoil. Then rake to clear debris, level the soil and aerate if the soil is compact.

If seeding, first apply the appropriate seed mix, then apply new lawn starter fertilizer and no more than a ⅛-inch-thick covering of straw, starter mulch or straw blanket. Too much cover will bury the seed and cause it not to grow.

If sodding, make sure the seams of the sod don't line up, and seed the seams with grass seed. Apply a new lawn starter over the sod and keep it moist, but not overly wet.

For both seed and sod, you'll want to water 1 inch a week or keep the first ½ inch of the soil moist. The best time to water is early morning or midday; avoid watering at night as it can cause issues with fungus.

Long-Lasting and Guaranteed

There are three types of nitrogen to pay attention to when purchasing fertilizer. Find the "guaranteed analysis" on the back of any fertilizer bag.

- Ammoniacal nitrogen — cheapest, quick-release green up, lasts 2 to 3 weeks
- Urea nitrogen — more expensive, slow-release green up, lasts 6 to 8 weeks
- Poly-coated urea — most expensive, time-released to last 10 to 12 weeks

Earl May fertilizers contain 100% urea nitrogen with 5% being a poly-coated urea, plus iron and sulfur. Sulfur helps with soil that contains clay by balancing the pH, and iron assists with a deeper greening of the lawn. The timing of fertilizer application is important, so check with an Earl May expert for advice, and ask which of their exclusive lawn care programs would be best for your yard.

Photo credit: Heather Lynn Photography

Inspired by fresh and comforting flavors, Grace on Main offers selections for gatherings, meetings and events that impress and nourish guests.

Redefining Local Dining

Michael and Ilee Muller bring local food options to Elk Horn.

A COUPLE'S JOURNEY OF EMBRACING THEIR RURAL COMMUNITY

By Haley Banwart

The Danish concept of hygge (pronounced hoo-ga) is more than just a quality of cozy contentment. It's a way of life where food is often central to an experience, because of its ability to bring people together.

Since 2020, Grace on Main has served as a hyggelig — meaning nice or cozy — gathering place in Elk Horn, a Danish settlement where history and heritage are celebrated. Located just one block north of the Danish windmill, an iconic community landmark, the inspiration behind the dining destination is a story of serendipity.

From California to the Iowa Prairie

For Grace on Main owners Michael and Ilee Muller, the allure of Iowa was not only apparent in the picturesque rural expanses of the prairie but also in the welcoming embrace of its towns and the warmth of its people.

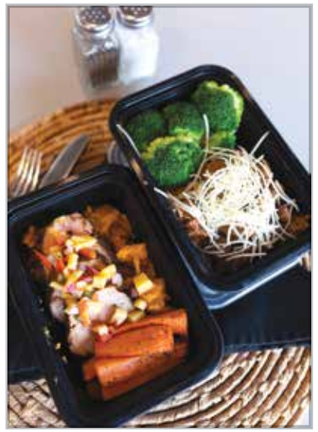
In the winter of 2015, the California natives made their first trip to Elk Horn to visit friends. Captivated by the community and its quiet lifestyle, Michael and Ilee began contemplating moving to the Midwest.

Unsure of their plans, everything began to fall into place when the Muller's friends presented them with the idea to open a restaurant. A local eatery had recently closed its doors, and with Ilee's business background and Michael's 17-plus years of restaurant and fine dining experience, the couple jumped at the opportunity.

In November 2019, the Mullers took a leap of faith and relocated from Sacramento with their two daughters to an acreage outside the Danish villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton. By January, renovations of the original Grace on Main location began.

"We called it Grace because we felt it was by the grace of God that we were able to move and open our restaurant," shares Ilee. "We invested everything we had in the rural Iowa community we had visited less than half a dozen times."

"We believed the people and the lifestyle Elk Horn offered would be worth the risk, and at the hardest time imaginable, Elk Horn proved us right."



Nourish Meals are made fresh in-house and packaged to accommodate any on-the-go lifestyle.

Overcoming the Odds

In another twist of fate, Grace on Main officially opened on March 18, 2020; the same day the announcement was made restaurants could only serve to-go orders in the early days of the pandemic.

"We quickly had to pivot," shares Ilee. "We threw open our front

Head Chef Michael Muller makes fresh pizza crust daily.

Grace on Main is renowned for its specialty pizzas and fresh salads.

Bella Muller works with her parents at the restaurant.

door and served pizza and pasta through the window. After the governor gave the okay to offer dine-in service, we continued to face challenges as we could only seat 20 patrons while honoring social distancing."

In a business with tight margins, Grace on Main managed to weather the storm despite declining sales, lost inventory and the inability to qualify for assistance given the cut-off dates and absence of tax documents from the prior year to demonstrate a loss.

"We had to get creative and expand our services to help us stay afloat and serve our community," Ilee adds. "We offered weekly specials, added Sunday brunch and started our Nourish Meal Prep services."

New Milestones and Meal Experiences

The Mullers credit the unwavering support of residents, visitors and the surrounding communities for not only helping keep their doors open during a difficult time but for helping their business grow and thrive as a result.

In 2021, Grace on Main moved to its current location where the Muller's have expanded their specials but continue to offer the original menu featuring signature scratch-made pizzas, pasta, salads, sandwiches and a selection of delectable desserts.

Equipped with a new space that can seat over 100 customers, the couple also brought to life their culinary vision to host an intimate private dining experience called the Grace Gather Table Dinners.

"Realizing there are minimal opportunities in rural Iowa for foodies or individuals to enjoy an elevated dining experience, we wanted to allow folks to try dishes they otherwise might not have," explains Ilee.

"At the dinners, Michael prepares a multi-course meal with five dishes specifically selected to fit a particular theme," she says. "Diners arrive knowing the theme, but not the menu and seating is limited to 20 guests who experience creative dishes that excite and surprise."

Shared Values and Aspirations

A further demonstration of the Muller's local pride and commitment to community includes the renewable energy sources they have embraced as business owners. Like hygge, sustainability is an equally important hallmark of Danish culture and heritage.

Fortunately for the couple, the site where Grace on Main operates today was outfitted with solar panels and geothermal heating by the previous owner. Another environmentally conscious effort implemented includes takeout containers made from recyclable material.

Additionally, Grace on Main frequently partners with local farmers to source ingredients and Windy Hill Compost, an enterprise that serves as an eco-friendly outlet for composting the restaurant's food waste while doubling as a local drop-off site in the community.

"As a restaurant, we offer more than just food. We offer a place to share a delicious meal, the opportunity to gather and to celebrate achievements," says Ilee. "We strive to offer consistent excellence in food, atmosphere and hospitality while giving back to our rural community."

Grace on Main frequently partners with local farmers to source ingredients.

SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

Grace on Main was recently honored with the 2022 Sustainability & Innovation Award by the Iowa Restaurant Association. The Mullers initially began by repurposing kitchen scraps to nourish their flock of twelve chickens, aiming to curtail landfill waste. As the eatery expanded, they forged a collaboration with Windy Hill Compost, a local enterprise, to convert a greater volume of food waste into valuable fertilizer.

Alongside their efforts to minimize food waste, the Mullers have adopted eco-friendly practices such as utilizing recyclable to-go containers and harnessing solar and geothermal energy to power the premises. Currently, the restaurant operates on an impressive **88.5% renewable energy** basis.

WHAT'S BUGGING FARMERS

PEST CONTROL PROGRAMS CAN SAVE CROPS FROM BEING DESTROYED BY INSECTS

By Kriss Nelson

Japanese beetles feed on leaf tissue between the veins, resulting in a distinctly "skeletonized" look, with leaf veins remaining and the leaf tissue removed.

Photo credit: Ashley Dean, Iowa State University

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, insects cause an estimated $70 billion of crop damage globally each year.

Without Iowa farmers using a timely pest control program, the loss of corn and soybeans in the state could be detrimental to the food and fuel chain around the world.

Common Iowa Crop Pests

Each crop year is different, leaving farmers constantly alert of what could be attacking their fields.

For corn, one of the most common pests is corn rootworm. Both the beetle and larva can cause injury to a corn plant, but the most significant injury comes from the larvae.

Ashley Dean, Iowa State University Extension specialist for field crop entomology, says corn rootworm larvae feed on corn roots, disrupting nutrient and water uptake. This can also cause a small root system, making plants unstable and likely to fall.

Dean says root injury from corn rootworms can cause yield losses of up to 45%. However, corn isn't the only crop to be at risk of pests.

A common pest in soybeans is the soybean aphid. The aphids use a piercing-sucking mouthpart to draw out plant sap from the soybean leaf. Injury from soybean aphids can be hard to spot until the soybean plant is severely impacted and discolored.

Soybean aphids excrete honeydew onto the leaf, and this sticky substance can promote the growth of sooty mold, which could interfere with photosynthesis. These pests have been known to cause yield losses of up to 40%.

The Japanese beetle is a pest affecting not only corn and soybeans but has also been an insect that homeowners have had to battle.

This pest will defoliate soybean leaves, and the injury can be quite distinctive. Japanese beetles will leave the leaf's veins, only consuming the soft tissue. Japanese beetles may also clip silks in corn, interfering with pollination success.

Ashley Dean develops educational resources for field crop pests in Iowa and aids in the research efforts of the Soybean Research Lab.

Photo credit: Ashley Dean, Iowa State University

Ashley Dean coordinates the Iowa Moth Trapping Network, the Regional Corn Rootworm Monitoring Network and the Iowa Pest Alert Network.

"IT CAN BE VERY COSTLY FOR FARMERS TO MANAGE THESE PESTS."

ASHLEY DEAN

"Yield reductions can be significant for these and other pests, reducing a farmer's bottom line," says Dean. "It can also be very costly for farmers to manage these pests."

Chemical Control of Insects

Coincidentally, the pesticides farmers use are in the same chemical family as many household insect sprays and also what is used in cities to control mosquitos.

"For post-emergence insect control, the two chemicals most used by farmers are permethrin and bifenthrin, both members of the 3A insecticide group," says Landus Cooperative Account Lead Dave Lemke.

Application Timing of Insecticides

Farmers, often with an agronomist's help, will begin scouting for insect pressure at the beginning of the growing season.

Once there appears to be a threat, they will look to the economic threshold to determine if an application of an insecticide is necessary.

An economic threshold indicates when farmers should take action to justify the cost of making an insecticide application.

Using thresholds keeps farmers from unnecessary chemical application and ensures they remain profitable.

"Farmers are stewards of the land, and there is an economic concern to insecticide applications," says Lemke. "Not only are they concerned for their bottom line, but also a potential of resistance to the chemical that can occur from overuse."

Farmers must also follow pre-harvest intervals, the wait time between a pesticide application and when the crop is harvested.

"Pre-harvest intervals are on the product labels and allow a chemical application to be safe as far as guarding the food supply," says Lemke.

Alternative Pest Control

Recent innovations in seed genetics allow farmers to be less dependent on insecticides.

One example is genetically modified organism (GMO) varieties such as Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt), which became available in the mid-1990s, significantly reducing European corn borer populations.

By manipulating the DNA of a plant with a naturally occurring protein, farmers now have another weapon in the war against insects.

"Seed genetics have allowed farmers to use less product," says Lemke. "They took the use of insecticides down by millions of pounds."

Seed treatments, biological control and cultural control are other insect management modes.

"Cultural control tactics are aimed at making the environment unsuitable for pests," says Dean. "Examples include manipulating the planting date, using crop rotation, residue management or a trap crop."

Spraying Equipment

With an attachment to their planter, farmers can use insecticides during planting to help combat early-season pests.

Later in the season, insecticides can be applied to foliage using sprayers attached to tractors, high-clearance sprayers for taller plants and airplanes or helicopters.

Advancements in spray technology are allowing farmers to be more accurate with their applications.

When you see a farmer spraying their fields, most of what is sprayed is water used to dilute the pesticides. Farmers manage crop protection products precisely, down to the droplet, to ensure the product is being used effectively and efficiently. Technology is also used to prevent pesticides from being applied in an area that has already been sprayed or is near a waterway.

The reality is the amount of pesticide farmers use on an acre, the size of a football field, is about the same volume as what could fit in a 12-ounce coffee cup. It's really "not a latte."

Photo credit: Ashley Dean, Iowa State University

Soybean aphids infest plants and remove sap, and their populations grow rapidly during the summer.

Agricultural sprayers are used to apply liquids such as pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers to crops.

Precision equipment, such as row shut-offs, prevents spray from overlapping. Nozzles and spray adjuvants also help ensure the product gets onto the crop, reducing the chance of the chemical drifting away.

Variable rate technology and drones allow farmers to spray the chemical where needed.

Regulations and Licensing for Insecticide Applications

Federal law requires farmers to be licensed to apply insecticides classified as restricted-use pesticides. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Pesticide Bureau facilitates the careful use of pesticides through state regulatory programs. It provides education to protect human health and the environment.

This includes pesticide applicator training, licensing and certification for private and commercial applicators.

For Lemke, this is an opportunity for pesticide applicators to stay on top of new regulations, products and application updates.

"These regulations enable us to make a safer, better application," says Lemke.

Dave Lemke (right), advising farmer Scott Larson of Callender, was named 2024 Iowa Certified Crop Adviser of the Year at the Agribusiness Showcase & Conference.

"SEED GENETICS HAVE ALLOWED FARMERS TO USE LESS PRODUCT. THEY TOOK THE USE OF INSECTICIDES DOWN BY MILLIONS OF POUNDS."

DAVE LEMKE

Insect control in cattle

When Ashlynn Jones is not teaching agricultural education at Fairfield High School, she and her husband Matthew help manage their family's Red Angus commercial cow herd.

Jones says their most significant concerns regarding pest control revolve around fly management, worms and parasites, such as lice and ringworm.

"Our job is to ensure our animals have their best day until their last day on our farm," says Jones.

When cattle are uncomfortable, it can lead to reduced weight gains, decreased milk production and, in a severe case, anemia from blood loss. Some insects can also be carriers of infectious diseases.

"We must keep our cattle comfortable; it is a top priority on our farm to provide the best care to our animals," says Jones. "We are out walking cattle daily, looking for flies and checking fecal matter for parasites."

If there is concern, the cattle need to be treated. Jones makes pest control decisions based on their Vet Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR).

"Everything we do, we do with the recommendation and consultation with our veterinarian," says Jones.

Education and Training

Besides seeking help from a veterinarian, Jones relies on training she received as a young 4-H and FFA member and now as an adult.

4-H and FFA members participate in the Youth for Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) training. This program ensures the safety and well-being of animals produced by youth for showing and 4-H and FFA projects and ensures a safe food supply to consumers.

Adults have the option to attend Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training.

BQA is a national program that raises consumer confidence by offering proper management techniques and commitment to quality within every segment of the beef industry. It also supports food safety, increases access to cattle markets and enhances herd profitability.

"Through these programs, we have been taught the proper administration of medicine and how to read medication labels," explains Jones.

Another essential part of a pest control program in cattle is understanding the withdrawal period, which is also demonstrated in the BQA program. This is the time that must elapse between the last administration of veterinary medicine and when the animal is taken to market.

"We are required, as producers, to follow that withdrawal date," says Jones. "As producers, we understand it is important to provide a safe and quality product to our consumers."

For Jones, it's more than following regulations and earning a return on investment.

"We are not out to just make a profit," she adds. "We understand our cattle as living animals and want to give them the best life possible."

Ashlynn Jones takes the well-being of her cattle to heart by focusing on their health.

Coon Rapids Riverside Bridge

Hybrid Icons installment

Single-track bike trails

COON RAPIDS,

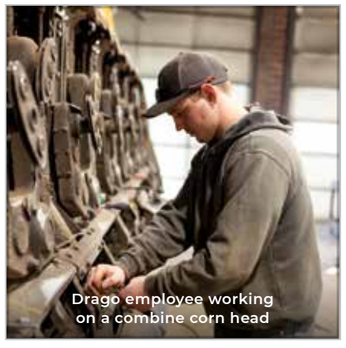
Hometown to the Great Outdoors

POET Bioprocessing

Historic rotating ear of corn

Super Valu grocery store

Garst Seed historic display at Hardware Hank


Drago employee working on a combine corn head

"Irene" sculpture at Sculpture Park

Coon Rapids celebrated $1.7 million invested in Main Street properties with a façade dedication ceremony in September 2023. Pictured is the ribbon cutting attended by building owners, city officials, project contractors and community members.

Janelle Kracht, Coon Rapids city council member

ENJOY OUTDOOR ADVENTURES, AGRICULTURE & SMALL-TOWN CHARM IN THIS IOWA GREAT PLACE

By Darcy Maulsby

When Janelle Kracht sees someone new around her hometown of Coon Rapids, one of her favorite things to do is strike up a conversation. "Welcome to Coon Rapids! I'm so glad you're here. What brings you to town?"

The answers never cease to amaze her. "Some visitors travel hundreds of miles to go biking, hiking or camping at Whiterock Conservancy, or to enjoy the star field that provides amazing nighttime views of the sky," says Kracht, an Iowa Corn district field manager who has served on the Coon Rapids city council since 2009. "It sounds like a cliché, but for those who visit, Coon Rapids is a little bit of heaven."

For generations, Coon Rapids' residents have been stewards of the area's rich lands, known worldwide for its seed corn innovation. Today, the 1,300 residents of this Carroll County town focus on quality of life, emphasizing natural resources and recreation.

In 2004, the Garst family made one of the largest land gifts in Iowa's history to create Whiterock Conservancy. This 5,500-acre non-profit land trust promotes sustainable agriculture, public recreation and natural resource protection, including prairies, wetlands and oak savannas.

"This is a unique property you can't find anywhere else in Iowa," says Kate Zimmerman, executive director of Whiterock Conservancy, which includes a 40-mile trail system for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrian riders. "It's a great place to unwind and unplug."

Located along eight miles of the Middle Raccoon River valley, Whiterock is open to the public every

Whiterock's Log House

Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

Campsite at Starfield Campground

Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

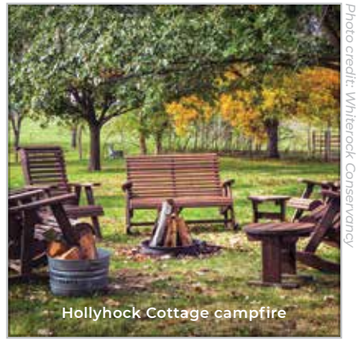

Hollyhock Cottage campfire

Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

Adam Esdhor, part owner of Hardware Hank

day for recreation and exploration, including fishing, canoeing, kayaking, stargazing and more. Guests can also bring their ATVs for Whiterock's popular Slow Sunday Drive guided tours in the spring and the fall.

In 2023, more than 18,000 people from the Midwest and beyond visited Whiterock. "We have many repeat visitors," Zimmerman adds.

Honoring the Past, Focusing on the Future

Both Whiterock Conservancy and Coon Rapids are nestled among the scenic, rolling hills of the Middle Raccoon River. For more than 150 years, people have been drawn to this unique region in west-central Iowa, situated about halfway between Des Moines and Omaha.

Ismael Ortiz, processing technician at Becks Hybrids

Hybrid Icons at night

Downtown Coon Rapids

Jenna Robb, owner of Jenna's Tattooed Confections

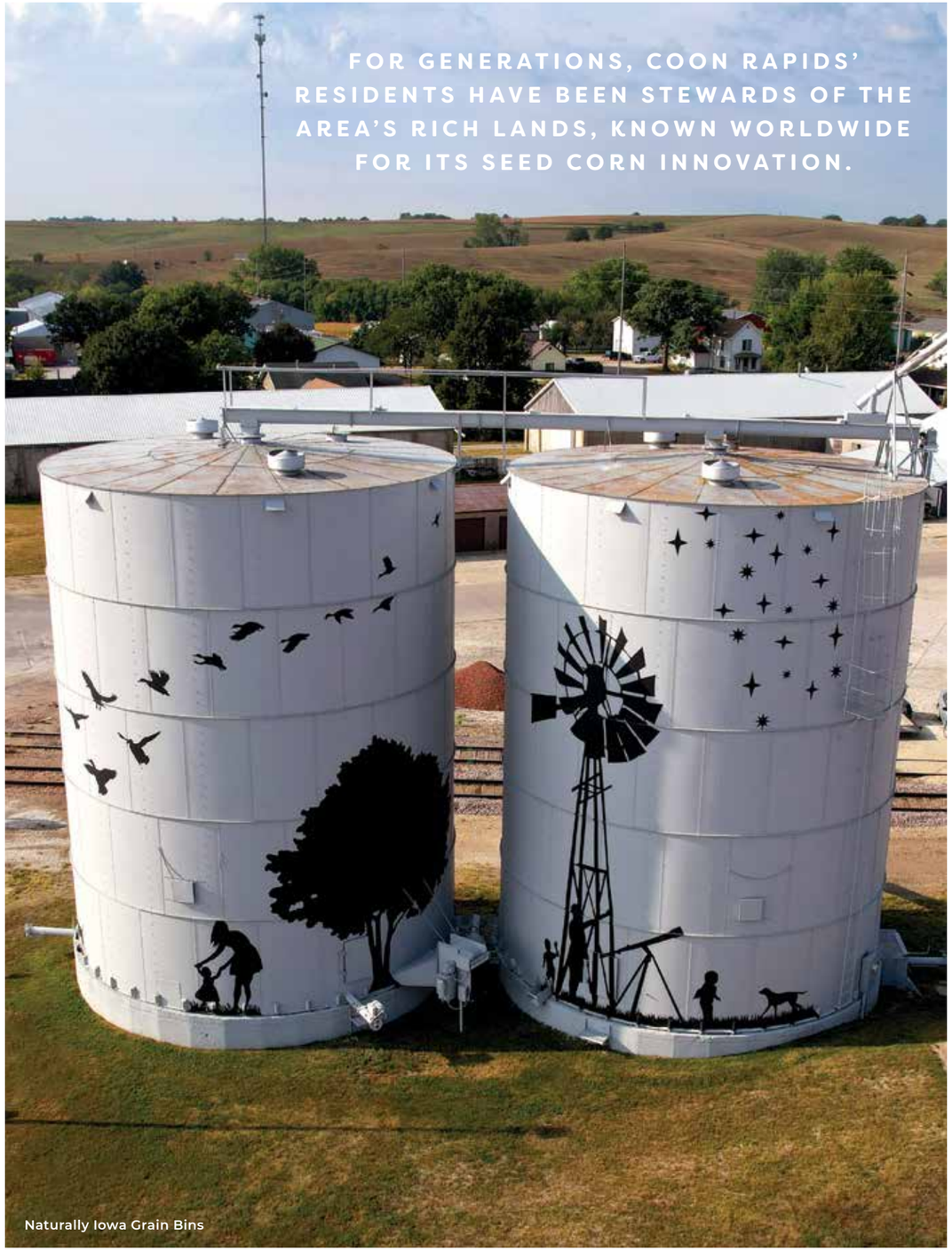
"You can enjoy Iowa at its best here," says Katie Mason, Main Street Coon Rapids executive director and Coon Rapids community coordinator. "Coon Rapids offers an exceptional quality of life and the potential to carry on the American dream."

Coon Rapids is one of the original three designated Iowa Great Places. The Iowa Great Places program recognizes and partners with Iowans who cultivate the unique, authentic qualities of their local places (neighborhoods, districts or regions) and make them remarkable places to live and work.

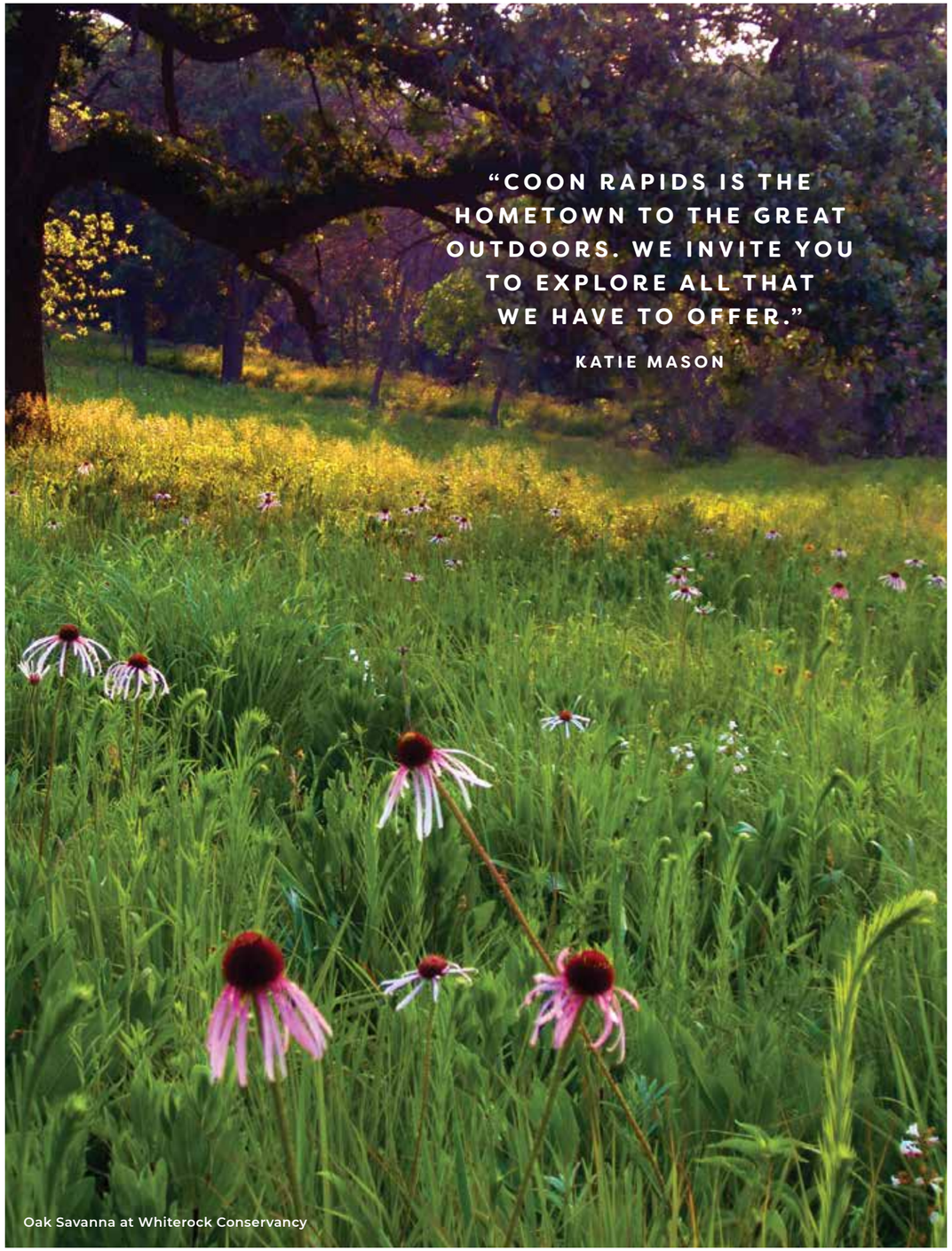
Established in 1863, Coon Rapids grew as agriculture took root in the area. By the 1930s and 1940s, the Garst and Thomas Seed Company in Coon Rapids helped lead the hybrid corn revolution that transformed Iowa into America's No. 1 corn-producing state.

Today, Coon Rapids remains an agricultural hub. The community includes a POET Biorefinery ethanol plant, Drago S.C.I. equipment dealer and NEW Cooperative. In addition, Beck's Hybrids and several local seed dealers offer soybean and corn seed genetics and treatments.

Coon Rapids' vibrant downtown includes boutiques, a coffee shop, restaurants, a fitness center, a pharmacy and more. Two long-time, family-owned businesses anchor Main Street, including Coon Rapids Hardware Hank on the west. On the East, Frohlich's Super Valu has served the community since 1919.



Naturally Iowa Grain Bins



Oak Savanna at Whiterock Conservancy

Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

Peace Through Corn: The Day the Cold War Thawed in Coon Rapids

At the height of the Cold War, tensions thawed a bit on September 23, 1959, when food and farming brought a capitalist and a communist together in Coon Rapids. The world was transfixed as Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited his friend Roswell Garst at his farm to learn about modern corn and livestock production.

Never had a Soviet premier visited the U.S., yet here were Khrushchev and Garst, discussing everything from seeds to soils.

Garst believed that hungry people are dangerous people. He recognized that the Soviets needed to raise more corn, a belief shared by the Soviet premier. “The two men were really quite alike,” says Garst’s granddaughter Liz Garst. “They were both big-idea men who were passionate about agriculture and food production.”

Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

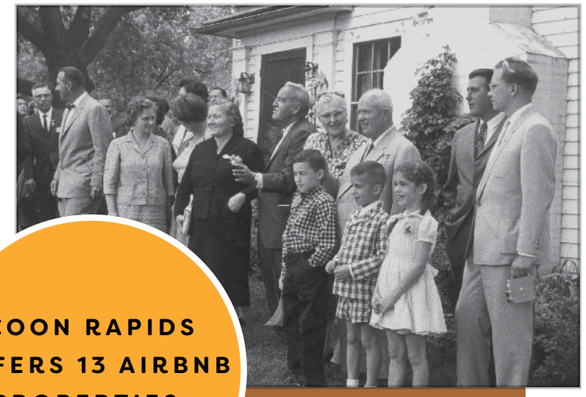


Photo credit: Whiterock Conservancy

Kayaking at Whiterock Conservancy

COON RAPIDS OFFERS 13 AIRBNB PROPERTIES.

Recent storefront façade improvements have revitalized Main Street. From August 2019 through December 2023, the community invested approximately $2.7 million (through private investments, grants and city funds), along with 12,153 volunteer hours, in the Main Street District. “If you can’t get away during the week, come visit us on Saturdays,” Mason says. “Most of our stores are open.”

Coon Rapids hosts nearly 50 events annually, including the Carroll County Fair and Christmas in a Small Town. Other diversions include an aquatic center, golf course, bowling alley, parks, playgrounds and public art, including agriculture-themed murals and other public art throughout the community.

Want to stay awhile? Coon Rapids offers 13 Airbnb properties, including several restored and historic farmhouses at Whiterock Conservancy that work well for family reunions and other gatherings. The community also has five campgrounds.

“Coon Rapids is the hometown to the great outdoors,” Mason says. “We invite you to explore all that we have to offer.”

NEED ANOTHER REASON TO VISIT COON RAPIDS? HOW ABOUT 20?

Celebrate Whiterock Conservancy’s 20th anniversary! Download the 20 Adventures for 20 Years Activity Guide at whiterockconservancy.org.

Recipe on Page 29.

GIVE AWAY

WIN $60 IN PORK COUPONS

to purchase pork products from your local retailer. Enter to win at **iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/iowa-pork**.

Fresh Salads That Satisfy

MIXING VIBRANT VEGGIES, HEARTY PROTEINS AND ZESTY FLAVORS

By Lydia Zerby

Iowa is a top-producing state in many salad ingredient staples, including pork, beef, eggs, turkey and dairy, so it's easy to create a fresh and hearty salad that combines these nutritious foods. Spring is the perfect time to visit a local farmers market and pick up fresh veggies, cheeses, meats and herbs to combine into a salad that will leave you feeling satisfied. Knowing Iowa farmers had a hand in growing and raising these wholesome ingredients is the cherry "tomato" on top!

Sesame Garlic Pork Tenderloin Salad

- 1 ½ pounds pork tenderloin
- Salt and pepper
- 8-10 cups spring mix or spring mix plus baby spinach
- ½ bunch kale, stems removed, chopped
- 1 ½ cups shelled edamame
- 1 cup matchstick carrots
- 1 cup shredded purple cabbage
- 1 bunch scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded, chopped
- 4 small sweet red, yellow or orange peppers, sliced into rings
- 1 cup loosely packed cilantro leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds

MARINADE

- ½ cup of Sesame Garlic Dressing (recipe to right)
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper

SESAME GARLIC DRESSING

- 1 cup rice vinegar
- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 ½ tablespoons sesame oil
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

For the dressing, bring vinegar to a boil and add sugar and garlic. Remove from heat, stir and let cool. Add remaining ingredients and chill until serving.

Place pork tenderloin into a gallon size zip-top bag, season with salt and pepper. Mix marinade in a small bowl. Once combined, pour into the bag and place in refrigerator for 2 hours or up to 12 hours.

Remove from marinade when ready to grill. Grill on high heat for around 6-9 minutes per side until the internal temperature of the pork tenderloin reaches 145 degrees F.

Remove from heat, let rest. Slice, then cut pork into bite-sized cubes. Pork can be served warm or chilled.

Combine salad ingredients and pork and toss together.

Dress with Sesame Garlic Dressing and serve.

Recipe credit: Cristen Clark, Food & Swine

Greek yogurt is made when regular yogurt is strained to remove the liquid whey. This results in a thicker, creamier and tarter yogurt. Compared to regular yogurt, Greek yogurt on average contains twice the protein, about 14 percent less lactose (a naturally occurring sugar) and approximately 15 percent less calcium, although this can vary depending on the brand.

Tandoori Grilled Chicken and Fattoush Salad

with Greek Yogurt Dressing

TANDOORI CHICKEN

- 1 ½ cups plain Greek yogurt, fat level of choice
- 3 tablespoons lemon, freshly squeezed
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon ginger, grated
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon garam masala
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, or more to taste
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 ½ pounds boneless chicken breast

Combine Greek yogurt, lemon juice and garlic in a bowl and stir to combine. Transfer half of the yogurt mixture to a resealable bag.

Cover the remaining yogurt mixture and reserve in the refrigerator for use as dressing for the salad.

Add grated ginger, coriander, cumin, smoked paprika, garam masala, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper to the yogurt in the bag. Add the chicken breasts and seal the bag.

Squeeze the sealed bag until the yogurt mixture and spices fully coat the chicken. Place the bag in the refrigerator to marinate for at least 30 minutes or as long as overnight.

When ready to cook, preheat a gas or charcoal grill to 450 degrees F. When grill is hot, add chicken breasts and grill for 7 minutes per side, rotating twice per side.

Transfer grilled chicken to a plate and allow to rest, tented with foil, for 10 minutes before serving. Serve with Fattoush Salad.

FATTOUSH SALAD

- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ pound Persian cucumber, thinly sliced crosswise
- ½ cup radish, thinly sliced
- 3 scallions (green onion), thinly sliced
- 2 small little gem lettuce, or baby romaine lettuces, torn to bite-size pieces
- ¼ cup flat-leaf parsley (Italian parsley), minced
- ¼ cup mint, leaves
- ¼ cup pomegranate arils (seeds)
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt, reserved mixture from the tandoori chicken recipe (see direction section)
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 2 (8-inch) pita bread, halved, toasted until golden and broken into bite-size pieces
- 2 teaspoons ground sumac, optional

Mix tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, scallions, lettuce, parsley, mint and pomegranate arils in a large bowl.

Add ¾ of dressing; toss to coat, adding more dressing by tablespoonfuls as needed. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add pita; toss once. Sprinkle sumac over top of salad, if desired.

Photo and recipe credit: Undeniably Dairy

Farmer's Market Vegetable, Beef and Brown Rice Salad

- 1 (about 1 pound) beef top round steak, cut ¾-inch thick
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 2 cups asparagus pieces, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 medium yellow squash, cut lengthwise in half, then crosswise into ¼-inch thick slices
- 3 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 cup diced, seeded tomatoes
- 1 cup canned garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed
- ¼ cup fresh basil, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon salt

MARINADE

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper

Combine marinade ingredients in small bowl. Place beef top round steak and ¼ cup marinade in food-safe plastic bag; turn steak to coat. Close bag securely and marinate in refrigerator for 6 hours or as long as overnight. Reserve remaining marinade in refrigerator for dressing.

Remove steak from marinade; discard marinade. Place steak on rack in broiler pan so surface of beef is 2 to 3 inches from heat. Broil 12-13 minutes for medium rare (145 degrees F) doneness, turning once. Remove; keep warm.

***Cook's Tip:* To grill, place steak on grill over medium, ash-covered coals. Grill, uncovered, 10-11 minutes (over medium heat on preheated gas grill, times remain the same) for medium rare (145 degrees F) doneness, turning occasionally.**

Heat oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until hot. Add asparagus and squash; cook and stir 7-8 minutes or until tender. Toss with rice, tomatoes, beans, basil, salt and reserved marinade in large bowl.

Carve steak into thin slices. Serve over rice salad.

Photo and recipe credit: Iowa Beef Industry Council

Top round is most often roasted whole and sliced for roast beef, but the meat can be fabricated into steaks as well, making for the most tender steaks to come out of this tougher section. Marinating top round before cooking serves two purposes: It helps tenderize and adds just the right amount of flavor.

Sarah Nolte, third-generation sod farmer and business manager at Blue Grass Enterprises.

SOWN IN TURF

GROWING DREAMS ON THE GREEN HORIZON

By Skylar Vanden Bosch

The evolution of Blue Grass Enterprises from a small family sod farm to a trusted industry leader is both untraditional and unprecedented. Sarah Nolte, the business manager at Blue Grass Enterprises, is a third-generation sod farmer. She manages the business that was started in 1969 by her grandmother, Audrey Loan.

As a single woman and farm owner living in Iowa in 1969, Audrey was unable to do basic business practices like qualify for a loan. Worried about the future of her family and farm, Audrey capitalized on the opportunity a local contractor brought forth. He asked if Audrey could grow the sod he needed for a project. She agreed, and the rest was history.

"The funny thing is it took three years for Audrey and her children to produce the first stand of grass. Now, we can easily do this in a year. That tells you there were some bumps in the road," says Nolte. "Once it was ready to harvest, other builders started to express their interest, too. From there, it snowballed into what it is today."

By the mid-1980s, the Loan family, including Sarah's father, Mike, was all-in on the sod business. They owned a few hundred acres right off the Cedar River in Linn County, where they planted, fertilized, maintained and harvested sod.

From the beginning, most of their customers were commercial and residential real-estate landscapers. When contractors and homeowners needed high-quality sod, they would turn to their trusted, local partner: Blue Grass Enterprises.

However, the 2008 Cedar River flood caused widespread damage, totaling millions of dollars—Blue Grass Enterprises was not immune. They needed to move away from the floodplain to reduce the risk of future catastrophic events. Nolte's family sold the original farm and moved to Alburnett. Now, 80% of their product is sold to new construction and housing, while the remaining product is sold to municipalities, golf courses, athletic fields and other uses.

Sustainability

The company's commitment to sustainable farming practices is more than preached — it's practiced. High-quality sod starts with healthy soil. Blue Grass Enterprises leverages cover crops and strip-cropping techniques to preserve soil quality and reduce erosion. Cover crops are selected based on the season but can range from soybeans and buckwheat to oats and rye. Cover crops, along with strategically selecting seed, fertilizer, and nutrient application, ensure healthy and resilient grass.

The company also hosts seminars for customers to learn about proper, sustainable lawn care.

"A huge part of our marketing push has been to educate our urban customers on how to care for their

BLUE GRASS ENTERPRISES LEVERAGES COVER CROPS AND STRIP-CROPPING TECHNIQUES TO PRESERVE SOIL QUALITY AND REDUCE EROSION.

lawns responsibly and sustainably," says Nolte. "We also cover how farmers can implement sustainable practices at their own operations."

Attendees learn how to care for the sod in a variety of locations. They gain an understanding of runoff, fertilizer, soil care, soil genetics, compost, watering and mowing techniques. Due to growing demand, seminars are occasionally held at Kirkwood Community College to accommodate the large number of attendees.

"It is very much a part of our mission at Blue Grass Enterprises to help our communities be environmentally healthy," says Nolte. "Our goal is to give people the tools they need to have a big impact."

Blue Grass Enterprises welcomes field trip groups to learn about their operations.

Sod Farming Basics

Throughout the year, Blue Grass Enterprises employees are seeding, planting, harvesting and tending to any of their 40-acre quadrants within their 400-acre farm. They seed twice a year in May and August, harvest sod between March and December depending on weather and soil conditions, and prepare sod stands for delivery within two hours of harvest. However, sod harvesting can happen year-round.

To get the job done, they need the machinery to make it happen. While some equipment on the sod farm is different than conventional farms, they do share some of the same tools, including tractors and mowers.

"A HUGE PART OF OUR MARKETING PUSH HAS BEEN TO EDUCATE OUR URBAN CUSTOMERS ON HOW TO CARE FOR THEIR LAWNS RESPONSIBLY AND SUSTAINABLY."

SARAH NOLTE

Blue Grass Enterprises farms 400 acres of sod in Alburnett.

Harvesting sod requires specialized equipment that precisely cuts and rolls the sod for delivery.

"It can be really intense," chuckles Nolte. "We have 10 employees and 13 tractors. The tractor-to-people ratio is wild compared to conventional farming. At any point in time, we might have people harvesting, mowing, spraying and fertilizing all on the same day."

The farm uses mowers that are 36-feet wide, allowing their team to mow 40 acres per hour, thanks to their impressive reach and field management practices. They also have two sod harvesters that precisely cut and roll sod to be loaded on semi-trucks for delivery.

The company's 10 employees come from a variety of professional backgrounds, ranging from traditional farming and agriculture to agronomy, education, diesel mechanics, forestry, horticulture and business management.

"Many people don't want to work at a desk. They seek well-paid, outdoor-focused careers," Nolte says. "They can become an agronomist and care for people's lawns or athletic fields, farm or work for city municipalities in parks or recreation. Some of the coolest jobs on the market right now are with major sports teams that have enormous turf management needs. Who wouldn't want that job?"

Photo credit: Adam Ryan Morris

raising the STEAKS

Leveraging generations of knowledge to produce delicious Iowa beef

By April Pearson

The Severson move cattle by horseback. It's a natural way to carry on traditions, and the cattle respond well to it.

Two Farms, One Family

Erma and Joshua Leonard purchased Grand View Farm and Ranch in Clarion in 1914. Though, it wasn't called "Grand View" at the time — the name came when Erma saw the sprawling prairie vista and proclaimed it "a grand view." Their daughter Icle and her husband Kenneth Severson eventually took over the ranch, then passed it on to their grandson Troy and his wife Elizabeth, who still live on the family's century farm.

In 1936, Kenneth's father Knute bought land a mile west of Grand View Farm and Ranch, land which his great-great-grandson and namesake Knute now owns with his wife Amanda. In 12 years, it'll become the family's second century farm.

Understanding the history of Iowa's longstanding farms and their perseverance is an important part of food appreciation and consumption.

Amanda and Knute are proud owners and operators of Grand View Beef. They combine traditional cattle ranching and farm practices with innovative communication and distribution methods to deliver delicious Iowa beef to recipients nationwide. Grand View Beef is the culmination of generations of hard work, simple living, communion with nature and a creative vision.

Knute and Amanda with their daughter Luella (left), son Harbor (right) and ranch dog King.

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

From Football to Forage

Amanda and Knute met while interning for the Seattle Seahawks. Working in the city made Knute realize he wanted to return to the family farm. He followed his heart back to Iowa while Amanda stayed in her home state of Washington, and that was the end of that. At least it was until Amanda landed a job with the Ladies Professional Golf Association based in Florida. When she found out the position would actually be located in Iowa, she took it as a sign and followed her heart back to Knute.

The two started Grand View Beef in 2017, combining Knute's passion for growing forage with Amanda's expertise in marketing unique products. They've since married, had two kids named Harbor Jack and Luella Lova, and grown their operation into a thriving family business. Grand View Beef allows them to live their values in their work — values of tradition, family and stewardship. "It aligns with who we are and what we care about," says Amanda. "It's been a great fit for us."

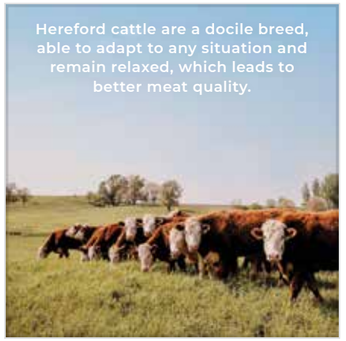
Family Raised, Grass Fed

Knute's parents, Troy and Elizabeth, run the cow-calf operation. "We have the amazing benefit of keeping all the operations in the family," says Amanda. "For us to see how the calves are being raised is a huge part of our story. It's essential to us." Troy started raising Herford cattle more than 25 years ago because they're hardy and gentle. Naturally suited to Iowa's climate, they have nice, thick coats in the winter that shed in the summer. The breed is also docile and calm, making them easier and safer to work with. All the Seversons take pride in treating their animals humanely and keeping them healthy.

Troy moves the cattle by horseback, giving them access to pasture year-round. In the winter, he feeds the cows the old-fashioned way — via a sled pulled by a team of Belgian draft horses. "We like to say that we try to use hooves and hearts as much as possible with other hooves and hearts," says Amanda. "The cattle respond well to the horses. It's what's been used on the operation for so long, so they're used to it. It's a great way to carry on traditions and keep things as natural as they've always been."

After the calves have been weaned at six months, they move on to Amanda and Knute's farm, where they're finished until they reach the age of 24-28 months. Considering that the industry standard is 14-18 months, this extra time allows the Seversons to maximize the potential of their cattle. In addition to longer finishing times, Grand View Beef cattle are 100% grass fed — that is, they graze a wide variety of nutritious forage.

"One big misconception about grass-fed beef is that all they eat is the type of grass you picture in your head," says Amanda.



Hereford cattle are a docile breed, able to adapt to any situation and remain relaxed, which leads to better meat quality.

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

Amanda and Knute host farm-to-table events at their Grand View Beef ranch located between Clarion and Belmond.

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

Generations on the farm — Elizabeth and Troy Severson, Knute and Amanda Severson.

GIVE AWAY

WIN $150 TO GRAND VIEW BEEF

to purchase grass-fed, family-raised beef. Enter to win at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/grand-view-beef.

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

GRAND VIEW BEEF RECENTLY DONATED A TWO-WEEK SUPPLY OF GROUND BEEF TO THE FIRST LUTHERAN FOOD PANTRY IN CLARION — 240 POUNDS!

Ground beef is the pantry's most requested protein, yet it's the least donated and most expensive to purchase.

Photo credit: Adam Ryan Morris

Using practices like intensive rotational grazing increases soil health, captures carbon, increases rainfall absorption and ultimately leads to healthier cattle.

"WE'LL WORK HARD AND STEWARD THIS LAND TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY SO THAT ONE DAY, WE CAN PASS IT TO THE NEXT GENERATION."

AMANDA SEVERSON

In the winter, the cattle are fed the old-fashioned way, via a sled pulled by a team of Belgian draft horses.

Photo credit: Jean Ubben Photography

Grand View Beef cattle are fed a range of forages, such as cowpeas, sorghum-sundangrass, ryegrass and baleage, to ensure they receive the appropriate nutrients.

"If you finished cattle on just grass, the meat wouldn't taste very good, and it would take them a long time to get to the appropriate weight." Grand View Beef cattle are fed a range of forages to ensure they receive the appropriate nutrients. Cowpeas harvested before maturation provide protein, sorghum-sudangrass contains fiber, hay and ryegrass deliver essential vitamins, and baleage increases appetite and aids in digestion. And the cattle seem to like it. "The way they move and act when they're grass-fed, they exert more energy," says Amanda.

Another common misbelief is that grass-fed beef doesn't taste as good as grain-fed beef. "When it's finished correctly and has a variety of good, high-quality forages, grass-fed beef finishes really well," says Amanda. "It's marbled and tender, and the taste is excellent. It just takes a lot of work and money to do that." More work and money result in a more expensive end product. Are customers willing to pay extra? In Amanda's experience, the answer is yes. "We started with both grass-finished and grain-finished beef. The grass-fed sold out faster, even at a premium price."

A Niche Market for a Niche Product

Amanda and Knute had planned for Grand View Beef to be a high-end wholesale producer for restaurants in Des Moines, Chicago and Minneapolis. Still, they didn't want to compete with larger producers who could offer higher volumes at lower prices. They found their niche selling directly to consumers after working at farmers markets for several summers. They learned what was important to their customers and built relationships with those who appreciated them most.

Now, they attend the Ames, Clear Lake and Okoboji farmers markets during the summer, and their products can be found year-round at Campbells in Des Moines, Wheatfields in Ames, Simply Nourished in Mason City and other grocers. They also sell their products via their website — from premium cuts to soup bones — ensuring every part of the animal is used. "It was a great pivot for us; now we can sell the whole animal, so there's no waste," says Amanda.

The couple has also started hosting farm-to-table dinners for customers who want to visit the farm and meet them. "We're trying to bridge the gap between consumers and producers in a way that's not intimidating," says Amanda. Diners enjoy a four-course meal prepared by a guest chef and tour the ranch.

Tradition and Innovation

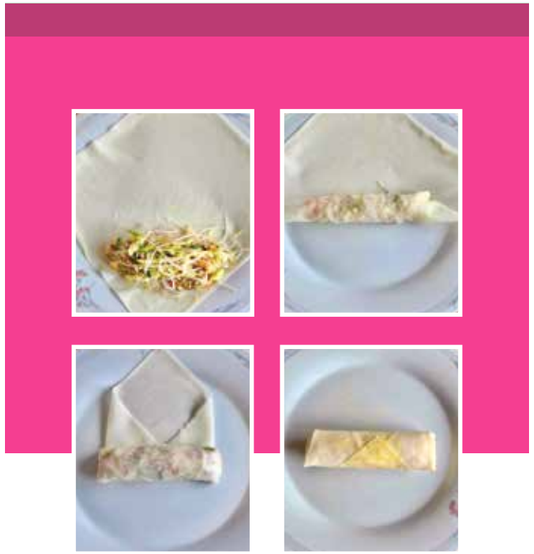
Living on a soon-to-be century farm. Raising Herford cows. Passing on generations of knowledge to their kids. Amanda and Knute are forging their path, keeping some old ways alive and adding new practices. "We like to work hard and overcome challenges," says Amanda. "We're lucky to do what we love every day."

Mao and LeeKhoua Sayaxang are staples at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market.

• MAO'S EGG ROLLS DELIVERS DELICIOUS DELICACIES •

Egg Rolls for Breakfast

By Gretchen Westdal-Centers



Anyone who's started their Saturday at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market knows there aren't rules when it comes to sticking to traditional American breakfast fare. Patrons indulge in everything from pupusas to crepes to curry, and it all pretty much started with one vendor: Mao's Egg Rolls.

Nearly 30 years ago, LeeKhoua and Mao Sayaxang were one of two ready-made food vendors at the market. Lee and Mao, who emigrated to Iowa in 1976 following the Vietnam War, originally started with the intent to farm and sell their produce at the market. But as many Iowans know, farming is hard, fickle work. Lee and Mao weren't afraid of hard work, they just had a different idea.

"My mom observed that nobody was selling on-site prepared food," says Choua Sayaxang, Lee and Mao's oldest son. "She's the one who came up with the idea to sell on-site prepared food. They found a food concession trailer and said, 'Egg rolls are the only thing we know how to make that tastes good.'"

Their customers agreed. People have been visiting the farmers market just for the egg rolls ever since.

It's a family affair today, with Lee, Mao, their sons, daughters-in-law and grandkids running the operation. Everyone has their jobs, and there's a long line of people waiting to purchase the delicious food. But it wasn't always that easy.

"The early days were tough," Choua recalls. "When we decided to sell food, my parents didn't want to let go of the farming aspect. So, we did both."

Late to Bed, Early to Rise

They worked around the clock to make their dream a reality. In addition to farming, starting a new business and caring for their three sons, Mao and Lee also worked full time.

"My dad was a public school teacher," explains Choua. "He was home in the summer, but my mom worked all year. I remember going to bed at 2 a.m. just to wake up at 4 a.m. so we could get to the market. We weren't living in the Des Moines area yet; we were in Prairie City because my family and extended family have a farm there."

The family faced challenges many small businesses come across — all the unknowns that pop up, despite planning and preparation.

Mao and Lee had never been in the food business before. Sometimes they couldn't be at the farmers market due to unforeseen circumstances, like an issue with equipment or a misstep in prepping the egg rolls. But they persevered, learning how to streamline the process and determine how much food to prepare.

"Through the years, we learned how to do things more efficiently. We used to chop all our vegetables by hand, and I eventually convinced my parents to buy a commercial food processor. Now, instead of spending two hours chopping all the cabbage and carrots, we only spend 20 minutes," Choua remembers with a chuckle.

Trailblazing, One Egg Roll at a Time

Year after year, the family returned with more knowledge and experience in running a successful operation. As their business grew, so did the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market. Now, Mao's Egg Rolls is one of 300-plus vendors that attracts an average of 20,000 visitors each Saturday from May to October. People can find foods and other goods that span cultures, cuisines and everything in between.

Mao's Egg Rolls was a pioneering business for the market.

"It's been amazing because we were one of only two vendors who sold and prepared food on-site when we started. Now, from the 300 vendors, about 33% of those sell on-site food or drinks," explains Choua, who, in addition to still helping run the business, is also an adjunct professor at William Penn University. "The farmers market has been great from a business, personal and community perspective because it brings different people to a diverse set of vendors."

Choua remembers that when they first started, his mom wondered who would eat egg rolls for breakfast.

It's a family affair — (left to right) LeeKhoua, Cheng, Eva, Emme, Julie, Crystal, Choua, Mao, Khang Le and Chameng.

Egg rolls and other Asian-style food are served with smiles at the Market.

MAO'S EGG ROLLS WAS A PIONEERING BUSINESS FOR THE (DOWNTOWN FARMERS) MARKET.

"I love that you can go there, and say, 'Of course I'm going to have egg rolls or pupusas or curry at 8:30 a.m.,'" says Choua. "We've helped contribute to the diverse aspect of the farmers market, making it possible for other food vendors, specifically from ethnic backgrounds, to come and sell."

A Tasty Future

Stop by on a Saturday morning, and you'll hear Choua and his brothers chatting about college football while manning the deep fryer, and their parents greeting regulars and catching up with their grandkids and daughters-in-law while serving up the goods.

Mao's Egg Rolls is still thriving thanks to the family's commitment to the business, the community and each other. The family is thinking about expanding to other markets throughout the metro area. There are even talks about moving into different areas of business. But one thing will remain: their connection to food and family.

uniting private and public partners for

A Greener Future

By Darcy Maulsby

THE SOIL AND WATER OUTCOMES FUND (SWOF) CREATES PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FARMERS AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS WHILE PROVIDING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR SOIL AND WATER STEWARDSHIP.

Do you think about agriculture when you think of big brands like Walmart, Pepsi or Ingredion? Probably not, but it's different for Dan Glandorf, who farms near Williamsburg.

"Last spring at planting time, I hosted 15 guests at my farm, including three members of the Walton family, Walmart board members and executives from Cargill," says Glandorf, a fourth-generation farmer who raises corn, soybeans and alfalfa. "They were very interested in learning more about how I use no-till, cover crops and other conservation practices."

Glandorf participates in the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund (SWOF), one of the only programs of its type in the country. SWOF creates partnerships between farmers and public and private partners while providing financial incentives for soil and water stewardship. SWOF offers these incentives directly to farmers who transition to on-farm conservation practices that yield positive environmental outcomes like improving water quality, capturing carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Participating in SWOF also helps corporations meet their voluntary sustainability goals. Glandorf was impressed by how much his farm visitors knew about modern agricultural practices. "They asked very good questions," says Glandorf, who showed them his soybean drill and the attachments on his no-till planter that allow him to farm in a more eco-friendly way. "They were scheduled to be here for an hour, but the conversation was so good that they stayed a few hours."

SWOF reflects how interconnected modern supply chains have become — and how decisions made on the land create a ripple effect far beyond the farm gate.

"We don't always think about the choices we make when purchasing goods and deciding what we eat, but there's always a consumer-to-farmer connection," says Adam Kiel, managing director of SWOF, a subsidiary of the Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) in Ankeny. "Many large corporations use a variety of ag commodities to produce products that you and I use every day, from soda pop and candy bars to snack products and pet food."

Program Expands to Hundreds of Thousands of Acres

SWOF fosters partnerships with multinational food corporations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other groups willing to invest in conservation and eco-friendly farming practices.

"Just as farmers respond to price signals from grain and livestock markets, we're showing them there's an economic value to conservation," says Kiel, who notes that farmers sign a year-long contract to participate in SWOF.

This partnership benefits both the farmers and the partners who participate in SWOF. "Sometimes the changes we're asking farmers to make with their farming practices don't pencil out immediately, so the financial incentives make it easier to adopt more conservation practices," Kiel says. "For the companies who partner with SWOF, it's in their best interests — both environmentally and economically — to keep farmers farming sustainably. It's a shared endeavor."

The Iowa Soybean Association developed SWOF in 2019,

Within a year of its creation, SWOF's impact expanded more than 10 times to include

100,000 ACRES IN 2020.

starting with a pilot project of 9,500 acres of Iowa farmland. "This innovative program helps farmers engage with more in-field conservation practices, including cover crops, transitioning to no-till and reducing fuel and fertilizer use," Kiel says. "It's a good fit for farmers ready to take the next step with conservation."

For new farmers like Eli Lynn, who farms near Fairfield, the financial rewards from implementing more in-field conservation practices are especially useful. "I started farming six years ago with nothing," says Lynn, who now farms 1,800 acres. "Anything I can do to save time and equipment costs is valuable to me, so I was especially interested in no-till."

Lynn also uses cover crops to control soil erosion and build soil health on his acres, which range from hilly land to flat fields with heavy, clay soils. However, he admits it would be tough to implement the various conservation practices without some financial incentives. "I couldn't have taken the chance of losing money on each acre. Payments from SWOF made it easy for me to adopt more conservation practices."

This is important to a company like Cargill, which became SWOF's first corporate partner in 2019. Promoting its mission "to nourish the world in a safe, responsible and sustainable way," Cargill has continued to grow with SWOF as the program has expanded.

More farmers and new corporate partners have also teamed up with SWOF, including PepsiCo, Ingredion, Nestle and others. Interest in SWOF continues to grow. Within a year of its creation, SWOF's impact expanded more than 10 times to include 100,000 acres in 2020.

Today, SWOF includes 300,000+ acres in 12 Midwestern states, including Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas and Indiana, as well as parts of South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio. SWOF also serves farmers in Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Virginia and New York.

Today, SWOF includes 300,000+ acres in 12 Midwestern states.

"SWOF values water- and climate-related outcomes, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, using less diesel fuel, and capturing carbon dioxide and holding it in the soil through practices like no-till."

ADAM KIEL

Soil and Water Outcomes Fund staff heading to a field to collect water samples.

These locations aren't random, Kiel notes. "Our partners direct us where they source their agricultural products."

SWOF Promotes Continuous Improvement

Accountability is a cornerstone of the program. When farmers apply for SWOF, they provide three to four years of baseline data about how they have farmed their land. Then, they detail what in-field conservation practices they intend to implement, from cover crops to reduced tillage.

"The financial incentives the farmers receive are based on outcomes," Kiel says. "Do a little, get a little. Do a lot, get a lot."

Farmers participating in SWOF receive "seed money" to help offset the cost of implementing new conservation practices on their acres. During the year-long contract, SWOF team members gather water and soil samples from participating farms to

"Agriculture is at the Heart of Everything We Do" PepsiCo Supports Soil and Water Outcomes Fund

At first glance, you might wonder why multinational companies like PepsiCo care about how Iowa farmers manage their land. We recently caught up with Margaret Henry, vice president of sustainable & regenerative agriculture at PepsiCo, who shared these insights.

"Agriculture is at the heart of everything we do. We currently source more than 30 agricultural crops and ingredients from approximately 60 countries, and enable more than 100,000 agricultural jobs globally. Our success depends on thriving food systems, so we're focused on transforming how we operate and how we collaborate with farmers to make food systems more resilient."

PepsiCo, which is the largest food and beverage company in North America and the second largest globally, partners with the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund (SWOF) to help make soil healthier, improve watershed health and biodiversity, and improve farmers' livelihoods.

For these regenerative ag practices to take root on farms, three things need to happen, Henry notes. "Farmers need economic support, social and cultural support, and agronomic support. Partners like SWOF provide locally relevant training on the most appropriate regenerative practices for the farmer and the region."

There's no one, single way to farm, Henry adds. "We work hard to ensure our programs meet the diverse needs of our farmers. SWOF delivers high-quality, customized agronomic assistance to our farmers as they implement new practices, help reduce emissions and nutrient loss, unlock a new revenue stream and increase the value of their farmland for current and future generations."

Emerging cereal rye cover crop.

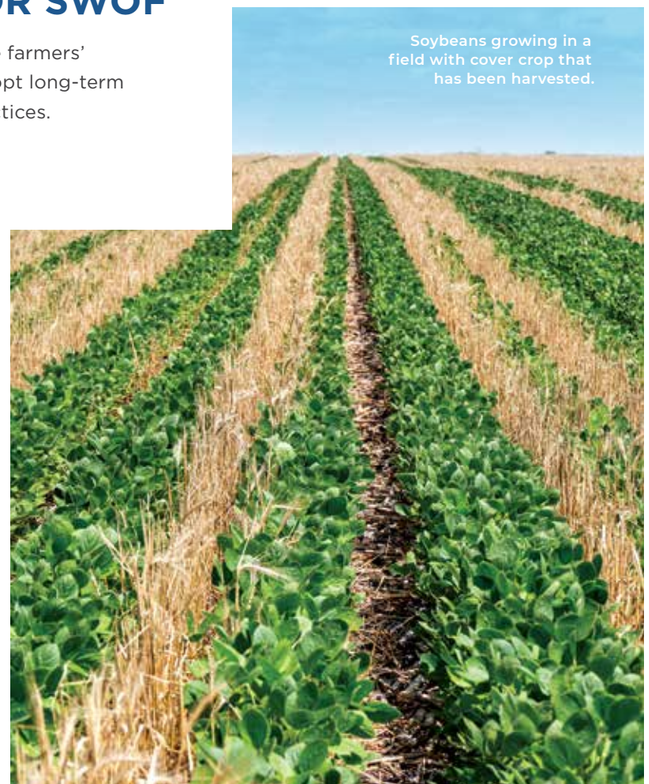
Sugar beets growing in a field with cover crop residue.

90%+ YEARLY RE-ENROLLMENT RATE FOR SWOF

This speaks to the farmers' willingness to adopt long-term conservation practices.

ADAM KIEL

Eli Lynn inspecting his rye cover crop.



Soybeans growing in a field with cover crop that has been harvested.

measure results. They also aggregate the data to share with SWOF's partners.

"SWOF values water- and climate-related outcomes, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, using less diesel fuel, and capturing carbon dioxide and holding it in the soil through practices like no-till," Kiel says.

The average SWOF payment to farmers in 2023 was $33 an acre. SWOF boasts an over 90% re-enrollment rate each year, Kiel adds. "This speaks to the farmers' willingness to adopt long-term conservation practices."

Continuous improvement is essential to Lynn as he strives to make his farm more economically and environmentally sustainable. "SWOF is helpful because the payments support doing the right thing for the long haul, not just a year or two."

As more partners get involved with SWOF, demand for additional acres grows. "Our goal is to have 750,000 acres enrolled in 2024," Kiel says. "It's a win-win for the farmers and public and private partners who support SWOF."

That includes Glandorf, who reflects on his farm's heritage and future every time he looks at four old cottonwood trees that his great-grandfather Herman Glandorf planted 150 years ago.

"He would take a break under the shade while farming with horses. Those trees remind me of the hard work and commitment it takes to pass a farm down through the generations. My son is the fifth generation of our family to farm this land, and we look forward to enrolling more acres in SWOF to help keep this farm sustainable for years to come."

SWOF staff conducting field verification in a no-till soybean field with a winter rye cover crop.

"It's a win-win for the farmers and partners who support SWOF."

ADAM KIEL

SWOF staff member Rosemary Galdamez with participating farmer Eli Lynn.

Rooted Ambitions: Nurturing Dreams Beyond the Fields

EMPOWERING FARMERS AS THEY CULTIVATE CAREERS ON AND OFF THE LAND

By Kerri Bell

Kerri Bell is a fourth-generation farmer who raises corn, soybeans, cover crops and alfalfa, as well as Hereford cattle in southeast Iowa. She farms alongside her husband Lance and twin daughters Ellie and Sophie, who returned to the family's farm after graduating college. Kerri works off the farm as a second-grade teacher at Mid-Prairie East Elementary in Kalona.

Our twin daughters, Ellie and Sophie, grew up on the farm. They've been working alongside my husband, Lance and I, and their grandparents, learning every aspect of our row crop and cow-calf farm operation. Both attended the Iowa State University (ISU) College of Agriculture. Ellie earned an agricultural studies degree and works as an administrative services specialist for Farmers Coop/Vision Ag. Sophie earned an agricultural business degree and is now employed as an insurance officer with Farm Credit Services of America. Ellie and Sophie continue farming and maintain a small cow-calf herd, finishing their steers and selling them to local consumers. I sat down with my daughters to hear how this livelihood has shaped them.

How has growing up on the farm influenced you?

Ellie and Sophie: It gave us a passion. Farming taught us about hard work, time and financial management, learning to operate farm equipment and more. Attending industry meetings with our Dad has taught us a lot throughout the years. We've learned new practices, taken risks and are growing with the ever-changing agriculture industry. Our upbringing influenced our education path and led us to full-time, agriculture-focused careers.

Why did you return to the farm?

Ellie and Sophie: The truth is, we never really left the farm. In 2016, we started farming our own land with the assistance of our grandparents and parents. We continued farming while attending ISU. Our responsibilities have grown, and we look forward to learning more and adapting to our new roles in our operation.

How do you balance farming with your off-farm ag careers?

Ellie and Sophie: We use our vacation time for spring and fall farm work, but it helps to live on the farm, so we don't have to go far. There is no perfect balance, but time management is beneficial. We each help run the grain cart, and Sophie drives the semi. We also help with seeding cover crops, running the planter and combine, crop scouting, farm maintenance, grain marketing and input purchasing.

What is your view on women's importance in agriculture?

Sophie: Women's involvement in agriculture is important because it allows us to be role models for interested girls. Traditionally, many women manage the farm's bookwork. While that's one of my favorite jobs, I also enjoy being outside, getting my hands dirty and running equipment.

Photo credit: Brittany Peiffer Photography

Ellie and Sophie Bell credit their passion for agriculture and strong work ethic to their upbringing on the farm.

It's important to be passionate about what you do, and I'm thankful for a variety of farm jobs.

Ellie: Women being part of agriculture can show their children and other women in the industry that it is possible. It's also important because it brings a different perspective to every daily task.

Why is it vital that more young people choose to farm and carry on a family legacy?

Sophie: If you asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, my answer was always to be a farmer. I'm thankful to have started farming at a young age. The lessons learned, relationships built and skills attained have been incredibly beneficial. I'm passionate about allowing farm kids to work in the operation, not just on it. I look forward to raising a family on the farm and continuing the family legacy. Farming is a business, but it's also our lifestyle, which I'll never take for granted.

Ellie: It's more important than ever for young people to choose the farming profession. Statistics show the average age of farmers is increasing, and the number of farmers is decreasing. Farmers take pride in caring for the land and raising products. We must continue educating and encouraging the next generation to stay involved in farming and local agriculture.

What is your vision for the future?

Sophie: My vision is to be back on the farm full-time. Eventually, I want to raise a family on the farm so my children can grow up with the same values I did. I want to continue to focus on row crop production by learning more to be a better producer.

Ellie: My vision for the future is to grow my livestock and row crop operation while still working full-time in the agriculture industry and raising a family on the farm.

Iowans understand the endless potential growing in these fields. Corn is renewable fuel, nutritious livestock feed, delicious food and is used in 4,000 everyday products we rely on.

Corn grows all this and more. Corn Grows Iowa.

IOWA CORN®

iowacorn.org/corngrowsiowa