

fresh pickings

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U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, 2020. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, FoodData Central, 2019. fdc.nal.usda.gov. (NDB 13364 beef)



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Welcome

IN THE FALL 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 HOMETOWN FOODS AND HOMETOWN VALUES.

YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PARTNERS ON PAGE 5.





36

Features



32



40

Photo courtesy of Beef: It's What's For Dinner



44

36 FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE EVERYDAY

On a multigenerational farm in Franklin County, the Plagge family's ordinary moments tell a bigger story.

40 UNEXPECTEDLY DELICIOUS

Sweet, savory and full of Iowa flavor, these desserts reimagine fall baking with comforting, nutty and surprisingly sweet-meets-savory twists.

44 BREEDING FOR THE FUTURE

Learn about genomic selection and how it's revolutionized dairy cattle breeding — resulting in healthier, feed-efficient cows.

In Every Issue

7

EDITOR'S NOTE
IT'S ALL ABOUT
PERSPECTIVE

8

FAMILY TABLE
BROCCOLI CHEDDAR
BLISS

12

POINT OF INTEREST
PEARSON LAKES
ART CENTER

48

FRESH PICKED
FROM PASTURE
TO PRICE TAG

ON THE COVER

Generations of hard work and care shine through at Kittleson Brothers Farm, where Iowa onions and potatoes are grown from the heart.

FALL 2025 | ISSUE NO. 27

14 ROOTED IN THE LAND

What started as a small farm more than 160 years ago has grown into a thriving operation, with deep roots in tradition and forward-thinking innovation.

20 A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Iowa is home to a bounty of birds and birders who love to spot them in their natural habitats — a pastime that's both relaxing and rewarding.

26 CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF INNOVATION

Discover how Iowa innovation in hybrid corn sparked a global agricultural revolution — 100 years of Pioneer Hi-Bred transforming farming, food and the future.

32 A BLOOMING SUCCESS

Isabel Bloom's legacy of handcrafted sculpture continues to inspire artists and captivate collectors today.

Celebrating farm families



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

You're invited to explore how food is grown around the state and meet farm families like the Schnells from Jasper County who make it happen.

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

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fresh pickings

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT

FRESH PICKINGS MAGAZINE

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Poultry raised in the U.S. consumes 60% of the soybean meal used for animal agriculture.

Iowa's status as a national leader in soybean and livestock production is mutually beneficial, with both helping to support the other's market health.



IOWA SOYBEAN Association

It's All About Perspective



see a deeper story — one of resilience, responsibility and connection to the land. Farming isn't just a job; it's a promise to feed families near and far and a daily commitment to doing what's right even when it's not easy.

Fall is the perfect time to reflect on perspective. As the leaves turn and the harvest rolls in, we're reminded of both the work and the reward in each growing season. It's a time when farmers see the fruits of their labor — and when families come together to share meals, traditions and gratitude. From field to table, it's time to slow down, take it all in and appreciate the whole picture.

In this issue of Fresh Pickings, we invite you to look at Iowa's farms, families and food through a new lens. Whether it's a recipe, a farmer's story, or a behind-the-scenes glimpse at how food gets from field to fork, our goal is to help you see the beauty in everyday moments and the value in perspectives different from your own.

Because sometimes, all it takes is a fresh point of view — and maybe a slice of pumpkin pie — to see just how much goodness is growing around us.

Enjoy the issue,

Lydia Zerby



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Enter to win an Isabel Bloom gift card to purchase handcrafted sculptures at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/isabel-bloom.

Broccoli Cheddar Bliss

THIS SOUP WARMS FROM THE INSIDE OUT WITH NOSTALGIC, COMFORTING FEELINGS OF HOME.

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.

There's something undeniably comforting about a warm bowl of broccoli cheddar soup. Rich, creamy and loaded with tender broccoli and melty cheese, it's a go-to for chilly nights, cozy lunches or after a long day of harvesting soybeans. While it's often associated with café menus and bread bowls, this soup is surprisingly easy to make at home — and even more satisfying when you do.

At its heart, broccoli cheddar soup is a celebration of contrasts. Earthy, slightly bitter broccoli balances the richness of sharp cheddar cheese. A base of sautéed onions and garlic adds depth, while creamy half-and-half ties it all together into a velvety spoonful. The key is using fresh broccoli (including the stems) and grating your own cheese, which melts better than pre-shredded varieties.

Homemade versions can be customized to suit your taste. Prefer it chunky? Keep the florets whole. Love it silky smooth? A quick zip of an immersion blender transforms it into a creamy purée. You can even add extras — such as chopped red bell pepper, diced ham, fresh sweet corn kernels or a handful of crumbled bacon — for your signature touch.

Don't be fooled into thinking this soup is all indulgence. Broccoli provides a healthy dose of fiber, vitamin C and antioxidants, supporting various aspects of health, including digestion and immune function. The delectable dairy additions of whole milk, sour cream and cheddar cheese offer more than just flavor — they deliver calcium for strong bones, protein for muscle repair and essential nutrients like vitamin D, phosphorus and B vitamins. Packaged shredded cheese often includes anti-caking agents that can interfere with melting and alter the texture of your soup. To get the best flavor and a velvety finish, grate a block of cheddar by hand.

Broccoli cheddar soup is the kind of recipe that invites you to slow down. It simmers gently, filling the kitchen with a warm, savory aroma that invites the household to gather for quality time. It's proof that the simplest ingredients — when treated with a bit of care — can create something deeply satisfying. It's ideal for a make-ahead meal, too — just reheat gently and add a splash of milk or half-and-half to achieve the desired consistency. 🌿

Broccoli Cheddar Soup

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 sweet yellow onion, diced
- ¾ teaspoon flaky sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 2 cups half-and-half or whole milk
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 5 cups chopped broccoli florets (1 extra-large or 2 small heads)
- 1 ½ cups matchstick carrots (3 large carrots, shredded)
- 2 ½ cups freshly shredded cheddar cheese

GARNISH

- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ½ cup sour cream
- 6 strips of bacon, cooked, chopped
- Chopped chives

Melt the butter in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion, salt and several grinds of pepper and cook, stirring, for 5 minutes, or until softened.

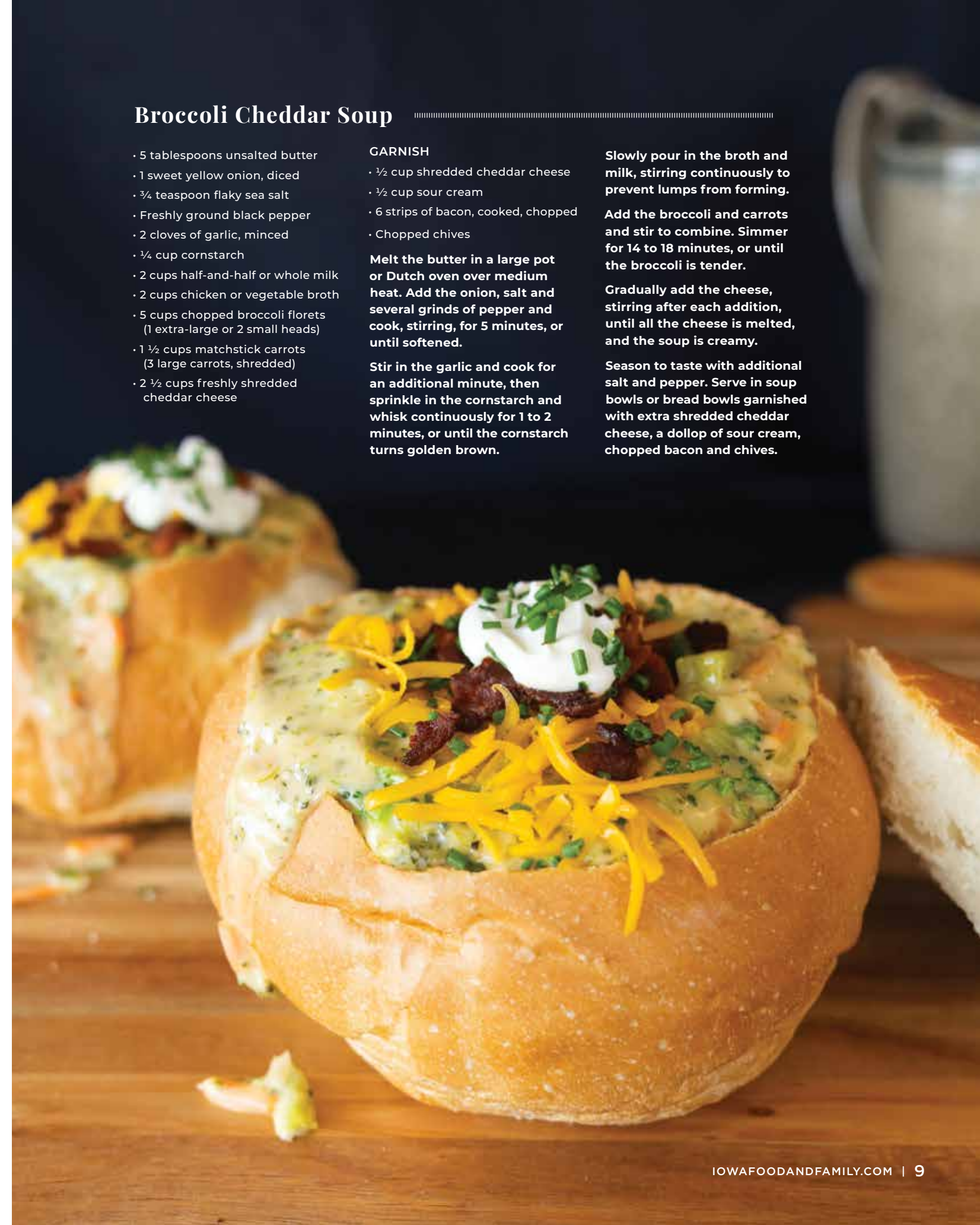
Stir in the garlic and cook for an additional minute, then sprinkle in the cornstarch and whisk continuously for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the cornstarch turns golden brown.

Slowly pour in the broth and milk, stirring continuously to prevent lumps from forming.

Add the broccoli and carrots and stir to combine. Simmer for 14 to 18 minutes, or until the broccoli is tender.

Gradually add the cheese, stirring after each addition, until all the cheese is melted, and the soup is creamy.

Season to taste with additional salt and pepper. Serve in soup bowls or bread bowls garnished with extra shredded cheddar cheese, a dollop of sour cream, chopped bacon and chives.



HARVEST SEASON

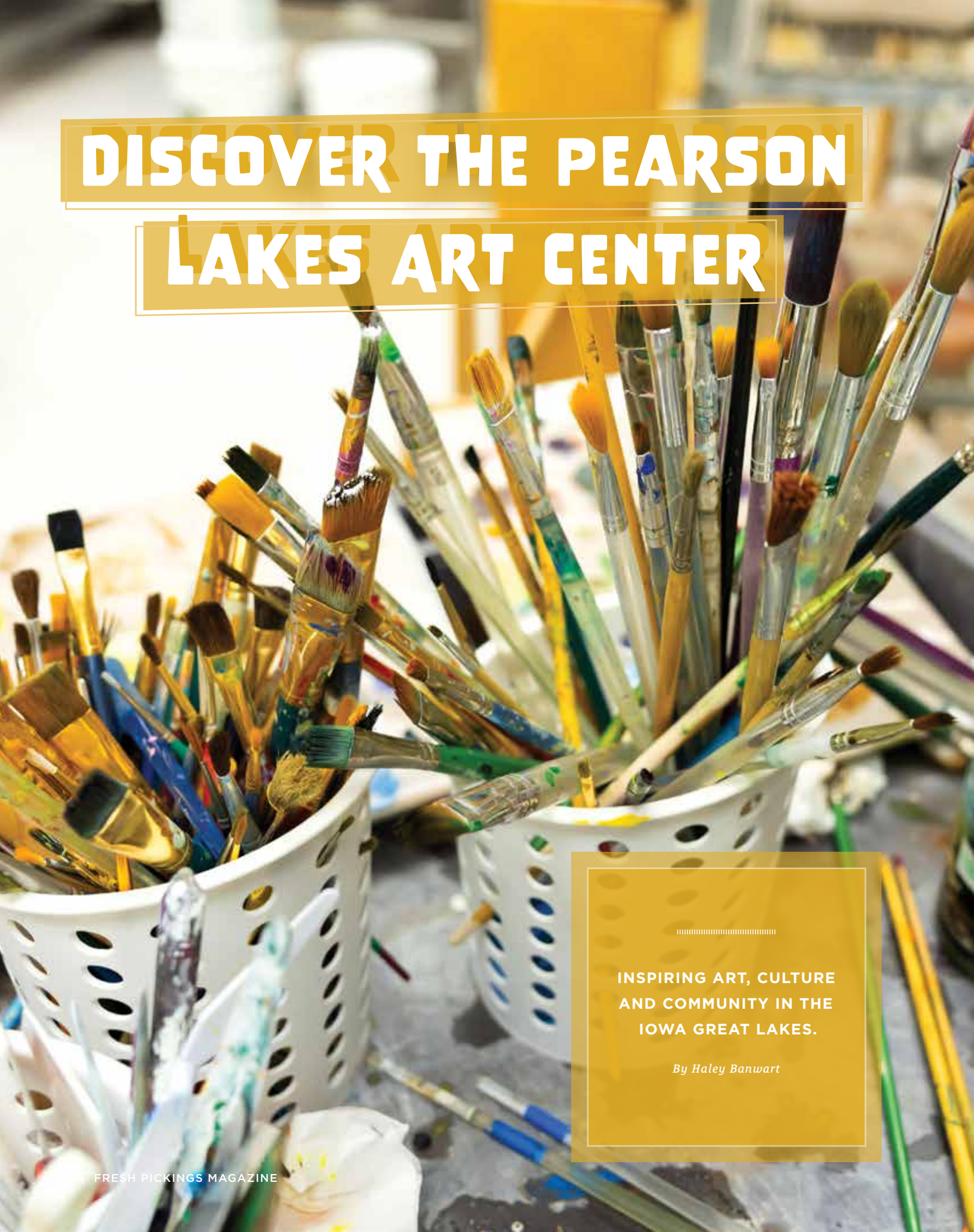
Harvest in Iowa is a season of hard work and gratitude as farmers bring in crops that have been months in the making. Soybeans are one of Iowa's top commodities, with the state ranking among the nation's leading producers.

These small but mighty pods are packed with protein and used in countless ways — feeding livestock, fueling vehicles with biodiesel, and even showing up in everyday items like crayons, candles and cooking oil. Each combine pass represents

both tradition and innovation, as today's farmers use advanced technology to harvest efficiently and sustainably.

Beyond the fields, harvest is about community. Families gather for field meals, neighbors pitch in and generations connect through shared work. It's a season that highlights Iowa's agricultural roots while reminding us that the bounty grown here reaches far beyond our borders, feeding and fueling people around the world.

DISCOVER THE PEARSON LAKES ART CENTER



INSPIRING ART, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN THE IOWA GREAT LAKES.

By Haley Banwart



From visual to performing arts, the Pearson Lakes Art Center provides opportunities for all ages.



A 300-seat performing arts theater hosts a variety of events.



The ArtSmart Interactive Gallery offers hands-on learning experiences for children.

From its humble beginnings in a converted dairy barn, the Pearson Lakes Art Center (PLAC) has now grown into a vibrant cultural destination in the heart of Okoboji. For 60 years, it has offered visitors of all ages a place to explore world-class art, enjoy live performances or experience the joy of artistic discovery.

A Legacy of Creativity

Founded in 1965, the center started as a gathering place for local painters on the Roy and Floss Smith farm. Early classes were conducted in rustic surroundings, with completed works proudly displayed in former milking stalls.

By the late 1980s, thanks to generous support from Bud and Beverly Pearson and the University of Okoboji Foundation, plans were underway to construct a new facility. That vision became a reality, expanding in both size and cost from initial concepts. To honor the support, the building is named in the Pearsons' honor.

Today, the 34,000-square-foot center is home to six galleries, a 300-seat performing arts theater, a culinary kitchen, classrooms,

an interactive children's space, and a diverse schedule of events that welcomes over 40,000 visitors each year. Admission is free, inviting everyone to explore, create and connect.

"People are often very surprised by our facility," says Kares Knudtson, PLAC marketing. "We often hear that this is an art center they would expect to find in a much larger metropolitan area. The PLAC is also unique in that it houses and offers experiences in four areas: Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Art Education and Culinary Arts."

A Curated Experience

The PLAC curates its exhibitions with a strong focus on community enrichment, presenting a diverse mix of media, styles and artistic perspectives. The gallery schedule intentionally highlights local talent while also introducing new artists from across the country.

Beyond the galleries, the center offers live performances, hands-on workshops, culinary events and youth art camps. "There is often a collaborative effort between departments, creating connections between

THE CENTER STARTED IN 1965 AS A GATHERING PLACE FOR LOCAL PAINTERS IN A CONVERTED DAIRY BARN.

programming and timing those opportunities to serve the public best," Knudtson explains. "It's a balance of bringing in what our community would like to see us offer, while also providing new creative experiences."

New this year is the PLAC Sculpture Trail, a scenic loop featuring rotating outdoor sculptures that connect to the regional trail system that stretches through the area.

"We are fortunate to live in the summer tourist area of the Iowa Great Lakes, where families gather year after year," says Knudtson. "We are honored to be part of their traditions, and at the end of the day, the people who support us year after year are the ones that help make us successful." 🌿

Rooted in the Land

KITTLESON BROTHERS POTATOES AND ONIONS GROW IN FERTILE SOIL

By April Pearson

What started as a small farm more than 160 years ago has grown into a thriving potatoes-and-onions operation, with deep roots in tradition and forward-thinking innovation.

How to grow...

The Kittleson family farm began in 1862, when John F. Kittleson purchased land just south of St. Ansgar, the “Garden Spot of Iowa.” By the 1920s, Carl and Julius Kittleson began growing onions and potatoes — crops that continue to define the farm today. Over the course of the century, the operation expanded to include peat land near Fertile, new warehouses and storage buildings, and statewide shipping routes. Despite a devastating tornado hitting the farm in 1971, the family quickly rebuilt. Today, the business is owned and operated by Steve and Beth Rachut, and Adam and Rosie Koch.

All Kittleson Brothers potatoes and onions are grown in peat soil from a former lakebed. “Peat muck is easy to work with,” says Koch. “It’s a loose material, and there’s zero clay in it, so the vegetables can expand easily underground.” The peat also gives Kittleson vegetables their unique flavor. “They do taste different,” says Koch. “I guess we don’t go out and try what other farmers are producing, but several people have told us ours taste better. It’s definitely different from what you grow in your garden.”

Steve Rachut and Adam Koch check the progress of an onion field near Fertile.

...Potatoes

Potatoes and onions grow in weather conditions similar to corn and soybeans, though Koch prefers when it's a little on the dry side. "The peat moss really holds on to moisture," he says. "Potatoes don't like to be waterlogged; it suffocates them. You also have more disease pressure when it's wet."

These potatoes originate from seed potatoes grown in Wisconsin. They go through a seed cutter, which cuts them into 2-ounce cubes and adds a seed treatment to prepare for planting. They're left to sit until the cut is healed, then planted in mid-to-late May with a specialty planter: A wheel stabs the potato chunk, spring loads it down a tube and plants it six inches deep.

Once the potatoes germinate, the Kittleson team drags the field to eliminate weeds, and pulls the soil up around the base of the plants — a process called "hilling" — to support and protect them.

In early September, when the potatoes have reached their peak, the foliage on top is allowed to die. However, the potatoes remain in the ground for at least two weeks. "The biggest concern with harvest is bruising and peeling," says Koch. "The skin is super tender right out of the ground, which is why we let them sit for a couple of weeks."

In mid-October — just in time for Thanksgiving — the potatoes are harvested with a deep-digging machine. It has a web to catch the potatoes, and rollers that gently clean the potatoes while keeping the skins intact. The crop is loaded onto wagons, trucked to the Kittleson warehouse in St. Ansgar and stored in cool, humid bins. When ready, they're floated in a trench to the processing room, where they're washed, graded and bagged.

...Onions

Onions start as tiny seeds that are pelleted with a coating of organic material and a seed treatment. This results in seeds that are larger and more uniform in shape, enabling more precise planting in terms of spacing and depth when they're planted in mid-to-late April.

Tiny plants emerge, and soon they reach the flag stage, with a fragile little leaf waving in the wind. "It's a pretty critical time, and there's not much you can do with them," says Koch. "If you get a strong wind, rain or hail, you'll pretty much lose the crop. The leaves will snap off. And when the leaves are broken, they're prime for disease."

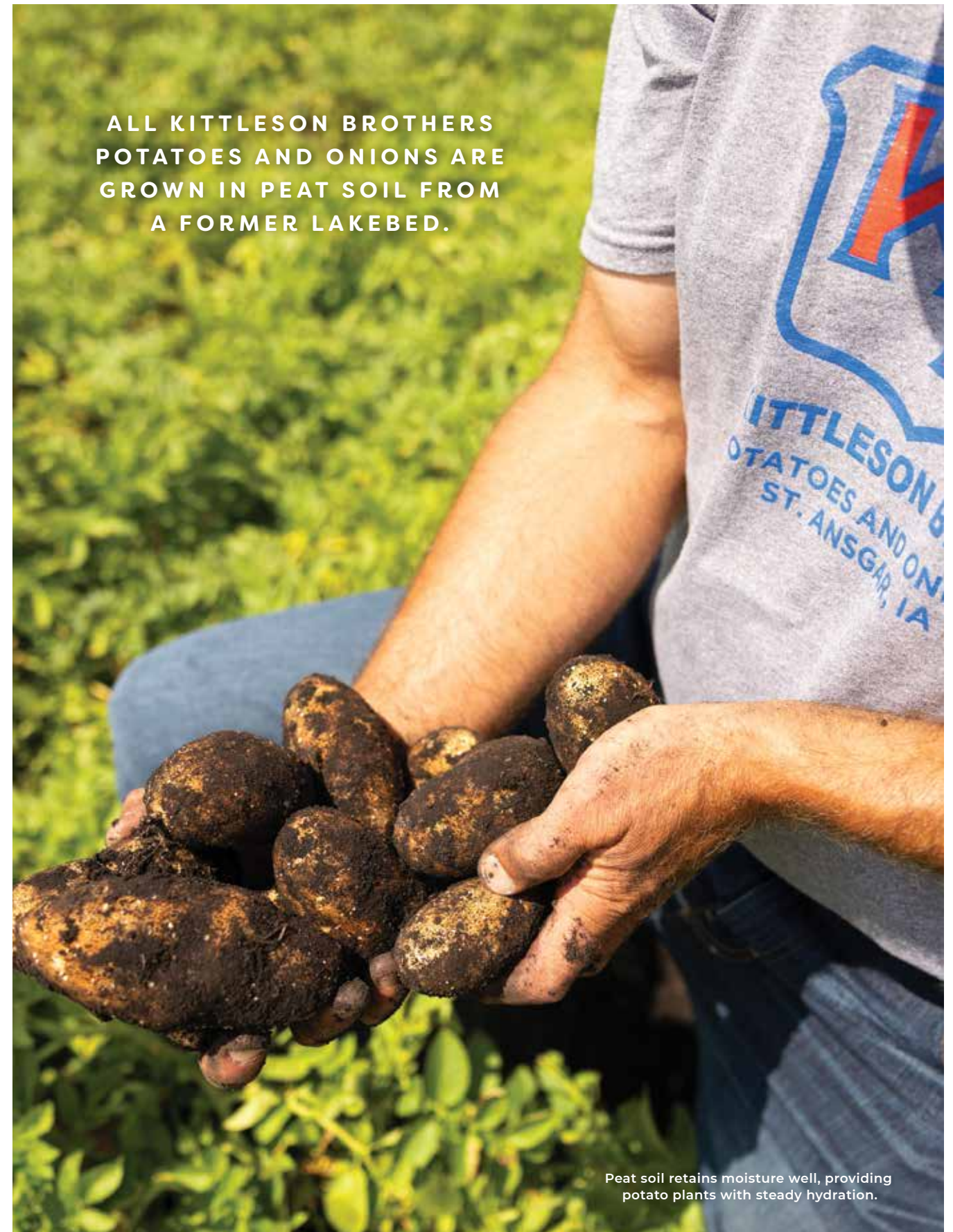
To mitigate storms and erosion, oats are planted along with the onions. The oats grow more quickly, allowing them to act as a barrier to help protect the onions. Even so, "We've had some pretty strong storms in Iowa. Every spring, it's always a little nerve-wracking."

As the onions grow, the Kittleson team pulls weeds and applies fungicide when necessary. The goal is to ensure that every ring inside every onion is crisp and fresh. "As the onion gets bigger and bigger, it's adding rings," says Koch. "If there's a bad week and the onions are infected with disease, that ring could be mush. And we won't

When you see the Kittleson Brothers logo, you know your produce was grown and packed in Iowa.



ALL KITTLESON BROTHERS
POTATOES AND ONIONS ARE
GROWN IN PEAT SOIL FROM
A FORMER LAKEBED.



Peat soil retains moisture well, providing potato plants with steady hydration.

TO MITIGATE STORMS AND EROSION, OATS ARE PLANTED ALONG WITH THE ONIONS.



Iowa's cool nights and fertile soil help red onions develop their sweet, mild flavor.

really know until we get through harvest and store the onions, when we can cut one open and see if it has a bad ring. Quality is big for us, and nobody wants a bad ring.”

Around early September, the onions are lifted out of the soil and tipped on their sides to dry in the sun. Once again, it's a touchy process: Lift them too early and the hot sun could scald them. Lift them too late and they run the risk of frost. “If there's going to be a frost, we have to rebury them,” says Koch.

Once dry, a harvester picks up the onions, shakes off the dirt, cuts off the tops, and loads them into wagons. They're trucked to the warehouse, where they're stored in cool, dry bins. From there, the onions are conveyed to the processing line to be graded, sized and packaged.

...Business

Not only are the Kochs and Rachuts skilled at growing potatoes and onions, but they are also great at running their business. “We've always been open to change, which has been happening a lot in the past 10 years,” says Koch. From planting to harvest to sales and everything in between, they never stop evaluating and improving the business. “It's how we manage the crops, update our trucks, add to our warehouses, cater to employees and remodel the storefront. We're working on better ways to process our products, improve distribution, and take care of our workers and customers.”

You can find Kittleson Brothers' red, gold, russet and white potatoes, as well as red and yellow onions, at more than 30 Fareways, Hy-Vees and local grocery

KITTLESON BROTHERS' POTATOES AND ONIONS CAN BE FOUND AT MORE THAN 30 GROCERY STORES THROUGHOUT IOWA.

stores throughout Iowa. You can also stop by the St. Ansgar warehouse to pick some up right from the source. Potatoes are available starting in October, and onions are available starting in September. They're available for purchase until they sell out, typically around May or June.

...Community

The Kochs and Rachuts are also dedicated to reducing food waste and supporting the community. Last year, they donated 6,000 pounds of potatoes and onions to food banks across Iowa. They offer special pricing for fundraisers and nonprofits. They offer Christmas promotions to encourage community members to give back. “We also work with food pantries that have Choose Iowa grants so they can purchase above what we can donate,” says Koch.

Kittleson received a grant from Choose Iowa for a new cooler to help extend its storage season since potatoes and onions can be a little finicky. “Onions are hard to grow. If the conditions aren't favorable, they're softer and more fragile,” says Koch, “but potatoes bruise more easily, and their skin is delicate. Both are a lot more work and require a lot more care.” When asked why they chose potatoes and onions over corn or soybeans, Koch explains, “Because they're also more fun and exciting.” 🌱



As harvest season approaches, Steve inspects onions in the field, checking for size, quality and overall health.



IT'S ESTIMATED
THAT THERE ARE

96

MILLION BIRDERS
NATIONWIDE.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

FLYING THROUGH THE ENRAPTURING WORLD OF LOCAL AND MIGRATORY BIRDS.

Photo courtesy of Karl Fliris



American Goldfinch

Photo courtesy of Karl Fliris

GIVE AWAY

WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD

Enter to win a \$100 gift card to Wild Birds Unlimited at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/wild-birds.

Sunlight dapples the forest floor as trees sway gently above. The scent of pine, assorted timber and wildflowers perfumes the air around. And then, there it is: the warble of a small, feathered friend perched on a branch.

This serene scene is the reality for many birdwatchers. It's a growing hobby throughout the country. According to the National Audubon Society, it's estimated that there are 96 million birders nationwide. That's more than a third of U.S. adults.

Perfectly Perched

Iowa is a hidden gem for bird watching, thanks to its position within the Mississippi Flyway. This bird migration route stretches from the Gulf Coast to Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada. The Iowa Ornithologists' Union reports 432 different species call Iowa home. For many birders, ticking off the long list of seeing these amazing birds in person is part of the fun.

For retired teacher Karl Fliris of New Hampton, who's a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, the approximately 200 species he's seen aren't enough.

"There are many birds I haven't seen yet," admits Fliris. "One I would love to see one day is a Prothonotary Warbler. It's elusive, and you have to hunt for them."

It's that search and hunt that keeps birders venturing out into the expansive Iowa fields and forests these birds love to call home. Iowa's native species not only offer us brilliant sights — they are also crucial to our ecosystem and agricultural success.

Healthy Bird Population, Healthy Farmland

Birds are a vital aspect of Iowa's healthy farmlands. Whether through their ability to help control pests via their insect consumption, their seed dispersal, pollination abilities, or nutrient cycling, birds play a crucial role in the quality of our crops and soil health.

Fields and pastures are ideal spots for bird watching and offer natural habitats for many species.

"I gravitate toward grasslands and pasturelands — oftentimes where cattle are — because many birds, especially bobolinks, dickcissels and meadowlarks, love grassy pasture fields," explains Fliris. "Birds also love the pollinator-friendly fields that often border corn and soybean fields."

Practical Farmers of Iowa notes that Iowa corn and soybean farmers who practice crop rotation and use cover crops — cereal rye is a favorite of many birds — can experience improved soil health, additional pollination and pest control.

A CONVERSATION WITH AN ACCIDENTAL BIRDER

After purchasing his first home, which had a bird feeder in the backyard, Emery Songer, a radio host for 1040 WHO, found himself drawn to bird watching. Discover how the simple act of noticing backyard birds turned into a lovable hobby.



Q: How did you get into birding?

A: I never thought I would be a bird guy! At our first house, I noticed a bird feeder left behind by the previous owners. It made me wonder what birds they had in their backyard. I read more about the birds that come to our area and fell in love with the Baltimore Oriole. I talked with my local bird store about how to attract them, and after I saw my first one, I was hooked on the hobby.

Q: Do you have specific species that you've seen only rarely or are still on the lookout for?

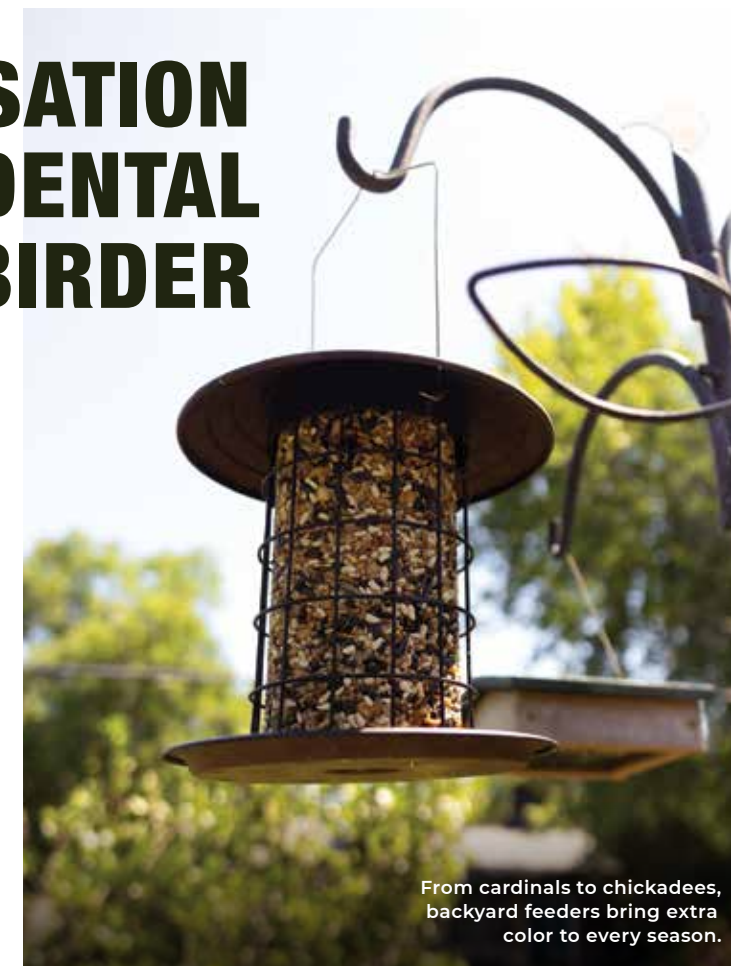
A: So many! But I'll focus on what I hope to see this winter. I always love seeing Dark-eyed Juncos in the wintertime. They are only found in Iowa during the colder weather and can be somewhat finicky with their feeding habits. I'm always thrilled when they land at my feeder. A new bird I haven't seen in person yet is the Lapland Longspur. They have a cool feather pattern on their heads. You'd see them in more open spaces and prairies, more regularly in western Iowa.

Q: How do you go about bird watching? Do you have any rituals or specific preferences?

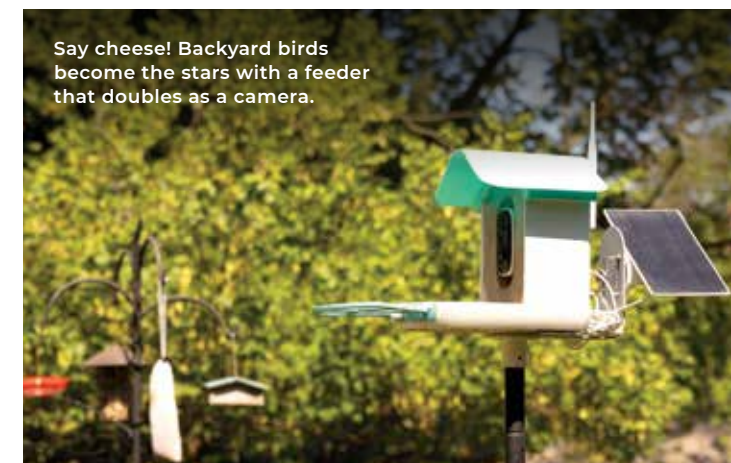
A: First, I love filling my feeders with different seeds and foods to attract different birds. Another great way is to get into the woods or nature somewhere with an identification book or the Merlin app. Listening to the various calls and looking up into the branches or along the ground to spot birds you may never see at home is quite exciting!

Q: What do you love about bird watching?

A: The quiet thrill of seeing a new bird species. It sounds wild, but when you're able to check



From cardinals to chickadees, backyard feeders bring extra color to every season.



Say cheese! Backyard birds become the stars with a feeder that doubles as a camera.

off another bird on your list, it just makes you want to keep coming back for more. I'm also a big fan of being outdoors and enjoying nature, and this is a perfect way to feel in tune with the environment around you. And there are always discoveries you can make in this hobby, which is so enriching.

“Habitat conservation efforts across Iowa in a variety of biomes (i.e., forests, grasslands and wetlands) are very important for sustaining Iowa’s bird populations,” explains Riggs Wilson, wildlife research specialist with the Iowa DNR. “With most of Iowa being privately owned, conservation practices on private lands are particularly important for providing habitat for birds and connectivity between habitat patches on the landscape.”

The Laws of Attraction

Birds, like humans, have a few basic needs. Food, water and shelter are the three key components needed to attract birds to a backyard or outdoor space.

“In 2025, the DNR’s Wildlife Diversity Program is focused on sharing how people can support wildlife where they live,” says Wilson. He goes on to list the top five ways Iowans can attract birds to their outdoor areas.



- 1 PLANT NATIVE PLANTS.** Native plants support many types of insects and often produce fruits, both of which provide an important food resource for birds. Native plants can also give the birds places to nest, hide from predators and shelter from winter weather.
- 2 ADD WATER.** Adding water to your yard in the form of a bird bath or water feature can provide an important source of hydration for birds that visit your yard. Just make sure to keep bird baths properly cleaned.
- 3 USE THE RIGHT LIGHTING.** Many birds migrate at night, and artificial light can cause birds to become disoriented during their migration and use up important food resources. Turn off unnecessary outdoor lights during the spring and fall when birds are migrating. Use timers or motion sensors for your lights, shielded lighting and warm-colored light.
- 4 REDUCE HAZARDS.** Use ultraviolet tape or paracord blinds on windows to prevent bird collisions and keep cats indoors to prevent them from eating birds.
- 5 EMBRACE WILDNESS.** Many birds rely on dead trees for food and nesting. When safe to do so, leaving some dead trees on your property can provide safe places for birds. You can also leave brush piles that help provide cover or allow vines and weeds to grow in certain areas, which in turn provide food resources.

Landowners interested in implementing conservation practices on their property can also contact their local Iowa DNR private lands biologist or district forester for technical assistance and to learn about available conservation programs.

IOWA IS A HIDDEN GEM FOR BIRD WATCHING, THANKS TO ITS POSITION WITHIN THE MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY.

A Lifelong Love

Bird watching is an activity the whole family can enjoy. No matter a person’s activity level, getting out into nature to watch or listen to the variety of bird species Iowa offers is a great way to connect to the land. From grandkids to grandparents — and even great-grandparents — stopping to slow down and spot a favorite bird, then sharing the discovery, creates a sense of community and belonging to something bigger. 🌿



Fledgling Dickcissel

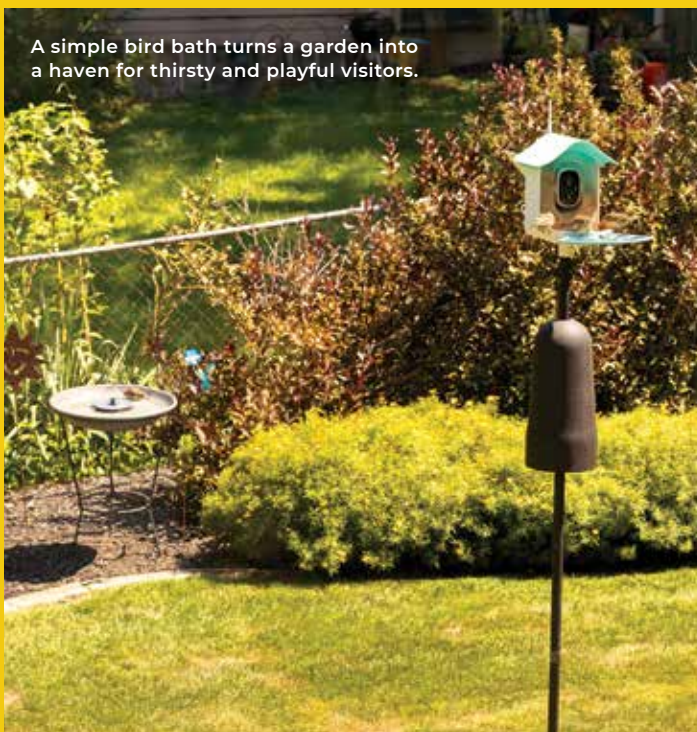
Photos courtesy of Keri Flitts



Male Eastern Bluebird



Female Orchard Oriole



A simple bird bath turns a garden into a haven for thirsty and playful visitors.

est. 1926

CELEBRATING

a century of

INNOVATION

The bountiful acres of corn and soybeans that thrive across Iowa reflect a modern miracle that started here 100 years ago and still enriches countless lives around the globe.

In 1926, a breakthrough in hybrid corn science led to the establishment of Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn Company in Des Moines. Now part of Corteva Agriscience, Pioneer has grown from its early success into one of the world's largest seed brands. "What this company's founders did was revolutionary for the U.S. and global ag market," says Bridget Anderson, seed strategic marketing communications leader for Corteva Agriscience.

No person was more important to the commercialization of hybrid corn than Henry A. Wallace. Born in 1888 in southwest Iowa near Orient, he was the third generation in a family of prominent Iowa ag leaders. His paternal grandfather, "Uncle Henry" Wallace, was a farmer, minister, speaker and writer who valued the role that livestock and crop rotations played in maintaining soil fertility. Uncle Henry and his son, Henry C. Wallace, purchased a weekly publication that would eventually become Wallaces Farmer magazine.

Raymond Baker and Henry A. Wallace walking a corn research plot on the Johnston research farm in the 1930s.



PIONEER'S SEED SOLUTIONS TOOK ROOT IN 1926 AND CONTINUE TO FLOURISH IN IOWA AND BEYOND.

By Darcy Maulsby

IN 1926, A
breakthrough
IN HYBRID CORN
SCIENCE LED TO THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF
PIONEER HI-BRED
CORN COMPANY IN
DES MOINES.



Photos courtesy of Corteva Agriscience



From Iowa beginnings, Pioneer Hi-Bred grew into a global leader in seed innovation.

Photos courtesy of Corteva Agriscience



Henry A. Wallace's vision in 1926 led to the creation of Pioneer Hi-Bred, transforming farming practices worldwide.



In 1892, Henry C. Wallace relocated his family from Adair County to Ames, where he could pursue his college degree and become an associate professor of dairy science at Iowa State College (now Iowa State University).

Young Henry A. Wallace thrived in Ames. He was fascinated by the study of plants. George Washington Carver, a botanist at Iowa State and friend of the Wallace family, sometimes took young Henry with him when collecting plant specimens. "I had great affection for him [Carver],

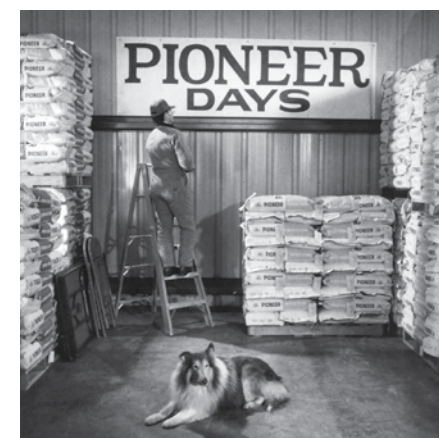
simply because he was patient," Wallace wrote years later.

Spreading the Hybrid Corn Message Through Wallaces Farmer

In 1896, the Wallace family moved to Des Moines when Wallaces Farmer began publishing weekly. Henry A. Wallace earned high marks at Des Moines' West High School. He also started taking college-level courses, which fueled his interest in corn.

In 1903, the high school student watched Professor Perry G. Holden, the "corn evangelist" of Iowa State, judge a corn show. Young Wallace questioned how Holden knew that the top-10 selected ears would produce more corn than the bottom-ranked 10 ears, if they were planted in the same field.

"While farmers saved the best-looking ears of corn to provide seed for next year's crop, Henry was skeptical that the most beautiful ears always yielded the best," Anderson says.



Henry C. Wallace (who later served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture) urged Henry to plant kernels from the "best" and "worst" samples side-by-side the following spring. The experiment took place at 38th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue in Des Moines.

The seeds in that experiment were open-pollinated corn varieties, which rely on natural methods for reproduction. Pollen from one plant is transferred to another plant of the same variety through wind, insects or birds.

Professor Holden and the Wallaces were surprised to see the results at harvest. The highest yield came from one of the samples Holden had judged among the worst. “This was the start of Henry A. Wallace’s lifelong involvement with the improvement of corn through genetic selection,” noted the Wallace Centers of Iowa.

After graduating from high school in 1906, Henry A. Wallace attended Iowa State College, where he continued his experiments with corn. He also began writing for Wallaces Farmer. The young scientist/journalist became a pioneer in hybrid corn, which is developed by crossbreeding two different parent corn varieties.

This process, known as hybridization, often results in offspring with enhanced traits. “You bring the best of both parents into the genetics,” Anderson says. “These traits include yield potential and beneficial, natural defenses of the plant, such as root and stalk strength and disease tolerance.”

Following his graduation in 1910, Henry A. Wallace went to work full-time for Wallaces Farmer, where he published a series of articles about hybrid corn. As he envisioned the possibilities for higher-yielding corn, Wallace lamented about woefully inadequate supplies of hybrid corn seed. With the help of his younger brother, James, and some friends, Wallace organized the Hi-Bred Corn Company in 1926, Anderson notes.

This decision would forever transform farming. From 1866 to 1926, average



Released in 1936, Pioneer Hybrid 307 showcased exceptional drought tolerance, doubling yields over open-pollinated varieties during Iowa’s severe drought that year.

corn yields in the U.S. had stagnated at around 26 bushels per acre, Anderson explains. With the introduction of hybrid corn, yields skyrocketed by the 1930s and beyond — and that trend continues. “Today, average corn yields are more than 170 bushels per acre,” she says.

Past Innovations Propel Future Yields

By 1981, Pioneer had become the seed corn market share leader in North America. Raymond Baker (1906–1999) played a significant role in driving much of this growth. A lead plant breeder at Pioneer for 43 years, Baker developed many of the company’s first corn hybrids.

Born on a farm near Beaconsfield in southern Iowa, Baker attended Iowa State College and majored in agriculture. He became interested in plant breeding after meeting Henry A. Wallace, who hired Baker in 1928. When Wallace became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in 1941, Baker became Pioneer’s lead plant breeder. “Raymond was a leader in how the company approached plant breeding,” Anderson says.

The company’s first blockbuster and one of the longest-lasting corn hybrids was Pioneer 307. Introduced in the

1930s, this hybrid was sold into the 1960s. “We still have 307 growing in our plots,” Anderson says. “We have our entire germplasm collection from the beginning.”

The company’s plant breeders continue to advance new genetics every year, thanks to year-round research. Along with research facilities in Iowa, the Midwest, and beyond, Corteva has plant-breeding facilities in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Chile.

Many of these modern genetics help crops thrive in challenging conditions. Pioneer® brand Optimum® AQUAmax® corn hybrids are designed to perform well in water-limited environments by incorporating traits that improve the plant’s root system and boost the ability to pollinate under stress. “Modern crop genetics are all about producing more with less,” Anderson says.

Pioneer Becomes a Market Leader in Soybeans

In the fall of 1973, Pioneer Hi-Bred purchased the Iowa-based Peterson Seed Company and officially launched a soybean business. “Soybeans have long been a complementary, rotational crop with corn,” Anderson says.

Back then, the company’s entire soybean research footprint consisted of two stations (Cedar Falls, Iowa, and St. Joseph, Illinois), two plant breeders, four technicians and more than 20,000 test plots. By 1991, Pioneer became the No. 1 soybean brand in North America. Today, hundreds of Corteva scientists and support staff worldwide cultivate over 500,000 soybean test plots each year.

Pioneer® brand soybeans have flourished in thousands of different environments. They were even grown on the Space Shuttle Challenger. Scientists have discovered that soybeans grown in space are similar to those grown on Earth — unleashing the ability to sustainably grow vegetation to support a long-term human presence in space.

Closer to home, Pioneer introduced Z-Series soybeans in 2024. These varieties deliver a 2.7-bushel-per-acre yield advantage. That’s an extra \$35 per acre return on investment, compared to the company’s A-Series



1964

Pioneer debuts its famous trapezoid symbol. The upper part is an abstract plant symbolizing growth and vigor. The flower part of the design is the sign for infinity. The entire symbol represents product improvement through continuous research.



Pioneer Z-Series soybeans are designed for higher yield potential and improved resistance to common soybean diseases.



varieties, which debuted in 2017. “Z Series soybeans have become the ones to beat,” Anderson says.

This reflects Pioneer’s “Long Look” guiding principles, which have been cornerstones of the business since 1926. Produce the best products possible. Deal honestly and fairly. Provide farmers with helpful management information. This includes a network of farmer-dealers. “Farmers listen to other farmers,” Anderson says. “These seed representatives are the face of Pioneer who help growers tap into the resources we offer.”

Those resources include ongoing innovation from the Corteva Agriscience research team. “It takes about seven years to bring new seed genetics to market,” Anderson says. “So, we’re always thinking years ahead.”

Success



A Blooming



Donna Young, co-owner and lead sculptor, continues Isabel Bloom's tradition of creativity and craftsmanship.

ISABEL BLOOM SCULPTURES, CRAFTED IN DAVENPORT, ARE FIGURES OF PAST AND PRESENT ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers

It's been said that if you find your passion, you'll never work a day in your life. For Donna Young, co-owner and lead sculptor at Isabel Bloom, this saying rings true.

"This was just going to be something fun to do while I figured out what I really wanted to do," Young laughs. "And here I am, 45 years later."

Young started at the Davenport sculpture gallery and studio in 1981, fresh out of college, just after the namesake artist Isabel Bloom, born in 1908, sold her studio. But an artist never truly leaves their craft.

"Isabel was still involved in the company," Young explains. "She was still our sculptor and designed all the new pieces."

Bloom was a trailblazer for women of her time. An acclaimed artist and sculptor who studied under prolific artists, including Iowa's own Grant Wood, she defied expectations in the 1930s and '40s by pursuing a career in art. She established her studio, developed her sculpting techniques, and balanced business, motherhood and creative ambition long before it was common for women to pursue both career and family.

"She was an inspiration," Young says. "She raised her kids and started her own business. She just didn't take no for an answer."

Following in Isabel's Steady Footsteps

Isabel once said, "Know what you want and follow it." This principle continues to guide her successors and serves as the company's cultural anchor.

That spirit is palpable in every corner of the studio. Though Isabel eventually had to step away due to health reasons and then passed away in 2001, her original processes and artistry remain central. Current artisans still mix the concrete in a cement mixer. The very method Isabel used herself.

Isabel first opened her studio in 1963. The door bore a sign that read, "Open by chance or by appointment." That levity and flexibility remain a cornerstone of her ethos. She experimented with mold-making and, through trial and error, discovered the best cement recipe to bring her sculptures to life.

"Isabel originally worked in ceramics," Young explains. "But she wanted to produce art for gardens. Ceramics wouldn't hold up in the weather, but concrete would. And concrete was a very inexpensive and readily available material."

Today, sculpting and mold-making techniques remain largely unchanged, but the artistry has evolved significantly.

"Isabel had her style," Young shares. "Mine is a little different, but the core is the same — simple, compact forms that are deeply thoughtful and handcrafted."



Photo courtesy of Isabel Bloom

A look back at the Isabel Bloom storefront in 1995, a gathering place for fans of timeless artistry.

Creative Collaboration

Today, the storefront is a vibrant mix of traditional and new sculptures for their loyal — and still expanding — customer base to peruse and collect. Graceful angels, happy woodland creatures, children hugging, cheeky garden gnomes and more are all handcrafted in Davenport and shipped across the country to collectors and admirers alike.



Photo courtesy of Isabel Bloom



ISABEL BLOOM

(PICTURED ABOVE) WAS A TRAILBLAZER FOR WOMEN OF HER TIME. AN ACCLAIMED ARTIST AND SCULPTOR, SHE DEFIED EXPECTATIONS IN THE 1930S AND '40S BY PURSUING A CAREER IN ART.



The team at Isabel Bloom, made up of talented artists and craftsmen, produce distinctive creations.

It's important for the store and the artists to connect with customers about what they're interested in collecting. There's a collaborative, community-like quality to the process.

"You get a lot of feedback. We ask for feedback," chuckles Young. "We have a book at the store where people can write down suggestions. If we get a lot of repeat suggestions or we read through and go, 'Oh, that's an idea!' we try new things."

Young recalls a customer who mentioned that his daughter loved dragons and asked if they would ever create a dragon sculpture. They hadn't, until then. In

the spirit of Isabel's childlike enthusiasm, they decided to give it a try. It was a huge, overwhelming success.

Community-Minded

Beyond the art itself, Isabel Bloom is deeply woven into the fabric of the local community. Events like "Story, Song & Sculpture" welcome a new generation to create and experience art in tangible ways. From letting children mold clay hedgehogs to allowing shoppers to customize butterfly sculptures, the community is quite literally being shaped.

"We want to create experiences," Young says. "Some of our customers grew up with Isabel Bloom in their

homes, and now they're introducing their kids to it. It's a legacy that continues to grow."

Part of that legacy includes a strong commitment to hiring and supporting women — a value Isabel herself championed by example. Today, the staff is predominantly female, and flexible scheduling enables mothers and caregivers to balance the demands of home and work.

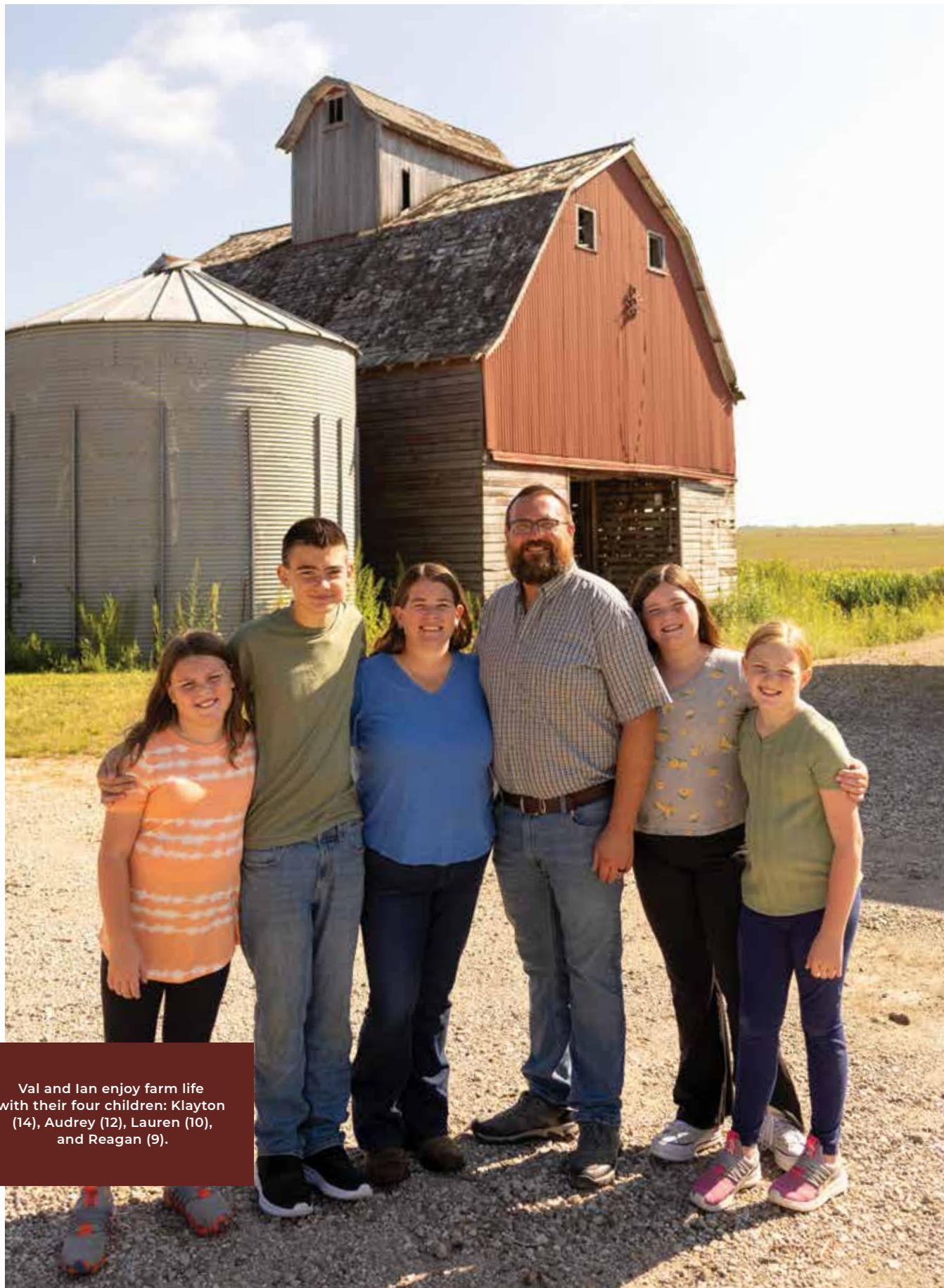
Sustaining Success

Despite having grown significantly from a five-person team in a small storefront, the company has preserved its small-business soul.

"We're cautious," Young says. "We don't jump on every trend, but we're open to ideas that make sense for us and our customers."

That measured approach has paid off. While Isabel may have released only one or two new sculptures a year, the current team now offers seasonal collections, décor items and custom commissions, some planned years in advance.

Still, the mission remains simple and profound: to make art that people love, that speaks to their lives and that honors the founder's creative spirit. 🌿



Val and Ian enjoy farm life with their four children: Klayton (14), Audrey (12), Lauren (10), and Reagan (9).

FINDING THE

 Extraordinary
 IN THE EVERYDAY



When Val and Ian Plagge participated in the American Soybean Association's DuPont Young Leader Program more than a decade ago, they attended a presentation that changed the way they viewed their everyday life.

"It was all about the power of telling your story," says Val. "We realized that even if it seems ordinary to us, our life is unique to most people. We're both farming full-time and raising four kids in rural Iowa."

So, in 2012, Val launched her blog, "Corn, Beans, Pigs and Kids." From field updates to family milestones and favorite recipes, she finds time to give readers a genuine look into the life of a modern Iowa farm family. And she does it all while balancing the demands of caring for her family and home, tending to the crops and livestock, and managing the farm's finances and marketing.

RAISING CORN, SOYBEANS, PIGS AND THE NEXT GENERATION.

By Haley Banwart

Rural Iowa Roots

The Plagge's rural Iowa roots run deep. Val is a fifth-generation farmer who grew up on a row crop and farrow-to-finish hog farm along the tri-county line of Hamilton, Boone and Story counties. Ian, a fourth-generation farmer, grew up near Latimer, where the couple now lives and farms.

They met at Iowa State University, where Val studied agricultural communications and Ian majored in ag business. Even in college, Ian was laying the groundwork for their future together, building hog barns and renting his first acres of land. After graduation, Val worked for the Iowa Soybean Association for four years before joining Ian on the farm full-time.



Documenting daily life on the farm, Val Plagge connects readers to modern Iowa agriculture.

Today, the Plagge's four children — Klayton, Audrey, Lauren and Reagan — are part of the day-to-day operation, helping with chores, caring for their 4-H meat goats and lending a hand wherever needed. "We always appreciated growing up as farm kids," Val shares. "It instilled a passion for agriculture in us, and now we get to raise our kids the same way."

"More than anything, we hope our kids grow up with the same love for agriculture that we do," Val says. "Life on the farm teaches so many lessons — working hard, helping family, neighbors, and friends, and appreciating the seasons and life cycles all around them. Those are the values we want to pass down."

Pork, People and Purpose

As part owners in a sow cooperative, Val and Ian have full ownership of the pigs they raise — starting with newly weaned pigs that arrive on their

farm weighing 10 to 15 pounds. The pigs are cared for in two nursery barns before being transitioned to five finishing barns, where they grow to a market weight of approximately 280 pounds.

At the heart of their crop and livestock operation is a focus on raising healthy, high-quality animals, beginning with the ingredients that go into their feed. Several times a week, the Plagges grind their own feed using corn from their fields, along with soybean meal and nutrient supplements from their local co-op.

“We follow a recipe book based on the pigs’ age and weight,” Val explains. “The feed ration changes six times over their lifetime, and we work closely with a nutritionist to make sure they’re getting exactly what they need.”

While most of their pigs are marketed commercially to Wholestone Farms’ processing facilities in Eagle Grove and Sioux City, the Plagges recently expanded into direct-to-consumer sales. “At first, we just wanted to make our pork available at the local grocery store in Latimer,” Val says. “But it’s quickly grown from there.”

They now offer their quality pork products at the Latimer Grocery Store, Nimrod Meats in Iowa Falls, the Hampton Farmers Market and through Purple Ribbon Beef in Britt — available both in Purple Ribbon Beef’s retail store and online. While direct sales make up a smaller percentage of their profits, Val says it’s been rewarding. “We’ve learned so much, especially from our partners and other farmers who focus solely on this type of business model.”

Inventory management is one of the biggest challenges, from keeping popular cuts in stock to finding freezer space. But a recent investment in a commercial-grade freezer is helping things run smoothly.

For Val and Ian, the connection with customers makes it all worthwhile. “We’re having a blast

doing it,” she adds. “It’s fun talking to people and encouraging them to eat pork, while showing off its versatility and flavor.”

Connected to their Community

Beyond the farm, Val and Ian stay active in their local community, volunteering at school events, church activities and with the local 4-H club and other agriculture organizations. The Plagges believe in showing up and giving back — it’s part of the values they live by both on and off the farm.

“What I’m most proud of is doing all of this side-by-side with Ian,” Val says. “We’re proud to be from Latimer and do what we can to support our community. For us, it’s about more than just keeping our farm sustainable — it’s about helping our town grow and thrive, too. Building relationships, getting involved and supporting local businesses are all ways we can make a difference together.”

“WE FOLLOW A RECIPE BOOK BASED ON THE PIGS’ AGE AND WEIGHT. THE FEED RATION CHANGES SIX TIMES OVER THEIR LIFETIME.”

Val Plagge



Iowa pig farmer, Val Plagge shares her hands-on farming experience online with readers far and wide.

A Favorite Pork Dish from the Plagge Kitchen

When it comes to putting pork on the plate, Val has plenty of go-to recipes she shares on her blog, including her fan-favorite Hog-Wild Baked Beans.



Hog-Wild Baked Beans

- 2 cans (28 ounces) honey baked beans
- 1 can (21 ounces) apple pie filling, chop apples into bite-sized pieces
- 1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 pound pork bratwurst, ground and browned
- 1 cup ketchup
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2–3 tablespoons chipotles in adobo sauce, pureed
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons ground mustard
- 1½ teaspoon cayenne pepper powder

Combine all the ingredients into a crockpot and cook on low for 2–4 hours. You can also simmer the baked beans on the stovetop.

For added flavor, sauté the chopped onion and green pepper in bacon grease. Taste and adjust the spice level as needed. This recipe makes about a half-gallon and is freezer-friendly.



Val and Ian Plagge guide their pigs from birth to market weight, providing attentive care, nutrition and health management every step of the way.



Photos courtesy of VIP Farms



PORK BUNDLE (\$150 VALUE)

Enter to win a pork bundle from VIP Farms at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/vip-farms.

DESSERTS WITH

Sweet, savory and full of Iowa flavor, these desserts put a creative spin on fall baking. From cozy fruit-filled comfort to a rich, nutty indulgence and even a surprising sweet-meets-savory bite, each of these treats offers a delightful twist. Get ready to enjoy familiar flavors in unexpected ways. By Lydia Zerby

UNEXPECTEDLY
DELICIOUS



Peanut Butter, Chocolate-Hazelnut and Chocolate Chip Beef Jerky Cookies

- ¾ cup butter, softened (1½ sticks)
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup creamy peanut butter
- ½ cup chocolate-hazelnut spread
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅔ cup finely chopped beef jerky
- ¼ cup bittersweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Combine butter, sugars, peanut butter and hazelnut-chocolate spread in large bowl. Using hand or stand mixer, mix until light and fluffy. Add egg and vanilla; mix until fully incorporated.

Combine flour, baking soda and salt in medium bowl; whisk together. Add flour mixture to butter mixture; mix until fully incorporated; do not over mix. Add in jerky and chocolate chips. Divide dough into 24 equal balls. Place on 2 ungreased shallow-rimmed baking sheets. Bake in 350 degrees F oven 13 to 15 minutes or until tops are evenly cracked. Cool 10 minutes before serving.

*Photo and recipe credit:
Beef. It's What's For Dinner*

A CREATIVE EDGE

DID YOU KNOW? No matter the egg size, the yolk stays roughly the same — only the white changes.



Almond Apple Strata

- 6 slices of day-old bread
- 6 eggs
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup purchased almond filling
- 2 cups nonfat milk
- ½ cup Swiss cheese, grated
- ¼ cup almonds, sliced
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 2 entire cooking apples, sliced
- ¼ cup toasted almonds, sliced

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Spread three slices of bread with the almond filling. Cover

each slice with a second slice of bread. Trim crust from sandwiches. Cut each trimmed sandwich diagonally into four triangles. Stand triangles up along edges of a greased 2-quart baking dish. Cut remaining crusts into cubes. Place cubes in center of dish between triangles.

In a medium bowl, beat eggs. Stir in sugar, cinnamon and milk. Carefully pour mixture into baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and untoasted almonds. Allow dish to stand 15 minutes before baking. Bake

for 40 to 50 minutes or until knife inserted comes out clean.

FILLING: In a medium saucepan, melt butter; stir in sugar and cinnamon. Add apples; bring mixture to a boil. Simmer 10 to 12 minutes or until apples are tender, but still retain their shape. Stir frequently. Drain liquid from apples.

Just before serving, top dish with apple filling and sprinkle ¼ cup toasted almonds.

Photo and recipe credit: American Egg Board

Soy Toffee Bars

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup soy flour
- 1 bar (4.4 ounces) milk chocolate, melted
- ¾ cup chopped soy nuts or chopped pecans

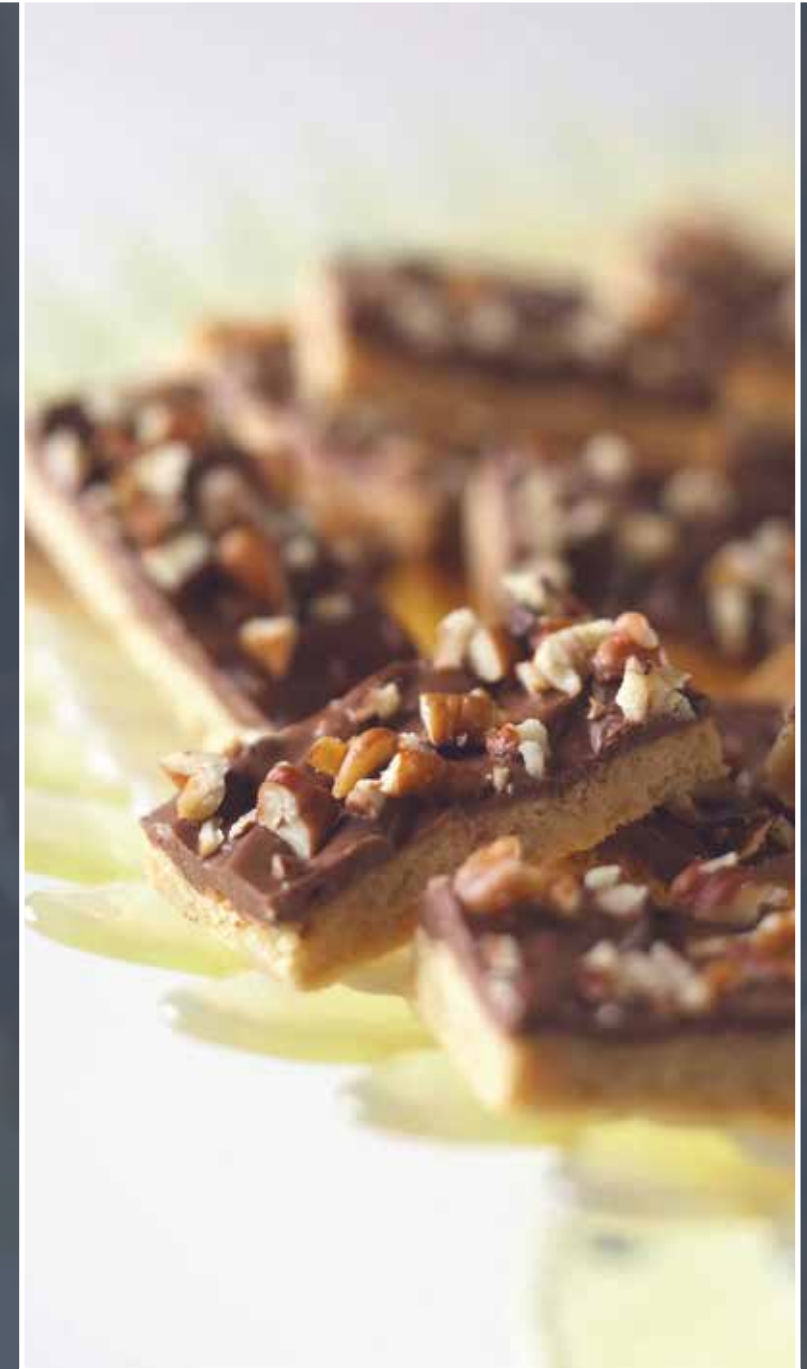
Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. In large mixing bowl, cream butter until light. Add sugar, egg yolk, vanilla; beat until well blended. Add all-purpose flour and soy flour, mix well.

Spread evenly in a lightly greased 10x15x 2-inch pan. Bake for 12–15 minutes. (Watch carefully because bars brown quickly.)

Let cool for about 5 minutes. Spread with melted chocolate. Sprinkle with chopped nuts. Cool completely. Cut into bars.

Yield: approximately 2½ dozen.

Photo and recipe credit: The Soyfoods Council



Soy flour is high in plant-based protein and supports heart health with its isoflavones.



Most methane from cattle comes from burps not manure, a natural byproduct of digestion.



James E. Koltes, associate professor of animal science at Iowa State University.

SUSTAINABILITY
IN THE DAIRY
CATTLE INDUSTRY *By Chelsea Mumm*

HOW GENETIC SELECTION IS IMPROVING

In some settings, burping at the dinner table is acceptable.

Not only is it acceptable, but it's also desired, as noted by researchers like James E. Koltes, associate professor of animal science at Iowa State University. For several years, Koltes and his colleagues have worked to identify the most feed-efficient dairy cattle, and more recently, which cows produce less methane.

Every day, student researchers measure the amount of feed each cow eats.

A few times a day for two months, the cows stop by the barn for a treat: alfalfa pellets. As the cow chows down and burps, a GreenFeed system's hood pulls the gases through and measures the amount of methane produced. Then, the process restarts with a new set of cows. In one year, the team has collected methane data from more than 300 cows.

The goal is to understand the genetic traits of cows that require less feed and produce less methane, thereby improving selective breeding. This means breeding cows to possess more desirable characteristics and fewer undesirable ones, without compromising the cows' well-being or productivity.

Sustainability in the Dairy Industry

Researchers and producers have worked for decades to understand the effect of feed intake on dairy cows' energy and health.

"Geneticists are almost like detectives trying to figure out the correlations between genes and genetic traits," said Juan Tricarico, senior vice president of environmental research at Dairy Management Inc. "Luckily, in this case, it's not a murder mystery."

But it is complex. Geneticists aim to determine the likelihood that calves inherit beneficial gene combinations, resulting in the

desired traits or behaviors. The nature of breeding a bull and a dam, however, means there is a level of randomness in terms of what gene combinations the offspring inherit, influencing what they look like and how they will behave.

By improving dairy cow genetics, researchers can create a positive ripple effect:

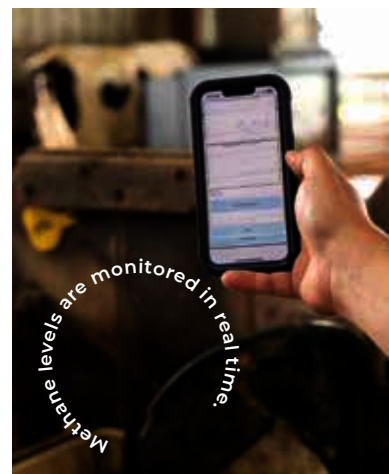
- More feed-efficient dairy cows are healthier animals, produce less methane and lower farm costs.
- Healthy animals cost less to raise because farmers use fewer antibiotics to treat disease.
- Healthy animals are also more productive, improving profitability and feeding more people overall.
- Healthier and more productive dairy cows mean producers will not need as many animals to produce the same amount of milk.



15U Intern Hayden Holm feeds his dairy herd.

Selective breeding must account for the full genetic picture, however.

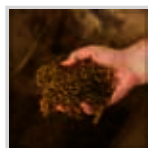
“If a cow eats less and makes the same amount of milk, but she’s more susceptible to disease, that’s very



Methane levels are monitored in real time.

undesirable,” Tricarico said. “If you do genetic selection based on one trait without paying attention to the other important traits, you run the risk of breeding an animal that may have one characteristic you desire but a bunch of other characteristics that you don’t like.”

This is why the industry selectively breeds using indexes rather than single genetic traits. While feed intake has already been incorporated into the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding’s Net Merit Index, the U.S. dairy industry’s national standard, methane production has not. This is where Koltes’ research comes into play.



THE GOAL IS TO UNDERSTAND THE GENETIC TRAITS OF COWS THAT REQUIRE LESS FEED AND PRODUCE LESS METHANE, THEREBY IMPROVING SELECTIVE BREEDING.

For example, consider two cows that have the same lifestyle and body build, producing the same amount and quality of milk. However, Cow 1 consumes more feed than Cow 2. In this scenario, it’s better environmentally and economically to breed Cow 2.

Improved dairy cow genetics can mean fewer crops need to be grown, less fertilizer is used, less soil needs to be tilled, less machinery is required to move feed, and less time is used overall.

COWS HAVE ALWAYS PRODUCED METHANE, SO THERE MUST BE A BIOLOGICAL REASON FOR IT. THAT’S WHY THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BREED FOR EFFICIENCY WHILE CAUSING NO HARM TO THE ANIMAL.



Dairy Cows’ Methane Production

Methane is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Since 2023, Koltes’ research has focused on the feasibility of breeding cows for lower methane production as part of a consortium of researchers across the U.S., funded by the Greener Cattle Initiative. The research team will use this information to study the genetic traits of the dairy cows that require less feed and produce less methane to identify — genetically — “the best of the best.”

In the case of dairy cows, methane represents wasted energy.

“Imagine if we could take that lost energy in methane gas and turn it into energy to produce more milk or milk fat and protein — the things that make dairy products,” Koltes said. “We know that if we can keep methane from being lost and instead use that powerful rumen

[the largest part of a cow’s stomach] to turn it into energy for the animal to be healthier and more productive, that’s a way to be more profitable.”



Kianna Gonzalez collects milk samples for testing.

it. That’s why Koltes says the ultimate goal is to breed for efficiency while causing no harm to the animal. This is an area actively being evaluated to ensure animal well-being is maintained.

Moving forward, researchers will study the genomes of the dairy cows to determine which parts of the DNA impact sustainability traits. Understanding the genes’ roles could be used to make faster improvements using genomic selection, a technology that has revolutionized dairy cattle breeding. In the future, improvements could also be carried forward by highly influential genes to breed for even more efficient production. Less feed intake, less methane production and less feed costs are a recipe for improved sustainability efforts.

“We are proposing a genetic solution because it’s a stable, long-term, cumulative solution,” Koltes said. “Short-term solutions are also helpful, but a genetic change will last long-term.”

Cows have always produced methane, so there must be a biological reason for

From Pasture to Price Tag

CLEAN PROTEIN FOR YOUR FAMILY

By Summer Ory



Summer Ory works with four families to grow soybeans and corn and raise cattle in Madison County. She graduated with a degree in business management from Iowa State University. Summer is involved with the sales and operations of a local Pioneer seed dealership and serves as president of the Earlham School Foundation. She's also participated in the Iowa Soybean Association's (ISA) Iowa-Missouri Grassroots Fellowship, Communications Squad and serves on the ISA Board of Directors.

This summer brought humidity and rainfall that had herdsmen wondering if we lived in Iowa or the Amazon. The rainfall replenished the ponds and creek beds, but then someone forgot to turn off the faucet. Many farmers were left with hay on the ground, only to watch it get rained on repeatedly.

As usual, the work continues. America has a voracious appetite for protein, and no one raises beef like the Midwest. Heifer retention waned as prices soared, and cattle farmers had to make a decision. Sell off replacement heifers for a career-high price or keep rebuilding the herd that had been squeezed down after a long, laborious drought? Most farmers had to respond to market demands.

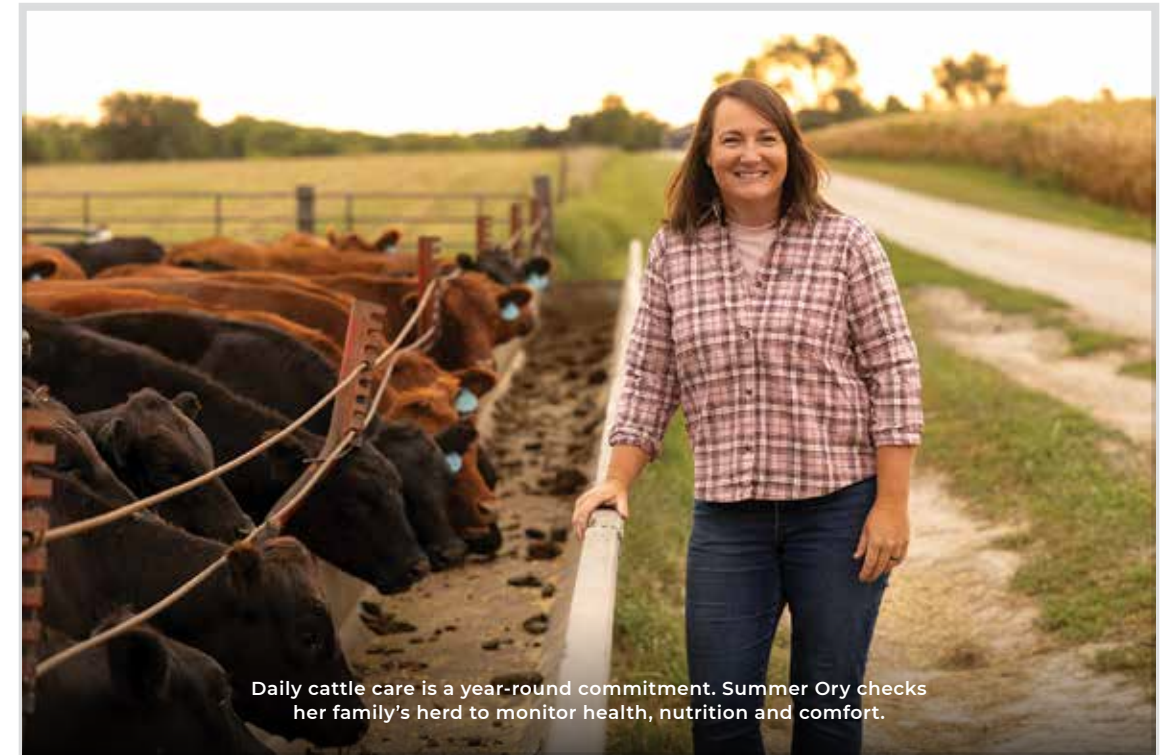
Beef is being fed out in feedlots at JBS, Cactus, Cargill and Friona, and now it is being sold in grocery stores for \$6 per pound for ground beef. JBS predicts the market supply will ease by 2027, but there are many dinners between now and then.

So, what are cattle families doing in response?

For Ory Brothers Beef, we developed a farm-to-family business model. By bypassing the feedlot, packer and the grocer, we offer our farm-raised beef directly to our customers. It's helping us keep our costs down to customize our own feed program with a nutritionist, and we outsource very little.

We were asked by friends and family during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide beef for their families. When times were uncertain and prices were skyrocketing, folks turned to the local farmer for peace of mind. Located right down the road from Earlham, we finish out most of our herd for freezer beef directly to the consumer, and the beef is raised and finished on our farm from the day the calf is born. The rest are kept back to bring youthful vigor to our herd base.

What we did during COVID worked for our customers, and word has gotten out. Ory Brothers Beef delivers dry-aged cuts of steak of the highest quality throughout Iowa. Instead of spending \$100 on a restaurant meal, you can have that same farm-raised



Daily cattle care is a year-round commitment. Summer Ory checks her family's herd to monitor health, nutrition and comfort.

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ribeye or filet resting in your own home. This allows us, in turn, to support local 4-H and FFA chapters, as well as various community projects, all of which help keep small-town Iowa thriving. The ripple effect is deep and wide.

How will the market react moving forward? I wish I had

a crystal ball. With tariffs and imported beef at an all-time high, the market is poised for more volatility. And that volatility will ultimately be passed down to the consumer.

To help, we examine market trends and explore ways to develop more effective solutions that benefit both the farm and its

customers. Finding innovative approaches means we can serve our customers in the best way possible. We know that our children's future depends on the farm finding a way to succeed through economic cycles, and we're here for the ride. 🌿

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