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Spring on the Farm

LIFE IN SEASON

A YOUNG
FARMER SHAPING
THE FUTURE OF AG

.....

INSIDE THE
COMMUNITY OF
OSKALOOSA

.....

AQUACULTURE:
LIVESTOCK THAT LIVE
BENEATH WATER

DISCOVER



life on the farm

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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.

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YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PARTNERS
ON PAGE 5.





Photo courtesy of Kloubec Koi Farm

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Photo courtesy of Iowa Beef Industry Council

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Aubrey Conway enjoying life on the farm in Melrose, where she lives with her parents Donnie, Emma and sister Margo.

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EDITOR
LYDIA ZERBY

PHOTOGRAPHER
JOCLYN KUBOUSHEK

DESIGNER
BRIANNA SCHECHINGER

CONTRIBUTORS

APRIL PEARSON
April Pearson Creative

CRISTEN CLARK
Food & Swine

DARCY MAULSBY
Darcy Maulsby & Co.

HALEY BANWART
Farm Roots & Chore Boots

ANNA TOOT
Wixted & Company

GRETCHEN WESTDAL CENTERS
GWC Creative

SUMMER ORY
Iowa Soybean Association

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The Season of Showing Up



As I sit watching my 10-year-old daughter participate in a pre-season softball clinic, I feel proud of her hard work and dedication in the off-season. I've worked to instill in her that players and teams who put in the time before others hit the field will be ahead of the game in their skill development. It's that pre-season work that many don't see, but that shows up later in the form of confidence and tenacity.

As a coach, I've watched players stand in the batter's box after striking out twice, shoulders tight, eyes searching for reassurance. I've walked out to the circle to tell a pitcher to take a breath and trust her skills. In those moments, success isn't guaranteed, and growth isn't instant. But showing up again — that's where it starts.

Farming isn't so different.

Seeds are planted beneath the soil with faith that the right mix of care, timing and

resilience will bring a harvest. Most Iowans see combines in the fall, but they don't always see the early planning, equipment repairs or the long days spent preparing for a season that depends on factors no one can control.

On the softball field, we can't control bad hops, tough calls or the final score. In agriculture, there's weather, markets and uncertainty. But in both places, the response is the same: adjust, learn and come back tomorrow.

I think that's one of the most Iowa lessons there is.

Many of our farm families pass knowledge from one generation to the next. Coaching feels very similar. The fundamentals matter — how to field a ground ball, how to support a teammate, how to handle failure with grit and gratitude for the lesson. Those lessons stretch far beyond a single season.

Luckily, spring resets us. Open fields are planted. Lineups are rewritten. Records reset to 0-0. The potential feels wide open.

Whether we're tending crops or mentoring kids, the work follows the same rhythm: prepare well, nurture patiently and trust that what's planted today will grow in time.

And then — we show up again tomorrow.

Enjoy the issue,

Lydia Zerby

GIVE AWAY

WIN AN IGLOO COOLER

Enter to win a 52-quart Igloo wheeled cooler, perfect for packing snacks and drinks for spring events at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/igloo-cooler.



Springtime Supper

A SIMPLE SHEET PAN FRITTATA THAT BRINGS IOWA EGGS, FRESH GREENS AND MIDWEST COMFORT TO THE TABLE.

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.

In Iowa, spring makes its presence known through longer days, warming soil and the first tender greens pushing their way into the light. Asparagus emerges crisp and vibrant, radishes bring a clean, peppery bite and peas deliver bright bursts of sweetness. These fleeting ingredients shape the essence of Iowa cooking — seasonal, expressive and deeply tied to the land. When assembled, the finished frittata is like a watercolor, with soft hues and layered textures, celebrating the beauty and freshness of the season.

A trip to a local farmers' market brings these ingredients to the table, allowing local abundance to shine with minimal effort. It is honest, unfussy food — perfectly suited to busy families and anyone drawn to cooking that reflects the season and the soil. The approach to this recipe is intentionally simple, letting the ingredients lead and resulting in a light, custardy frittata layered with crisp-tender vegetables at their peak.

Fresh eggs provide structure and richness, while a touch of cream and Parmesan lends gentle

indulgence without overpowering the vegetables. A finishing flourish of radish slices adds both visual contrast and bright flavor. Traditionally enjoyed in Iowa on warm bread with butter and salt, radishes take on new character when roasted. They develop a gentle sweetness, a subtle bite and a vivid pop of color that completes the dish.

Serve the frittata alongside vinaigrette-dressed greens, atop a slice of wheatberry bread or tucked into a flaky croissant with ham for an elevated breakfast. Its versatility makes it equally at home for brunch, packed for a picnic or served as a light midday meal. With its balance of protein-rich eggs, creamy dairy and fresh produce, it's a dish that feels both nourishing and celebratory — proof that spring cooking thrives on ease and flexibility. 🌿



Spring Vegetable Frittata

- 12 large eggs
 - ½ cup heavy cream
 - ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
 - ½ teaspoon sea salt
 - ½ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
 - 3 tablespoons of chopped fresh chives
 - 2 teaspoons olive oil
 - 3 green onions, sliced thinly
 - 1 cup spring greens like arugula or baby spinach
 - 8–10 asparagus spears, sliced in half lengthwise
 - 1 cup snap or snow peas
 - 4–5 radishes, sliced
 - 1 package Garlic and Fine Herbs Boursin cheese, crumbled
- Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Place sheet pan in the oven to heat up while mixing frittata ingredients.
- In a large bowl, whisk eggs, cream, Parmesan cheese, salt, pepper and chives until well combined.
- Remove pan from hot oven, grease with olive oil. To the hot pan scatter green onion, spring greens, asparagus and peas evenly. Gently pour egg mixture over the top of the pan. Add radishes and crumbles of Boursin cheese evenly over the mixture.
- Reduce oven to 375 degrees F. Bake for 24–26 minutes or until puffed and only slightly golden around the edges, and set in the middle. Remove from oven, let cool to warm. Slice into 12 squares and serve.

ROOTED IN

By Lydia Zerby



In Iowa, spring doesn't arrive all at once — it unfolds in layers. One week, the ground is still firm with frost, and the next, green shoots are pushing through the soil. Planters appear on front steps, seed packets are organized and conversations turn to the weather forecast. For both farmers and backyard gardeners, this season is about preparation, patience and possibility. Whether you're planting acres or a few containers on the patio, the same truth applies: healthy soil and thoughtful timing are crucial.

Whether you're a novice gardener or a pro, following these tips will get you growing.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SOIL RIGHT NOW

Spring gardening begins below the surface. As temperatures warm, soil microbes wake up and earthworms become active again, helping create the structure plants need to thrive. Iowa farmers monitor soil moisture and temperature carefully before planting crops like soybeans and corn, and home gardeners benefit from doing the same.

A simple rule of thumb: soil should be crumbly, not sticky. If you squeeze a handful and it forms a muddy ball, it's still too wet to work.

Adding compost or other organic matter improves soil structure, boosts nutrient levels and helps retain moisture during summer heat — a practice used in both backyard gardens and large-scale farming.

According to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, many cool-season vegetables can be planted once soil temperatures reach about 40–50 degrees F, often weeks before the last frost date.



WHAT TO PLANT FIRST

Cool-season crops thrive in Iowa's unpredictable spring weather and are perfect for gardeners eager to get started. These vegetables grow quickly and tolerate chilly nights, offering one of the fastest paths from garden to table.

Early Spring Crops:

- Lettuce
- Spinach
- Peas
- Radishes
- Arugula
- Kale
- Green onions



FROM LAWN TO GARDEN: START SMALL

You don't need a large yard to grow something substantial. Starting small builds confidence and keeps gardening enjoyable rather than overwhelming.

Easy ways to begin:

- Convert a sunny patch of lawn into a raised bed.
- Use containers for herbs and greens.
- Plant strawberries along a fence line.
- Grow tomatoes or peppers in large pots.



A GARDEN THAT GIVES BACK

Gardens don't just feed families — they support pollinators that play a critical role in food production.

Bees and butterflies help pollinate fruits, vegetables and many Iowa crops. Adding a few flowering plants near your garden can improve your yield and support local ecosystems.

Pollinator-friendly choices:

- Zinnias
- Bee balm
- Herbs like basil and thyme
- Coneflowers
- Sunflowers



FRESH IDEAS FOR THE TABLE

The excitement of garden-fresh foods can make mealtimes more fun and adventurous. Families — including kiddos — feel excited to eat what they grow. A handful of homegrown greens can transform simple meals:

- Toss spinach into scrambled eggs.
- Add radishes to tacos or salads.
- Blend herbs into dips or dressings.
- Layer lettuce onto sandwiches for extra crunch.



PLANTING SEEDS OF CONNECTION

Gardening creates a powerful connection to agriculture. Experiencing the patience required for seeds to sprout or the disappointment of a late frost helps develop a deeper appreciation for the challenges farmers navigate every season.

Spring reminds us that growth takes time, care and resilience — whether it's happening in backyard beds or across Iowa fields.

So, grab a trowel, dig into the soil and plant something new this season. The rewards will keep growing long after spring fades into summer. 🌱

Marvel at a Miracle in Stone

DISCOVER A SPIRITUAL AND GEOLOGICAL WONDER IN WEST BEND.

By Haley Banwart

Sometimes detours make the best destinations. Unexpected bypasses that lead somewhere unforgettable. That's exactly how the small town of West Bend earned its place on the map. Here, in the heart of flat Iowa farmland, rises one of the state's most surprising landmarks: the Shrine of the Grotto of the Redemption.

Recognized as the largest man-made grotto in the world, the site is home to one of the most extensive collections of precious stones and gems found in a single location. Geological rarities such as amethyst, jasper, geodes, stalagmites and petrified wood shape every arch, wall and alcove, catching light and creating a radiant mosaic.

Spanning a full city block, the four-story structure is comprised of nine separate grottos. Life-size Carrara marble statues capture human emotion in biblical stories, from the Garden of Eden to the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The craftsmanship and symbolic detail draw visitors into quiet reflection. But the Grotto's story is not etched in stone alone; it's rooted in the devotion of one man who dedicated his life to building it.

A Promise Kept

Story goes that as a young seminarian, Father Paul Dobberstein became critically ill with pneumonia. He prayed to the Virgin Mary, promising to build a shrine in her honor if he recovered. He did. And, he kept his word.

Following his ordination, Dobberstein arrived in West Bend in 1898 to begin his work as the parish priest. Patiently, he began stockpiling rocks sourced from local farmers and across the globe, arriving in a steady stream of train carloads.

Then, in 1912, without a blueprint and armed with little more than a trowel and determination, Dobberstein began building the Grotto, laying each stone by hand. With help from volunteers, the work became a labor of love that would span 42 years.

Finding time for his craft between his duties at the church and local school, Dobberstein could often be found washing stones in his bathtub or ending the day with cracked, bleeding hands. These were small sacrifices he readily accepted to share the mysteries of mankind, expressed in mineral and crystal, and cemented in place to withstand Iowa's harshest seasons for decades to come.

A Living Legacy

Long before its completion — and still today — tourists from around the world have traveled to West Bend to witness what has been called “a miracle in stone.”

For local resident Bruce Hellesteth, some of his earliest memories of the Grotto include driving into town and scanning the license plates of the cars lined up and down the street, curious to see how far visitors had journeyed. Now, as the Grotto custodian, he gets to meet those travelers face-to-face.

“In my role, it's become obvious how much the Grotto touches people. There's a peacefulness and serenity many visitors experience walking the grounds,” says Hellesteth. “People are often surprised by its scale and beauty, and when you consider the time, effort and collection of stories it tells — all brought together without a plan — you start to realize how many blessings it took for a place like this to exist.”

“The Grotto is open year-round, without a gated entry, just the way Father Dobberstein intended it to be,” Hellesteth adds. “And when people ask me why it was built here, in West Bend, I simply reply: Where else would it be?”



A walk through the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend reveals intricate structures made from rocks and minerals collected from around the globe.

A Mahaska Masterpiece



The Uplifting Puppet Parade brings color and creativity to Art on the Square in Oskaloosa.

Photo courtesy of Mahaska Chamber & Development Group

From its humble beginnings more than 180 years ago to now, Oskaloosa has sustained and grown its community. At a time when many smaller towns in Iowa are struggling to keep their main streets vibrant and their populations growing, Oskaloosa may be a shining example of how to honor the past while looking toward the future.

Past to Present

The town was first settled in the mid-1800s by a group of Quakers. William Canfield established a trading post and built a homestead after the town was platted in 1844. Thirteen rudimentary cabins and two stores followed soon after. By the late 1870s, coal mining propelled the local economy forward, and the boom of the transcontinental railway further established Oskaloosa as a lucrative supplier of the country's dominant energy source.

Both Oskaloosa and Mahaska County were named after the Native American peoples who long called this area home before the Quakers, Canfield and other settlers. Oskaloosa is derived from Ouscaloosa, the name of a Creek princess meaning "last of the beautiful," who was married to Osceola,

S tately, neat red brick buildings with well-appointed signs beckon customers inside. A small-domed, intricate octagonal bandstand constructed of handsome steel and concrete sits in the center of a tree-filled town square.

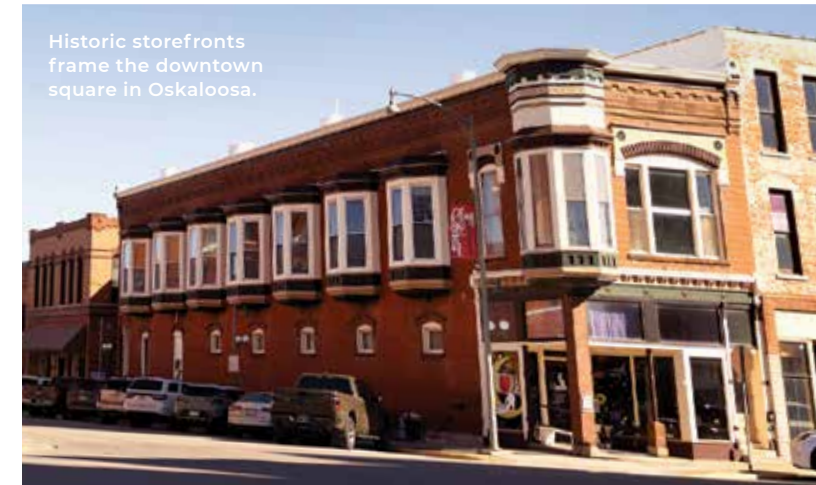
Wide streets and sidewalks invite pedestrians to explore decorated alleyways that tell stories of the past and present. This picturesque scene could be out of a movie set, but for the lucky citizens of Oskaloosa, it's home.

INSIDE THE COMMUNITY OF OSKALOOSA.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers



The statue of Chief Mahaska recognizes the influential Ioway Tribe leader and the history behind the town's name.



Historic storefronts frame the downtown square in Oskaloosa.

a Seminole Tribe chief. Mahaska was named to honor the Ioway Tribe chief Mahaska (White Cloud). This storied past is still honored today. In stately bronze, the statue of Chief Mahaska stands proudly in the town center.

Oskaloosa is the county seat of Mahaska County and leverages its prominence to support the local economy through strong agricultural ties, businesses of all sizes and community-led initiatives that help the area thrive. For a city with a population of around 11,500, there are plenty of diversions — many found only in larger cities — all contributing to a place that vibrates with life, arts and culture.

Nelson Pioneer Farm & Museum

Less than four miles from the town center, visitors can step back in time and be immersed in the early days of



The Nelson farmstead dates back to 1844, when Daniel and Margaret Nelson first settled the land.



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The museum complex includes about 14 historic structures representing over a century of Mahaska County history.



Mahaska County Historical Society to preserve their family's legacy.

Other original buildings that showcase early agricultural efforts and pioneer life include:

- The Nelson Barn
- Summer Kitchen and Meat House
- An 1860s log cabin
- Prine One-Room Schoolhouse
- Mott General Store
- Spring Creek Voting House
- Wright Post Office
- Rus Scale House
- Coal Creek Meeting House

Oskaloosa. The Nelson Pioneer Farm & Museum is an impressive collection of original buildings dating from the mid-1860s to the early 1900s. It operates as a "living history site and museum village," allowing visitors to experience what agricultural life was like during the early pioneer days and to see the evolution and growth of Mahaska County.

With more than 15 sites to explore, learning becomes hands-on, and past stories come to life. Daniel and Margaret Carden Nelson

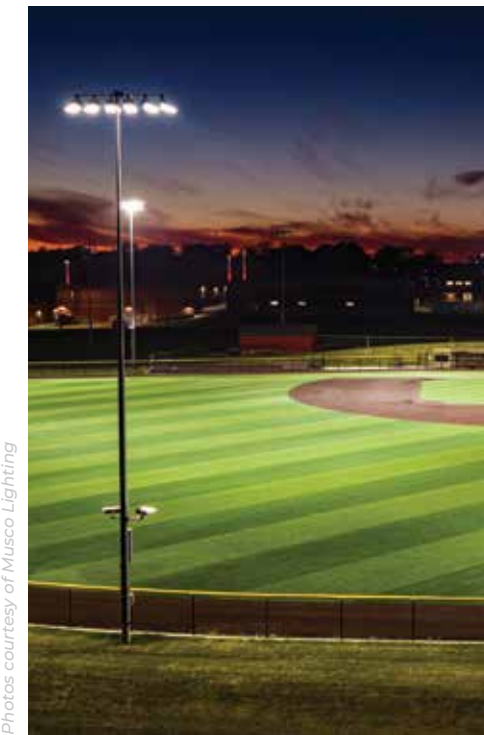
settled the acreage as the Nelson Family Homestead upon their arrival from Ohio in 1841. The family originally lived in a log cabin and eventually built the two-story brick farmhouse that still stands today, welcoming visitors from May through September when the museum is open. The 230-acre operation remained in the family until 1958, when the Carden Nelsons' grandchildren, Daniel Roy and Lillian, donated the farm, buildings and contents to the

Additional points of interest include a nature trail, period events celebrating the area's history and the only known mule cemetery in Iowa, honoring the Nelson family's mules that assisted in Civil War efforts.

It's a colorful destination that transports visitors to both the challenges and simplicities of early life on the farm.

Musco Lighting

In an area founded on coal mining and agriculture, it may be surprising to find a global leader in technologically advanced, large-scale LED lighting systems calling Oskaloosa home. But that's where you'll find the headquarters for Musco Lighting. Founded in 1976, the company has grown steadily, specializing in sports, transportation and infrastructure lighting found in professional stadiums, national landmarks



Photos courtesy of Musco Lighting

Musco Lighting is headquartered in Oskaloosa and provides lighting for stadiums and venues around the world.



RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE COME TO MAHASKA COUNTY FOR THE MANY OPPORTUNITIES THAT POP UP THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

and neighborhood fields around the world.

The company employs more than 2,000 people worldwide while maintaining a strong presence in Oskaloosa as its central hub for invention, administration, engineering and global project coordination. More than 800 team members are based locally, making Musco one of the area's largest employers. The company is also deeply invested in the community, supporting global youth recreation and development initiatives, education and local events.



Thriving Downtown, Arts and Cultural Scene

In addition to Musco's influence, industries such as manufacturing, farming and agriculture help fuel a thriving downtown, arts and cultural scene that sets Oskaloosa apart. Residents and visitors enjoy amenities such as the F.A.C.E. of Mahaska County and the Oskaloosa Art Center and Studio,



Photo courtesy of Mahaska Chamber & Development Group

which offer a diverse mix of classes for all ages. Programs include children's summer camps, evening and weekend classes, gallery exhibitions and support for local artists.

Downtown Oskaloosa features a variety of walkable local shopping and dining options. Seasonal events —

including Sweet Corn Serenade, Concert on the Square, Friday After Five, and Merry Little Downtown Christmas — draw crowds throughout the year.

The George Daily Auditorium, a nearly 700-seat theater, hosts both touring and local productions, further enriching the cultural

Oskaloosa Art Center and Studios celebrates local artists, while George Daily Auditorium hosts regional performances and touring shows.

landscape. The TRIO Entertainment Complex offers indoor recreation, including pickleball and tennis courts, as well as a golf simulator. A three-screen movie theater, restaurant and bar add to the entertainment options.

Residents and visitors alike come to Mahaska County for the many opportunities that pop up throughout the year.

Access to the Outdoors

For outdoor enthusiasts, the region is home to Lake Keomah State Park. The park features Iowa's first man-made lake, currently undergoing restoration, and expected to be completed this coming spring. Once finished, the 84-acre lake will again offer boating, fishing and swimming, along with

access to a stone lodge and boathouse.

The 366-acre park includes a three-mile hiking trail, as well as shorter paths connecting the lodge and campgrounds. During the winter months, snowmobiling is permitted on designated trails. City parks, including Edmundson Park, offer walking trails, disc golf, an inclusive playground, a swimming pool and picnic areas for warm-weather enjoyment.

Rooted Yet Rising

With its deep historical roots, forward-thinking businesses, active arts scene and access to both cultural and outdoor recreation, Oskaloosa exemplifies what small-town Iowa can be at its best. It is a community that values its past

without being bound by it, investing in people, place and possibility. Whether visiting for a weekend or calling it home, Oskaloosa offers a compelling reminder that vitality, innovation and connection can flourish well beyond the boundaries of a big city. 🌿

Visitors can explore the murals of Oskey Alley and enjoy nature at nearby Lake Keomah State Park.



Photo courtesy of Mahaska Chamber & Development Group





LEADING THE ARMBRECHT WAY

If you spot Dr. Paul Armbrecht on the road, there's a good chance he's driving to a farm in his used, high-mileage Cadillac. You might also see him in a school classroom or county fair show ring, helping non-farm Iowans make the farm-to-fork connection.

"In the last 20 to 30 years, there has been a big shift in Iowans getting farther removed from the farm," says Armbrecht, who lives at Twin Lakes northwest of Rockwell City. "Even when I visit schools here in Calhoun County, the odds are less than 10% of the kids live on a farm, and fewer of those have livestock."

Armbrecht has played a key role in advancing Iowa's ag industry for more than 50 years, first as a full-time veterinarian and now as a leading swine veterinarian consultant. At 78, he continues to devote his time to improving livestock

During a visit near Rockwell City, Dr. Armbrecht checks on a client's cattle, part of the day-to-day work that keeps Iowa herds healthy.



Dr. Armbrecht's first Grand Champion Hog trophy, won at his local county fair in Nevada in 1958.

production, in addition to sharing agriculture's story.

"When I'm with a non-farm audience, I'll ask, 'Do you like bacon cheeseburgers?' If you do, you're supporting three industries in Iowa — beef, pork and dairy," Armbrecht says. "Imagine what would happen if these farmers weren't here."

DR. PAUL ARMBRECHT, A BELOVED IOWA VETERINARIAN, SHARES 6 LESSONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFE.

By Darcy Maulsby

6 keys to success in farming and life

These are the kinds of things Ambrecht shares with his own grandkids, who live in urban areas around Des Moines, Minneapolis, Kansas City and Baltimore. As a grandfather, a veterinarian and a mentor, Ambrecht embraces six non-negotiables that lead to success in farming and life:



Tools of the trade: a glimpse at the essentials Dr. Ambrecht keeps close while working with livestock.

01 INVEST IN “BUCKET TIME.”

When he was growing up on a farm near Colo, one of Ambrecht's pigs earned grand champion honors at the 1958 Story County Fair. “That was my first success with livestock, but it also tuned me in to realizing this isn't about the trophies,” Ambrecht says. “It's about the care of the animals.” After graduating from Iowa State University's (ISU) College of Veterinary Medicine in 1971, he joined a veterinary clinic in Lake City in 1973. As farms grew larger through the years, Ambrecht reminded clients about the value of “bucket time.” Sitting quietly on a bucket and observing animals in their environment. It's a strategy he still uses to troubleshoot animal health issues.

“We can have streaming video and all the latest technology, but it still doesn't tell us everything

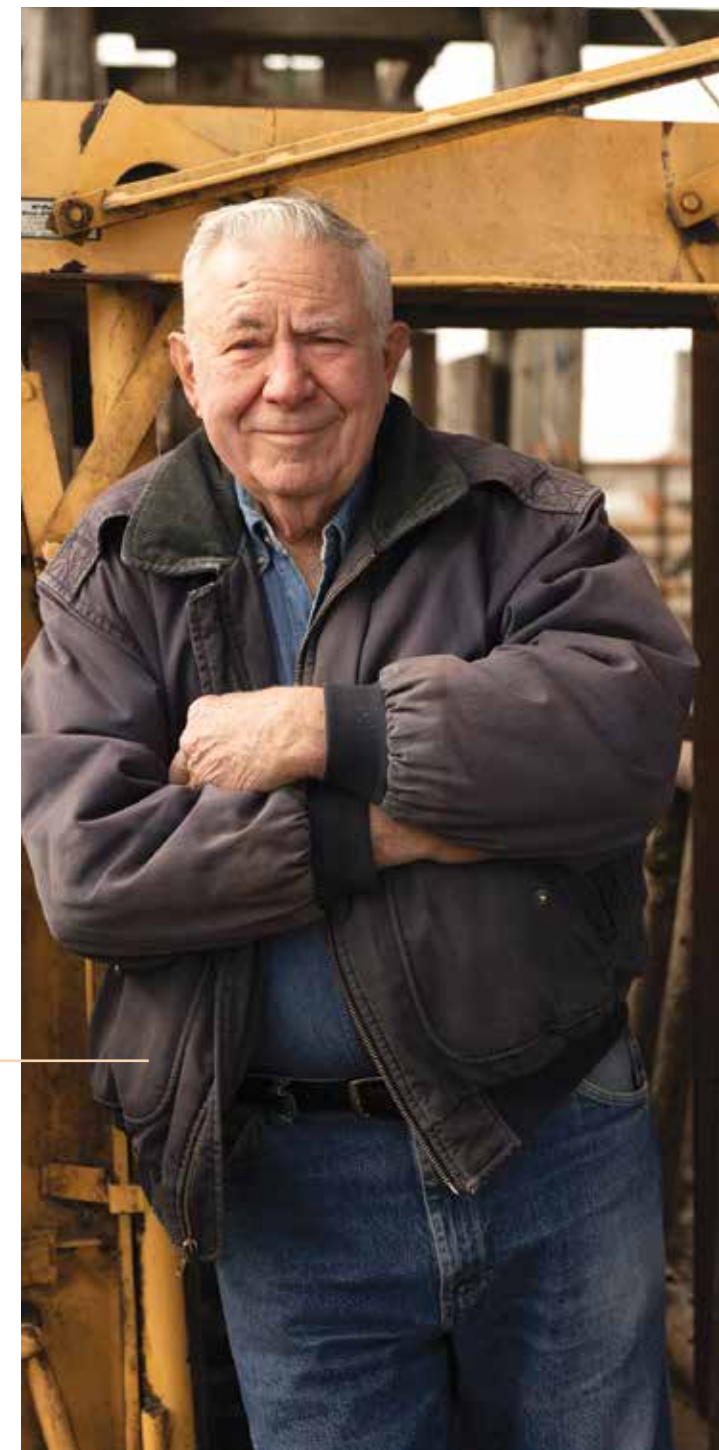
we need to know,” says Ambrecht, who serves independent pork producers across Iowa, including some whom are the fourth generation of their family to work with him. “Somebody needs to be in the barn, observing in real time what's going on and taking notes. Asking the right questions is vital.”

STAY CURIOUS. 02

Never stop learning. “Read a lot,” advised Ambrecht, a U.S. Army veteran who has participated in the American Association of Swine Veterinarians' Foreign Animal Disease Committee. “Too many people waste way too much time with the ‘one-eyed idiot box,’ also known as a smartphone.”

03 TELL THE TRUTH.

After earning his veterinary degree from Iowa State University and serving in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps, Dr. Paul Ambrecht returned to rural Iowa where he has spent his career supporting livestock producers.



Ambrecht's passion for people and pigs came under fire when he testified in 2007 as an expert witness in an animal welfare case in Ohio. While the judge ruled the hog farm was innocent of cruelty and inhumane treatment charges, animal rights activists bombarded Ambrecht with harassing phone calls and threatening letters. “This backlash wasn't going to sway me,” Ambrecht says. “If you stand for something, you're going to be challenged.”

04

GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY.

From his leadership roles at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Lake City to his volunteer work with local youth, Ambrecht is a familiar face throughout his local area. “If you're going to live in a community, it's important to be available to people,” he says. Ambrecht has helped countless FFA and 4-H livestock exhibitors at the Calhoun County Expo learn the importance of animal care and biosecurity basics. Ambrecht has also served as a judge for the Bacon Buddies show at the Expo since 2023.

Bacon Buddies helps young people with special needs experience agriculture hands-on by partnering with 4-H and FFA mentors who exhibit livestock at the fair. Participants have the opportunity to speak with a livestock judge in a public setting and earn a blue ribbon for their efforts.



STAY HUMBLE. 05

Armbrecht has received many honors during his long career, including Iowa Honorary Master Pork Producer, Iowa Veterinary Medical Association Veterinarian of the Year, American Association of Swine Practitioners' Swine Practitioner of the Year, and "Master of Pork Production" by National Hog Farmer magazine. He and his wife, Marlene, were inducted into the Iowa State 4-H Hall of Fame in 2007. But despite the accolades, he remains humble and committed. "Having a supportive spouse and family is key to getting things accomplished," Armbrecht says. "Also, provide service to people, and nobody can replace you. Those are the correct things that will stand the test of time."

06 HELP THE NEXT GENERATION.

Armbrecht speaks to ISU veterinary students and encourages them to consider growing their practices in rural Iowa. "He provides great perspectives on how a veterinarian in a rural community can add value far beyond animal health services, and he shares the rewards this community engagement brings, both personally and professionally," says Dan Grooms DVM, PhD, the Dr. Stephen G. Juelsgaard Dean of Veterinary Medicine at ISU.

A recent American Veterinary Medical Association study found that fewer than 4% of veterinarians nationwide practice primarily in food-animal medicine. Armbrecht supports a new program at ISU — the Production Animal — Veterinary Early Acceptance Program (PA-VEAP). "This allows students to complete vet school faster than a traditional vet med program," says Armbrecht, who recently wrote a letter of recommendation for a local student who has been accepted into PA-VEAP.

All this ties back to the values Armbrecht was raised with. He appreciates a newspaper editorial his maternal grandfather, Leon Wengert, wrote in April 1953 about the joys and responsibilities of farming.

"Truly, stewards of the land are ever mindful that they are co-partners with God," wrote Wengert, a Story County farmer. "I wonder, as we enjoy the fruits of the soil and the labors of our farmers, whether we pause long enough to ask the Lord and Giver of all good things to give our farmers wisdom and divine guidance in supplying the entire population with the necessities of life." 🌿



Recognized with numerous honors — including Iowa Veterinarian of the Year — Dr. Paul Armbrecht has dedicated his career to keeping livestock healthy and supporting Iowa agriculture.

"One little girl was fearful of the interview portion of the Bacon Buddies event, but we helped prepare all the participants for this before they entered the show ring with a pig," says Armbrecht, who noted that several of the Bacon Buddies had never touched a real pig before the show. "After participants give it a try, they're so excited."

During the school year, Armbrecht volunteers with the Calhoun County Farm Bureau's annual Ag Career Day to help local middle-school students learn about veterinary medicine and other ag careers close to home. He also visits the South Central Calhoun (SCC) elementary school in Rockwell City to help kids learn more about production agriculture.

"Dr. Armbrecht is always willing to help," says Kari Case, an SCC second-grade teacher. "I love how he brings real-life examples of items he uses as a vet. He's animated, gets right down to the kids' level and is so good at holding their attention."

FOOD FOR ALL

WHY URBAN FARMING HAS ITS ADVANTAGES.

By April Pearson

By preserving green space, Cultivate Hope creates a place for neighbors to form positive social connections around something everyone has in common: food.

Photo courtesy of Matthew 25

Urban farming involves planting, maintaining and harvesting community gardens, as well as growing food in public areas, so all have access to fresh and healthy food. As urban farming grows in popularity, more city dwellers are benefiting.

BENEFIT 1: ACCESSIBILITY

Matthew 25's Cultivate Hope Urban Farm, Cedar Rapids

"Before our work, this area was a food desert," says Anyssa Ball, program manager for Cultivate Hope. "There wasn't access to fresh vegetables. So we try to address general food access."

Cultivate Hope strives to grow food closer to home, provide affordable produce and keep money local. On their two-acre farm, complete with a playground and classroom, there's a greenhouse and garden for its subscription-based Community Supported Agriculture program.

"Members purchase a share at the beginning of the year, and then for 20 weeks, they get a selection of vegetables weekly," says Ball. The subscription is available at a reduced price for members who need it.

Garden-fresh greens, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes and other produce are distributed through the Cultivate Hope Corner Store's free produce section. For those who wish to grow their own food, there are garden plots available for rent, "and we have a few garden beds that are set aside for anyone to harvest from," says Ball.

Giving Gardens, Grinnell

Jennifer Cogley, director of programs for Giving Gardens, notes that food insecurity is a significant concern.

"In Grinnell, 36% of students are on free and reduced lunch, and there are other food-insecure neighbors who live at or below the federal poverty level," she says. "Giving Gardens is



Giving Gardens donates 1,000 pounds of produce every year.

one way individuals can access food without the potential stigma of going to a food pantry.”

Accessibility is key. Giving Gardens has eight robust community plots throughout town, making them within walking distance of several neighborhoods. Families and individuals are invited to pick their own food free of charge. “The community garden at the hospital has raised beds that are very high, so they’re wheelchair accessible,” says Cogley.

Giving Gardens plots are chock full of tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, herbs and more, with some producing faster

than they can be picked. “If there’s anything that’s ripe and ready to go but hasn’t been picked, it’s donated to the local food pantry,” says Cogley. In fact, Giving Gardens donates 1,000 pounds of produce every year.

Birds & Bees Urban Farm, Des Moines

Kathy Byrnes and Ed Fallon, founders of Birds & Bees, have long advocated for local food production. “We know that people want to have access to food when we have unpredictable events like a derecho or the COVID pandemic,” says Byrnes. “There were disruptions to our food systems, and

we all experienced what it was like to worry about where our next meal was coming from.”

The couple operates a small, sustainable farm in their yard, where they raise rabbits, chickens and bees. They feed their livestock with kitchen scraps and their garden beds with livestock waste. As a result, they have fresh eggs, meat, honey and produce just steps from their home in the heart of the city. “Everybody used to grow food in their own spaces,” says Byrnes. “It was your patriotic duty. And I think it’s your patriotic duty to do so again, if you can.”



Photo courtesy of Giving Gardens



Photo courtesy of Birds & Bees



Photo courtesy of Giving Gardens

Urban farm efforts help reduce food insecurity and empower people to take part in local food production.

The City of Des Moines recently approved an initiative that Byrnes and Fallon proposed in 2023 — to plant an urban orchard in a food-insecure neighborhood. Thanks to their efforts, there are now 36 new apple, apricot, cherry, peach, pear, plum, and serviceberry (juneberry) trees in Drake Park. “This is the best use of public land — to grow food and bolster food security for all,” says Byrnes.

Urban farming offers ample opportunities to educate enthusiastic growers of all ages and skill levels.

Cultivate Hope offers summer camps for kids, a youth development program for teens and workshops for adults. “And we have two internships,” says Ball. “One is a six-month term, so they experience a full season, and the other is a three-month term for helping out with the teen program.”

Giving Gardens is involved with numerous programs that include lessons about healthy food. “I work with P.O.W.E.R. Kids, which is Positive Opportunities for Wellness, Exercise and Reading for children in kindergarten through fifth grade,” says Cogley.

Birds & Bees provides consultations and workshops that educate locals about urban farming and empower people to meet their food-growing goals. “We eat great food and want everyone to, as well,” says Byrnes.

GIVE AWAY

WIN \$150 TO AN EARL MAY GARDEN CENTER

Enter to win at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/urban-garden

BENEFIT 2: EDUCATION

BENEFIT 3: ENGAGEMENT

Volunteering with urban farms helps improve community life, address public concerns and promote neighbors’ well-being. It embodies civic engagement.

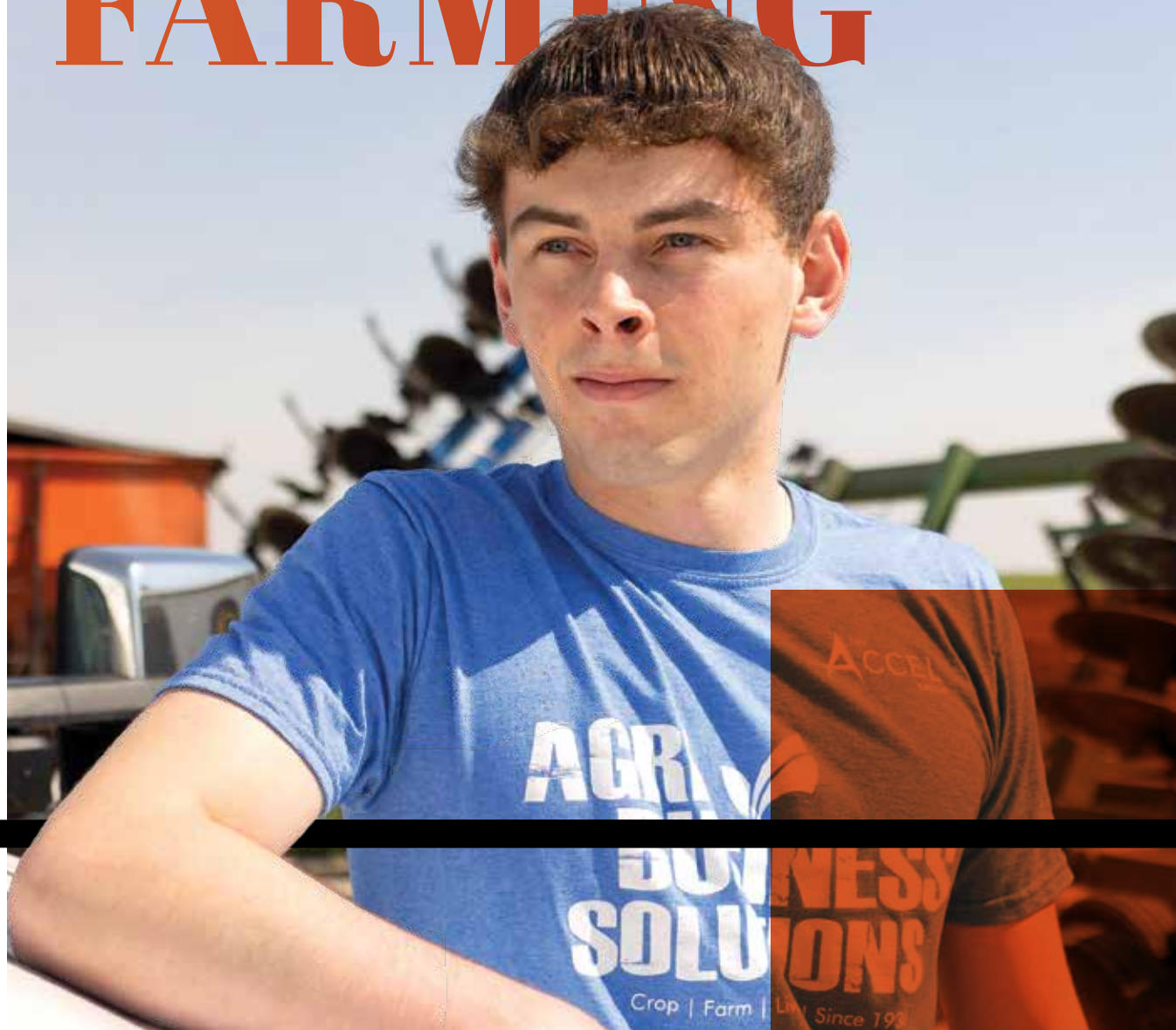
Cultivate Hope offers regular volunteer opportunities for individuals and large groups. “It’s about more than food,” says Ball. “It’s about beautifying the neighborhood and creating a space where people feel welcome. It’s about forming connections.”

Giving Gardens also depends on volunteers for everything from planting to picking. “Giving Gardens would not happen without volunteers,” says Cogley. “We started with one garden, and now we have eight. It expanded a little bit at a time, because of grassroots efforts.”

Birds & Bees relied on volunteer help when planting the Drake Neighborhood orchard. “Thanks to 30 volunteers, we had the best time planting fruit trees. Then we all got together in the shelter and had pie,” says Byrnes.

Urban farming offers advantages, including increased access to fresh food, participant education and neighbor-to-neighbor connections. These efforts help reduce food insecurity and empower people to take part in local food production. Ultimately, urban farming grows more than just food — it grows community. 🌱

NEXT GEN FARMING



Kollyn Lentz of Plainfield represents the next generation of Iowa agriculture as a sixth-generation farmer carrying on his family's farming tradition.

HOW ONE YOUNG FARMER IS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE.

By Anna Toot

Kollyn Lentz may clock out of his sales role at Unverferth MFG Co. at 5 p.m., but his work is just beginning. Lentz has a to-do list waiting for him, including hog barn chores, keeping up with field operations and participating in Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) educational events whenever he can.

Balancing a full-time manufacturing support job with farming is no small task, but if anyone is up for it, it's Lentz, a sixth-generation farmer in the Plainfield-Clarksville area. For him, farming isn't a career that fits neatly within business hours — and that's exactly how he likes it.

First Steps into Farming

Born and raised in Plainfield, Lentz grew up surrounded by agriculture, helping on his grandparents' farm. His passion for farming evolved as he grew up, participating in FFA and 4-H at Nashua-Plainfield High School, then attending Hawkeye Community College to study agricultural business and Iowa State University (ISU) to earn his bachelor's degree in agricultural studies.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, Lentz was a high school senior looking for something to fill his newfound free time. His neighbor, Rick Juchems, a past ISA district director, called and offered him a job on his hog farm, assisting with daily chores, including feeding, loading and everything in between.

"Long story short, now I manage two of his hog barns and rent his ground for farming," Lentz said.

This experience led to his first foray into farming in 2021, when he rented land with his father and grandfather.

"Even though my family farmed, it's still tough to get started. Thankfully, when I met Rick, everything changed," Lentz said. "I always tell young people who want to be farmers to find their niche and their way into the door however they can, whether it's getting involved in local organizations like ISA or the Practical Farmers of Iowa, or

getting to know local farmers who may be retiring soon and are looking for a young person to pass their operation onto," Lentz said.

Currently, Lentz farms row crops in Butler and Bremer Counties alongside his father, uncle and grandfather. He doesn't consider himself a full-time farmer, despite spending countless hours in the field.

Fortunately, his day job supports his farming dreams.

Beyond the Field

Lentz's interest in manufacturing was sparked during his time at ISU, where he took courses across multiple departments, including agronomy, agricultural systems and technology and agricultural business. An internship at Unverferth, which sells agricultural equipment for fertilizer, tillage, grain handling and more, led to a full-time role starting in June 2024.

At Unverferth, Lentz provides technical support to customers and dealers, assists with product improvement programs and serves as the ears for the engineering team, providing them with field feedback on what's working and what isn't.

Lentz balances two careers as well as he can, but some days are better than others. His vacation days are typically used as "farm days" to help him catch up on farmwork and operations.

"My boss is understanding, so if something comes up on the farm, I can always head over there for an hour or take an early lunch to check on it," Lentz said. "It's a tough balance, but flexibility is key."

Lentz loves his day job, but his love for farming runs deep.



2.3 MILLION ACRES OF IOWA CORN AND 1.5 MILLION ACRES OF IOWA SOYBEANS ARE NEEDED TO FEED IOWA PIGS.

“**FARMING** is my life, but **PASSION** it’s also my”



Lentz walks the barn aisle, checking on the pigs.

His work as a crop scout for AgVantage FS in the summer of 2021 sparked his interest in agronomy and sustainable agricultural practices.

“What I love about farming is that you get to do a little bit of everything. You’re not just doing one job,” Lentz said. “With farming, if you want to be a mechanic, you can be a mechanic. If you want to be an agronomist, you can be an agronomist. If you love animals, you can make that a part of your daily routine. You can make it what you want it to be.”

Learning Never Stops

Despite being early in his farming career, Lentz has embraced several new practices, including cover cropping and no-till, and hopes to incorporate more cutting-edge technology on his farm in the future. No doubt he’s learned about additional conservation practices from Juchems, who grew cover crops on all his acres and added filter strips and prairie strips to conserve the precious soil and water resources.

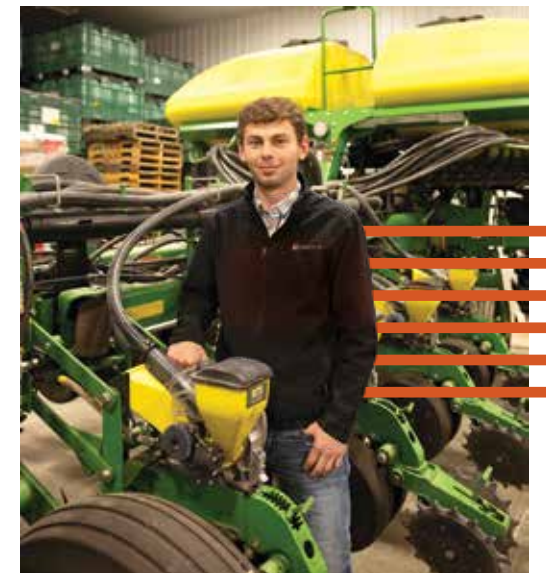
ISA has played a positive role in Lentz’s farming journey. As a member of ISA’s Soy Squad in college, Lentz dug deep into the soybean industry, discussing research, demand, policy and education with policymakers and other young farmers.

“The Soy Squad was really cool to be a part of,” Lentz said. “I was able to meet other great young people from different schools and better understand what ISA does.”

Looking ahead, Lentz hopes to buy a farm — which seems likely given his work ethic — and to continue growing his career at Unverferth.

As he navigates two successful careers and works toward his goals, Lentz follows his own advice.

“Keep your chin up. Times can be tough, but we must keep riding the tide and know that it will get better,” Lentz said. “Farming is my life, but it’s also my passion. I wouldn’t have it any other way.” 🌱



Before seeds ever hit the soil, farmers like Lentz spend time preparing tractors and planters to ensure a successful planting season.

not your average lunch

Lunch doesn't have to be predictable or boring — and this collection proves it. We have curated fresh, satisfying recipes that go beyond the usual sandwich routine, inspired by the flavors of spring and the many foods grown and raised by Iowa farmers. From crisp seasonal produce to protein-packed ingredients, these meals highlight the connection between local agriculture and everyday eating. Whether you're packing a midday meal, fueling a busy afternoon or looking for something new to break out of a lunch rut, these recipes make the middle of your day something to anticipate.



best grilled cheese

- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 slices whole-grain bread
- 2 slices sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 slices Swiss cheese

Place a small, nonstick skillet on a stovetop over medium heat.

In a small bowl, combine butter and Parmesan cheese. Divide butter mixture between bread slices and spread an even layer on one side of each slice.

Place one slice of cheddar and one slice of Swiss between two bread slices, with the buttered sides facing out.

Cook one sandwich in hot skillet for about 2 minutes, until crust is golden.

Flip sandwich and grill on the second side until crust is golden and cheese is melted.

Repeat with second sandwich. Slice into quarters and serve.

Photo and recipe credit: usdairy.com

al pastor glazed beef flat iron steak

- 1 beef flat iron steak, about 1 pound

MARINADE AND SAUCE

- ¼ cup barbecue sauce
- ¼ cup canned crushed pineapple
- 2 tablespoons ancho chile powder
- 1 tablespoon minced sweet onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 4 bolillo rolls, sliced lengthwise, toasted

GARNISH

- Grilled fresh pineapple slices, pickled onions, shredded lettuce (optional)

Combine barbecue sauce, pineapple, chile powder, onion and garlic in blender or food processor container. Cover; process 1 minute or until smooth, scraping sides of container as needed. Pour half into bowl, cover and refrigerate.

Place steak and remaining barbecue marinade in food-safe plastic bag; turn steak to coat. Close bag securely and marinate in refrigerator 15 minutes to 2 hours. Place steaks on a grill over medium,

ash-covered coals. Grill, covered, 12 to 16 minutes for medium rare (145 degrees F) to medium (160 degrees F) doneness, turning occasionally. Keep warm.

Spread reserved barbecue mixture evenly over cut sides of each roll. Thinly slice steak. Place slices on bottom of rolls. Top with pineapple, onions, and lettuce.

Photo and recipe credit: Iowa Beef Industry Council



cook's tip

You may substitute 1 French baguette, sliced lengthwise, toasted for 4 bolillo rolls. If bread is too thick, scoop out middle and save for another use.

breaded pork tenderloin sandwiches

- 4 boneless pork chops, about 1-inch thick
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon seasoned salt
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 cups crushed saltine crackers
- Oil, for frying
- 4 large buns
- Toppings, if desired

Lay one of the pork chops onto a cutting board. Cut horizontally through the pork chop almost all the way through (stop about ½ inch from the edge). Open the chop like a book and lay it flat onto the cutting board. Repeat with remaining chops.

Cover the chops with a layer of plastic wrap. Use a mallet to tenderize and pound the chops to about ¾-inch thick. Remove the plastic wrap.

In one shallow bowl, combine the flour and seasoned salt.

In another shallow bowl, whisk together the eggs and milk.

In a third, add the crushed saltine crackers.

Coat a pork chop in the flour mixture, then the eggs and lastly the saltines. Repeat with the remaining chops and set aside.

Pour your frying oil into a large skillet or frying pan (about ½ to 1 inch of oil is ideal). Heat the oil to 350 degrees F.

Fry the chops one at a time for about 3 minutes on each side, depending on the thickness of your chops. The internal temperature should be 145 degrees F, and the breading should be a light golden brown.

Serve each breaded pork tenderloin on a bun with condiments of choice.

Photo and recipe credit: Iowa Pork Producers Association



cook's tip

Cooking times are for fresh or thoroughly thawed ground beef. Ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees F. Color is not a reliable indicator of ground beef doneness.

french onion meatball subs

- 1 pound (93% lean or leaner) ground beef
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 packet (1 ounce) onion soup mix
- ¼ cup dry breadcrumbs
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 packet (0.87 ounces) brown gravy mix
- 2 cups water
- 4 sub rolls, split
- 8 slices Gruyere cheese
- 1 green onion, thinly sliced

CARAMELIZED ONIONS

- 1½ cups thinly sliced onion
- 2 tablespoons butter

Combine ground beef, egg, onion soup mix, breadcrumbs and pepper in large bowl, mixing lightly but thoroughly. Shape into twelve 2-inch meatballs.

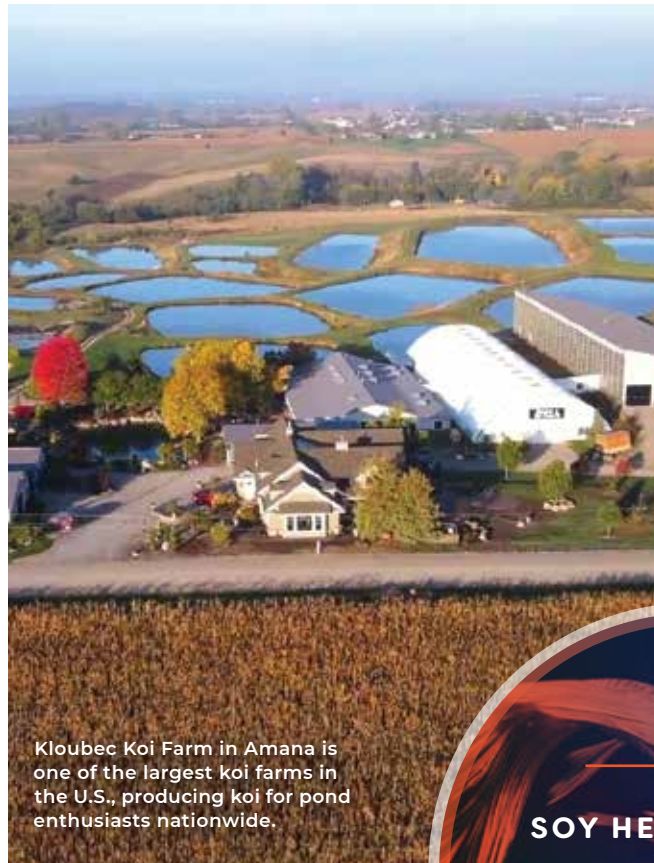
Heat oil in nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add meatballs; cook 5 minutes or until meatballs begin to brown, turning occasionally. Remove from skillet; set aside.

Meanwhile, add onion and butter to skillet; cook 8 to 10 minutes or until caramelized, stirring often. Lower heat if necessary. Add

gravy mix and water; whisk until thickened. Return meatballs to skillet. Cook 8 to 10 minutes or until heated through and reach an internal temperature of 160 degrees F.

Preheat broiler to high. Place half of cheese in bottom of sub rolls; top with 3 meatballs, gravy and remaining cheese. Place in broiler pan so surface of subs is 3 to 4 inches from heat. Broil 2 to 3 minutes or until cheese melts. Sprinkle with green onion.

Photo and recipe credit: Iowa Beef Industry Council



Kloubec Koi Farm in Amana is one of the largest koi farms in the U.S., producing koi for pond enthusiasts nationwide.



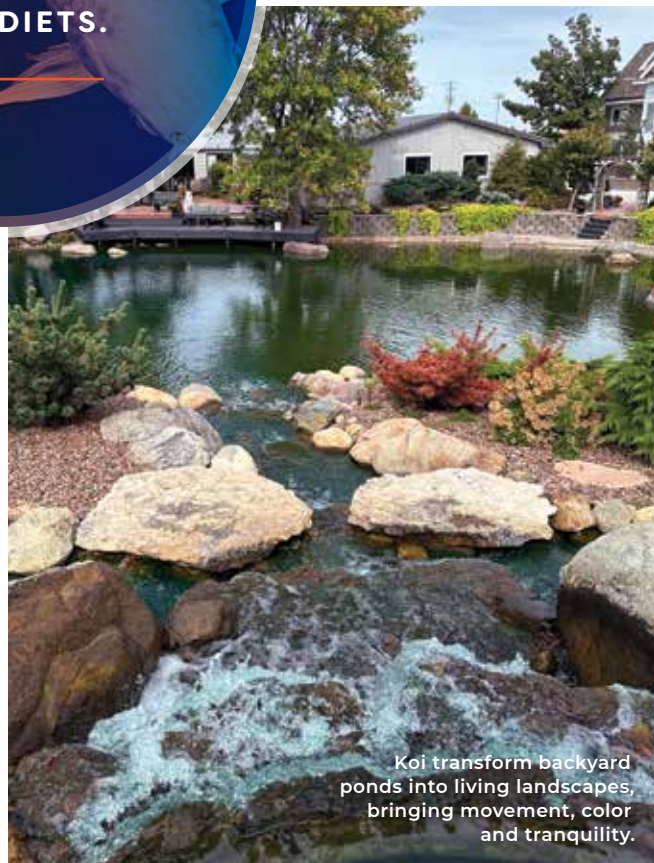
Photos courtesy of Kloubec Koi Farm

Koi are selectively bred for color, pattern and body conformation, creating stunning varieties prized by collectors.

**SOY HELPS CREATE
BALANCED, PLANT-BASED
FISH DIETS.**



Koi farming is a family tradition, with knowledge and passion passed from one generation to the next.



Koi transform backyard ponds into living landscapes, bringing movement, color and tranquility.

LIVING JEWELS

HOW A CENTURY FARM IN IOWA BECAME A NATIONAL LEADER IN KOI AQUACULTURE.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers

Iowa is known as a land of bountiful agriculture. The verdant soil and topography provide ample opportunity to tend to and harvest crops, care for livestock and live off the land. Iowa's agricultural traditions are strong, and from that strength, innovation creates new opportunities.

In the rolling hills near Amana, one Iowa farm raises something unexpected beneath the surface of mineral-rich ponds: living jewels, which are more commonly known as koi fish.

Kloubec Koi Farm is a designated Iowa Century Farm and a third-generation family-owned and operated business that has reimagined Midwestern agriculture. In 1981, Myron and Ellen Kloubec began building ponds and installing aeration systems. What began as game fish production evolved into a specialized ornamental koi operation that now ranks among the largest koi farms in the U.S.. The

Kloubecs have dedicated their farm to perfecting the science of raising fish.

From Common Carp to Living Art

Koi, or nishikigoi, are ornamental varieties of the common carp. These brightly colored and patterned fish are descendants of two different species of carp that originated in ancient China. It was the Japanese rice farmers in Niigata who eventually bred the carp to produce beautiful colors and patterns that contrast with their ponds. For centuries, Japanese breeders refined bloodlines to create fish that resemble living works of art.

Now, nearly six thousand miles away in Iowa fields, these storied fish that represent good luck and prosperity are bred to be enjoyed nationwide.

While the well-known Go-Sanke varieties — Kohaku, Sanke and Showa — remain staples, they represent

only part of the farm's production. Kloubec Koi raises dozens of varieties, including Utsuri, Bekko, Ogon, Goshiki, Asagi, Shusui, Koromo, Ochiba Shigure, Butterfly (longfin) koi and more. All koi varieties carry Japanese names rich with symbolism. Some reference color, while others evoke imagery from nature, such as Ochiba Shigure, meaning "autumn leaves on the water." In Iowa, those meaningful names now echo across earthen ponds in the heart of the Midwest.

Farming Fish in Iowa

On their 80-acre Amana property, the Kloubecs own and operate more than 50 outdoor earthen ponds along with multiple indoor koi houses that collectively provide approximately 300,000 gallons of under-roof growing space. These controlled systems allow for year-round availability, even during Iowa winters.

FRY BEGIN LIFE PROTECTED INDOORS BEFORE TRANSITIONING TO EARTHEN GROW-OUT PONDS WHERE NATURAL PLANKTON, SUNLIGHT AND MINERAL-RICH CLAY ENHANCE THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

A delicate balance must be maintained for the fish to thrive. Water chemistry is monitored constantly. Oxygen levels, filtration and stocking density must remain precise to protect fish health.

Like on other farms, biosecurity and environmental stewardship are central to the Kloubec's operation. Strict health protocols and quarantine systems safeguard both the farm and its customers. During harvest, pond water is retained within the farm by pumping it into adjacent ponds rather than allowing it to flow away. This preserves the valuable resource and reduces unnecessary discharge.

Farming fish in Iowa is distinctive, but the Kloubecs have long maintained that aquaculture is agriculture — with the added twist that their livestock live beneath the water's surface.

Precision and Protection

For the fish to properly develop, it's critical that each step of the process is done with precision and proper protection. Indoor spawning allows selective pairing and improved fertilization rates. Fry begin life protected indoors before transitioning to earthen

grow-out ponds where natural plankton, sunlight, and mineral-rich clay enhance their development.

Kloubec Koi's stock is certified KHV-free by USDA APHIS — a federal designation reflecting rigorous testing and strict biosecurity standards. This testing is done twice a year and ensures fish are virus free. In an industry where disease control is critical, this certification provides added assurance to customers nationwide.

Coast-to-Coast Reach

Kloubec Koi supplies both wholesale and retail markets, serving garden centers, pond retailers, landscape professionals and individual koi hobbyists. Fish are sold and shipped coast to coast, allowing customers to source healthy, American-raised koi directly from an Iowa family farm.

Through its online platform, the farm offers year-round purchasing and professional overnight shipping, maintaining oversight of quality from breeding to delivery.

A Century Farm, Reimagined

Though koi may seem far removed from traditional row crops, Kloubec Koi Farm reflects the same principles that define Iowa agriculture: stewardship, careful breeding, long-term planning and family commitment. The Kloubecs honor their agricultural roots while advancing aquaculture innovation. In 2018, the farm received the Leadership in Industry Development Award from the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

"We're proud to be an Iowa farm," says Ellen Kloubec. "We just happen to raise our livestock a little differently."

Today, vibrant flashes of red, white, black, gold and platinum glide through Iowa waters — living jewels raised by Midwest hands and shipped to ponds across America. 🌿

Learn more at kloubeckoi.com



Careful water testing and monitoring are essential for maintaining healthy koi in large-scale aquaculture systems.



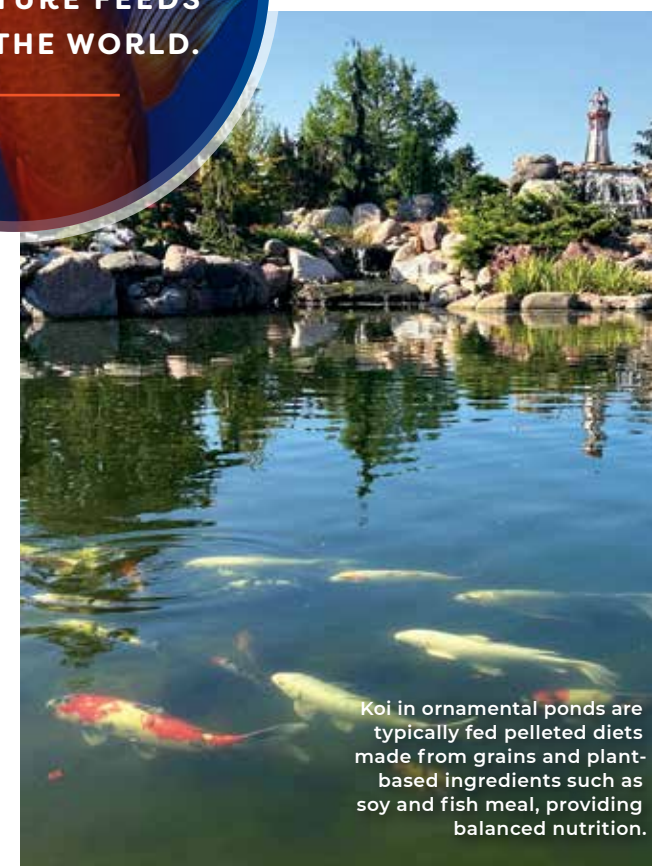
Each koi is evaluated for color, pattern and body shape before being selected for breeding or sale.



SOYBEAN MEAL IS WIDELY USED IN AQUACULTURE FEEDS AROUND THE WORLD.



Kloubec Koi Farm hatches more than 20 million koi annually, making it one of the largest koi producers in North America.



Koi in ornamental ponds are typically fed pelleted diets made from grains and plant-based ingredients such as soy and fish meal, providing balanced nutrition.

Photos courtesy of Kloubec Koi Farm

LIFE IN SEASON
Spring on Iowa Farms

AN INSIDER Q&A ON LONG DAYS, TOUGH DECISIONS AND THE JOY OF WATCHING THINGS GROW.

By Haley Banwart

For Iowa farm families, spring is a season of both risk and renewal. During this brief but busy window, they're caring for newborn animals, spending long hours in the field and making management decisions that will shape the entire year.

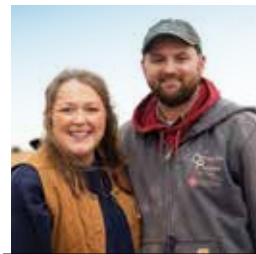
In this Q&A, three Iowa farm families share what spring looks like in their operations, the financial and emotional risks most people never see, and what they wish Iowa consumers knew about the food grown on their farms.

MEET THE FARMERS



DAVE STRUTHERS
 Collins, Iowa

Soybeans, corn, alfalfa, pigs, cattle



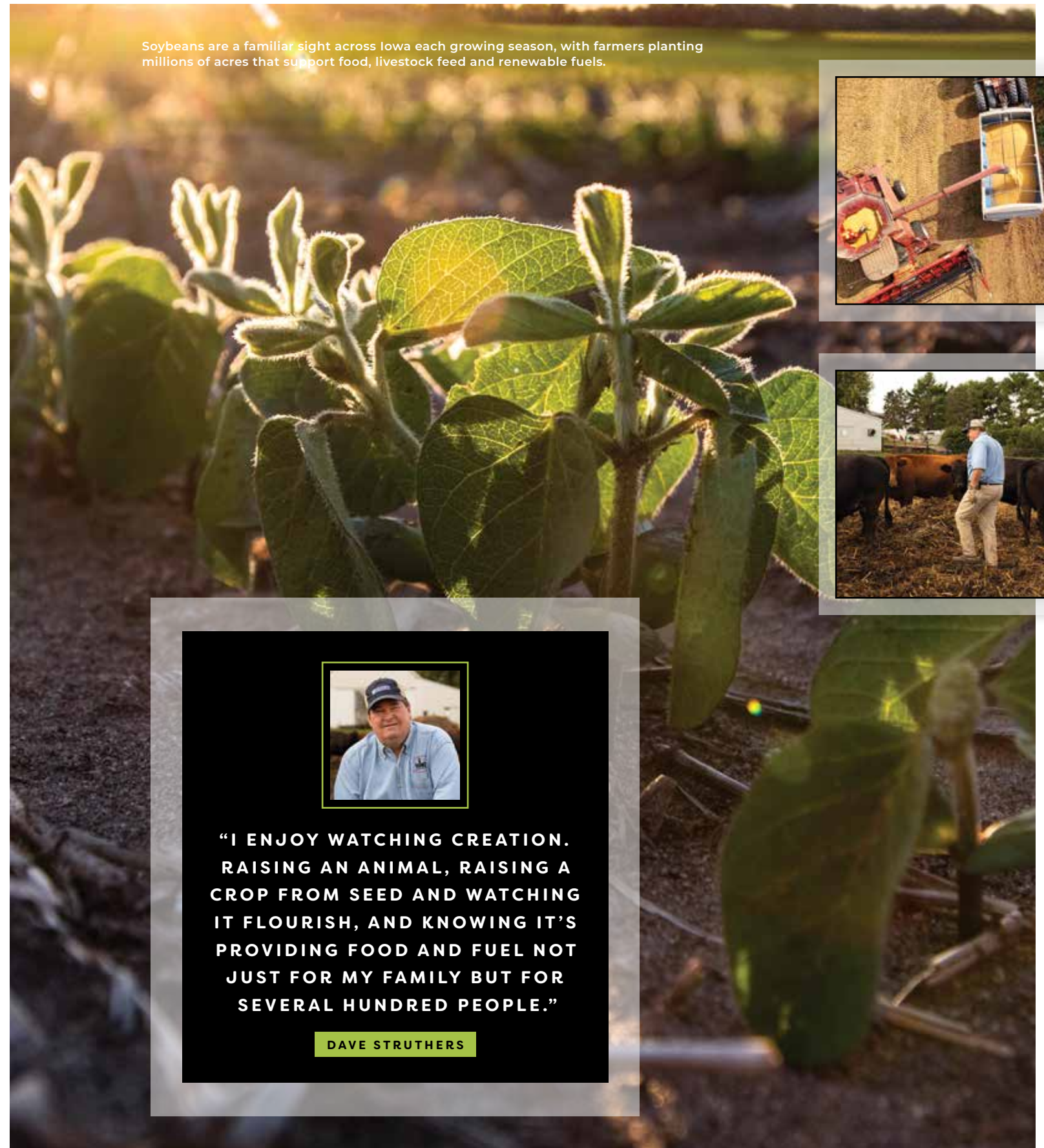
DONNIE & EMMA CONWAY
 Melrose, Iowa

Cattle, corn, soybeans, hay



DEAN FRAZER
 Conrad, Iowa

Pigs, corn, soybeans



Soybeans are a familiar sight across Iowa each growing season, with farmers planting millions of acres that support food, livestock feed and renewable fuels.



“I ENJOY WATCHING CREATION. RAISING AN ANIMAL, RAISING A CROP FROM SEED AND WATCHING IT FLOURISH, AND KNOWING IT’S PROVIDING FOOD AND FUEL NOT JUST FOR MY FAMILY BUT FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE.”

DAVE STRUTHERS



Iowa beef producers combine generations of experience with modern practices to raise cattle and provide high-quality beef.



“WE LOVE WORKING WITH LIVESTOCK. THERE’S NOTHING BETTER THAN SEEING A FRESH BABY CALF ON GREEN GRASS.”

DONNIE & EMMA CONWAY

Q: What does a “normal” day look like for you during the spring season?

the pigs before I head to the field. I farm alongside my younger brother and my nephew. We run two planters. My nephew handles soybean planting, and I’m in charge of planting corn.”

- DAVE S.

eye on our herd. We try to be as hands-off as possible — let the cows be cows and hope for minimal intervention. Our mornings start with getting our two children ready for school and daycare. Then it’s chore time. The cows are always our priority before we head to the field.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“A typical day includes loading pigs around 6 a.m., chores, then heading to the field to plant corn, soybeans or seed corn. We run two planters simultaneously and spray our own crop protection products immediately after planting.”

- DEAN F.

“If it’s good planting weather, I’m up early, eating on the go. I feed

“Springtime is when we start calving, which can mean late nights and long hours keeping an

Q: What’s one part of your job most people don’t realize takes as much time or energy as it does?

our crop mix, choose the right hybrids and determine when and where to sell them at a profitable price. As farmers, we track prices, decide how much to sell and must always be ready to pivot.

It’s not like having a salaried job with a set pay scale. There are no guarantees. Our income depends entirely on the prices we get and how much we produce.”

- DAVE S.

“All the operational planning. We evaluate our decisions from a whole farm level to maximize what we’re doing with our cattle and row crop enterprises from both an environmental and economic standpoint. For example, we like to experiment with incorporating other crops — like milo — as an additional forage source for our cattle to graze during the winter.

And machinery maintenance. Oftentimes,

- DEAN F.

you’re a mechanic first and a farmer second.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“Scheduling and logistics take far more time than most people realize. We schedule pigs to packers two to three weeks out, while weaned pigs arrive every three to four weeks from our sow cooperative. Coordinating people, pigs and equipment, especially in spring and fall, can get hectic.”

- DEAN F.

Q: Farming is sometimes a solitary job, but no one does it completely alone. What does your support system look like, and how important is it to your work and well-being?

“My wife takes care of our home, makes sure I’m fed and helps with logistics. My brother, nephew and I all share responsibilities, and I can rely on them. That support system is really important to keeping things going.”

- DAVE S.

“We’ve had a working relationship with a neighboring farm family since high school, and that partnership has

continued over the years. We’re now moving toward sharing equipment and other resources, which is a big step forward for both of our operations.

Emma’s parents are also a huge help, whether it’s watching the kids or doing chores like cutting brush or raking hay. And we’ve been fortunate to have the support of a part-time hired hand.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“The family supports each other and works well together. Before that, I leaned on ag friends who understood the stress. I’ve also worked with the same veterinarian for more than 30 years, and in pork production, you build strong relationships with suppliers and fellow producers. You rely on each other in this close-knit industry.”

- DEAN F.

Q: What does environmental stewardship look like for your operation?

“Stewardship means ensuring the land remains productive for generations to come. I have a son who would

like to farm someday, and other nephews too, so we want to make sure it’s left in good condition for them. That includes paying attention to water and air quality, utilizing nutrients on a calculated basis and reducing soil erosion.”

- DAVE S.

“We’ve used programs like EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives

Program) to help us cost-share for improvements such as cross-fencing, installing water systems and better utilizing our grass through managed grazing. We’ve also invested in conservation practices, such as building terraces and incorporating greater crop diversity into our rotation.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“Stewardship is part of our daily work. We raise our own pigs and use their manure to fertilize much of our corn and soybean acres, in accordance with DNR regulations. That’s sustainability in action. We also use no-till and strip-till practices, cover crops, waterways, buffer strips and terraces to reduce erosion and protect water quality.”

- DEAN F.

Q: What do you wish consumers knew about the farms behind their food?

“There’s a pride instilled in how we care for our animals and the products we produce. In our

operation, most of our corn goes to feed our hogs and cattle, or to produce ethanol. Our soybeans are processed into soybean meal that’s then fed to our hogs. Agriculture creates a supportive, sustaining cycle.”

- DAVE S.

“It’s important to remember that even larger operations are

also family-run and owned, often with multiple generations involved. Different production practices all have their place in our industry because each meets the different demands of everyday families.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“Most of the protein people buy comes from multigenerational

family farms like ours. Despite growth, we still rely on the same husbandry skills passed down through generations to care for our animals. We also commit to the Pork Quality Assurance (PQA) program to ensure consumers receive a safe, high-quality product.”

- DEAN F.

Q: With all the different challenges outside your control, what motivates you to keep farming?

“I enjoy watching creation. Raising an animal, raising a crop from seed and watching it flourish, and knowing it’s providing food and fuel not just for my family but for several hundred people. I also enjoy the flexibility that comes with farming.”

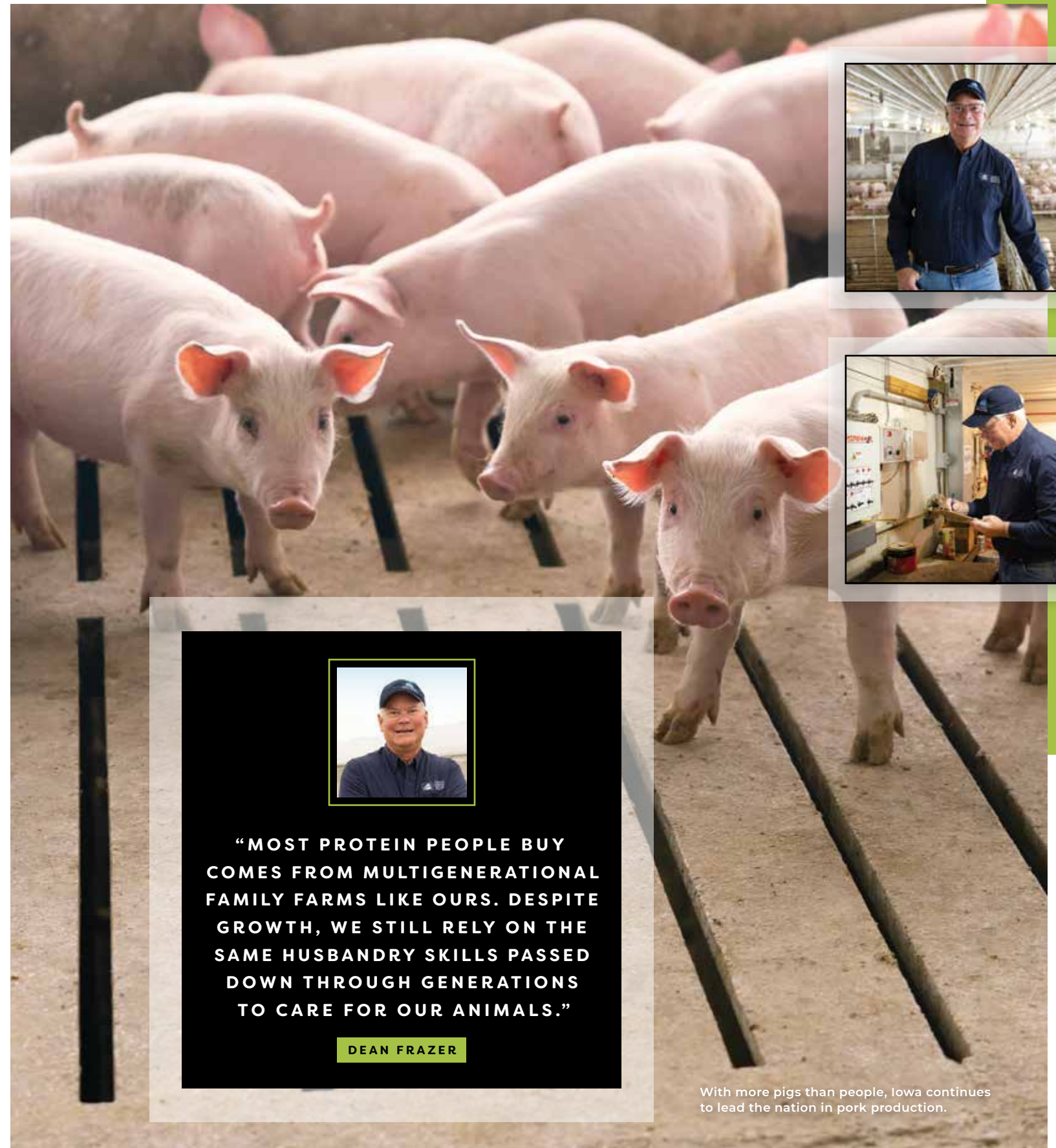
- DAVE S.

“We love working with livestock. There’s nothing better than seeing a fresh baby calf on green grass. And our kids love it, too. We enjoy taking them along with us and building something together as a family, something that can be theirs one day if they choose.”

- DONNIE & EMMA C.

“Working alongside my family every day is a big motivator. Farming is also about legacy. My family has been doing this for more than 155 years, and my son and daughter-in-law are continuing the tradition of hard work and giving back to the community, just as the generations before us.”

- DEAN F. 🌿



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DEAN FRAZER

With more pigs than people, Iowa continues to lead the nation in pork production.

Planning for the First Pass

A SNEAK PEEK INTO WHAT IT TAKES TO PREPARE FOR SPRING PLANTING.

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.

While the combines are parked and we wait for winter to loosen its grip, we step into the spring season with a renewed hope, a quiet optimism that may go unnoticed to the world that hasn't experienced a planting season. The upcoming months offer a fresh start, a chance to do a little better, to put our trust and faith in the soil again and to believe that hard work will be rewarded. Regardless of how last year ended, we know why we farm in the first place: confidence in tomorrow and the belief that something good is about to grow.

Much like a pro athlete prepares their body for the big game by practicing, eating well and staying disciplined, a farmer takes care of equipment, prepares the machinery for another season and does farm prep work in anticipation of "go time."

The prep work starts with a strong planting plan, and that involves

reviewing the field history and combining years of data to see what has worked best for that soil profile. Using a field software program like Granular, we assign each field a planting plan for a specific soybean or corn hybrid and a specific planting population (the number of seeds planted per acre), which can vary by field and by hybrid.

"WE KNOW WHY WE FARM IN THE FIRST PLACE: CONFIDENCE IN TOMORROW AND THE BELIEF THAT SOMETHING GOOD IS ABOUT TO GROW."

As needed, soil samples are pulled and sent to the lab to ensure we are feeding the soils appropriately with custom dry fertilizer mixes. As the ground heaves (multiple days of freeze/thaw), the soil is conditioned and breaks down tiny fertilizer granules, naturally breaking up compacted areas and reducing the need for mechanical tillage.

Today's hybrids allow for earlier planting windows while a seed treatment protects the seed from pests that might snack on it before it emerges. Soil temperatures around 65 degrees are ideal, but some



"SOIL IS A LIVING ECOSYSTEM AND IS A FARMER'S MOST PRECIOUS ASSET. A FARMER'S PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE HEALTH OF HIS OR HER SOIL." - HOWARD WARREN BUFFETT

planters will be seen when the temperature is 52 to 53 degrees F (and rising). Any temperature below 50 degrees F produces a cold, wet soil profile that can cause the seed to slowly emerge and corkscrew. We want to see a robust and even emergence. Delayed plants will not keep up and will waste vital nutrients in the soil, competing with their neighbors.

A great deal of time is spent prepping the fields with

machinery, receiving the new seed order and having farmers mentally and physically prepare. Different generations approach this season in different ways, but a common theme is keeping their faith strong and reading new publications, articles, podcasts or online content.

Looking ahead, the future of farming is driven by resilience, stewardship and hope. Every decision made today — every seed, every field — reflects a

belief that tomorrow matters. The challenges will never disappear, but neither will the determination of those who work the land. With each new season comes another opportunity to build something lasting, to leave the soil better than we found it and to trust that the work done now will sustain families, communities and generations yet to come. The future is not just something we wait for — it's something we plant. 🌱

