

WINTER 2026

fresh pickings


BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IOWA FOOD & FAMILY PROJECT

IMMERSED IN
RAISING A LEGACY,
BITE BY BITE

WINTER WONDERS
AWAIT IN IOWA'S
LOESS HILLS

HOW ONE CHEF
FEEDS KIDS AND
FUELS CURIOSITY

GROWING BEAUTY YEAR-ROUND
WITH HYDROPONIC FARMING



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Welcome

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

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

WE NETWORK WITH NEARLY 35 FOOD, FARMING AND HEALTHY LIVING ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE PROUD OF IOWA'S HOMEGROWN FOODS AND HOMETOWN VALUES.

YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PARTNERS
ON PAGE 5.

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Features

14 **WHEN IT MATTERS MOST**
ISU Extension connects Iowans to research, education and experiences to help address challenges unique to our state.

20 **CHEF JOE: IOWA BRED, EUROPEAN MADE, HOME GROWN**
A world-trained chef brings fresh, flavorful and nutritious meals to Ankeny students while inspiring lifelong healthy habits.

24 **LAND, LIVESTOCK AND LEGACY**
Marek Land and Livestock is a century farm in Eastern Iowa that's focused on a diversified and beefed-up farming operation.

30 **NO FIELD, NO PROBLEM**
Discover how hydroponic farming uses small spaces to grow abundant yields and deliver fresh crops to more consumers.

34 **COOK LOW & SLOW**
Warm up winter with easy, slow-cooked meals that bring out the best in Iowa-grown ingredients.

38 **WINTER WANDERINGS**
Experience the magic of Iowa's Loess Hills in winter — from breathtaking views to fascinating historic sites.

42 **BIOSECURITY BEAMS BRIGHT ON IOWA FARMS**
From lasers that deter wild birds to beagles that sniff out disease, discover how Iowa farmers and scientists strengthen biosecurity from barn to border.

In Every Issue

7
EDITOR'S NOTE
A MAGAZINE GROWN IN IOWA

8
FAMILY TABLE
LETTUCE WRAP IT UP!

11
WELLNESS TIPS
SMALL CHANGES, BIG RESULTS

12
POINT OF INTEREST
THE MACHINE SHED

48
FRESH PICKED
THE BEST FREEZER IS A FULL ONE

ON THE COVER

Edible flowers, one of the many crops grown at Prairie Meadows Wesley Life Meals on Wheels Hydroponic Farm.

WINTER 2026 | ISSUE NO. 28

EXPERIENCE *life* ON THE FARM WITHOUT LIVING ON THE FARM.



Follow along for in-depth stories that
bring modern agriculture to life.

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fresh pickings

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FRESH PICKINGS MAGAZINE

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A Magazine Grown in Iowa



Today, Fresh Pickings is entering an exciting new chapter. As we continue to evolve, we're committed to delivering even more of what makes this magazine special — thoughtful storytelling, practical recipes, beautiful photography and meaningful insights that make you feel closer to Iowa agriculture. We're also exploring new ways to bring those stories to life, both in print and beyond the page.

Nourish the Stories You Love

This is where your support truly matters. Help us share Iowa's stories by choosing a paid subscription to Fresh Pickings magazine. Becoming a paid subscriber isn't just about receiving a magazine; it's an investment in the stories and communities that define who we are. Your contribution helps ensure we can continue telling authentic, in-depth stories about the people who grow, raise and craft the food that nourishes our state. It also allows us to expand our reach by bringing the magazine to more Iowans.

When you choose to support Fresh Pickings, you join a community of readers who value connection and help sustain the beauty and identity of Iowa's agricultural landscape.

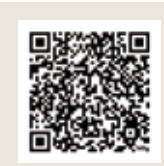
Thank you for being on this journey with us, for welcoming these stories into your home and for believing in the power of local, meaningful storytelling. Together, we can continue to grow something truly special.

Enjoy the issue,

Lydia Zerby

Fresh Pickings began with a simple idea: connect Iowans with the people, places and stories behind their food. In the early days, the magazine was a small but heartfelt project — a bridge between farm families and the neighbors who enjoyed the fruits of their labor. We set out to create something honest, approachable and rooted in the values that define our state: hard work, hospitality and a deep appreciation for the land.

Over the years, Fresh Pickings has grown into much more than a magazine. It has become a trusted companion in kitchens, classrooms, farm offices and homes across Iowa. Issue after issue, we've expanded the stories we tell and the people we feature. We've highlighted innovations in crop and livestock farming, celebrated holiday food traditions featuring Iowa-inspired ingredients and introduced readers to farm families. All the while, our mission has remained constant: encourage connection, spark curiosity and help Iowans feel informed and proud of the state's agricultural roots.



Activate your paid subscription today and help Fresh Pickings magazine bring Iowa's farms, food and stories to life — one issue at a time.

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Lettuce Wrap It Up!

BRIGHT, SAVORY AND HANDS-ON – SESAME SOY TURKEY WRAPS MAKE MEALTIME FRESH, FUN AND FULL OF FLAVOR.

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.

Growing up, a special meal I enjoyed on the farm was my mom's stir-fry, served over jasmine rice. The abundance of crisp, tender vegetables and Asian-inspired flavors was a treat for my taste buds and a break away from the standard meat and potatoes menu. There's something deeply satisfying about a meal that's equal parts fresh and flavorful. Sesame soy ground turkey lettuce wraps are light, yet filling, packed with texture, and brimming with flavor that tastes indulgent while being surprisingly healthy. This quick and easy meal will find its way into your dinner rotation in no time!

The magic starts with the ground turkey. When sautéed with a splash of soy sauce, sesame oil, garlic and a bit of ginger, the turkey soaks up the umami notes that make Asian-inspired dishes so craveable. The addition of water chestnuts adds crunch, while green onions and a sprinkle of sesame seeds lend freshness and savory depth. This is the time to buy the knob of fresh ginger, as it really shines in the dish. Grate the whole knob, and freeze the remainder in a zip-top freezer bag to use later.

Spoon the rich turkey mixture into crisp butter lettuce leaves,

and suddenly dinner feels bright and interactive. Each wrap is customizable. You can pile them high or keep them light, drizzle with a little extra soy or spicy chili sauce and eat them by hand. It's a meal that feels playful, like street food meets weeknight cooking, and kids absolutely love them!

Beyond taste, these wraps are a nutritional win. Turkey provides lean protein to fuel muscles and keep hunger in check. The lettuce adds hydration, fiber and crunch without feeling heavy. Sesame oil contains healthy fats that support heart and brain function, while ginger and garlic bring anti-inflammatory and immune-boosting benefits.

Pairing the wraps with steamed edamame makes the meal even better. These perfectly pop-able, vibrant green soybeans are loaded with protein, fiber and antioxidants. A sprinkle of sea salt or a side of soy sauce for dipping brings out their natural sweetness and gives you a perfect salty-savory bite.

Quick to make, easy to customize and endlessly tasty, this simple duo might just become your new favorite weeknight meal. 🌿



Sesame Soy Turkey Lettuce Wraps

- 1 tablespoon soybean oil
- 1 pound ground turkey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tablespoon freshly grated ginger or ⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 can (8 ounces) water chestnuts, finely diced
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- ¼ cup hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons roasted red chili paste or sriracha
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced, divided
- Pinch of salt
- 12 butter lettuce leaves
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds

Heat 1 tablespoon of soybean oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the ground turkey, minced garlic

and grated ginger to the pan and cook for about 6 minutes or until turkey is nicely browned. Add water chestnuts and sesame oil, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, rice vinegar, roasted chili paste and honey. Cook an additional minute and remove from heat. Stir in green onions.

Add about ¼ cup turkey mixture to each lettuce leaf and garnish with sesame seeds. Serve immediately.



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Small Changes, Big Results

10 Iowa-Inspired Healthy Habits

The **Live Healthy Iowa 10-Week Wellness Challenge** is all about building simple routines that add up to meaningful change. The good news? You don't have to overhaul your entire lifestyle to feel healthier and more energized. In fact, many of the most effective habits start small and tie naturally to the foods, farmers and flavors celebrated by the Iowa Food & Family Project.

By Lydia Zerby

Here are **10 Iowa-inspired habits** to try during the challenge — one for each week — to help you feel your best:

1 Start your day with a protein boost.

Eggs, yogurt or a slice of whole-grain toast with peanut butter can help keep you full and focused.

2 Add one more veggie to your plate.

Whether it's a handful of spinach in scrambled eggs or extra carrots in a beef barley soup, tiny additions build big nutritious wins.

3 Drink more water.

Winter air is dehydrating. Keep a reusable bottle nearby and try flavoring it with berries or cucumber slices for variety.

4 Try a new movement routine.

A 10-minute walk, a short online workout or stretching before bed all count. Pick something realistic for your season of life.

5 Cook a new recipe at home each week.

Use a Fresh Pickings recipe or try a local ingredient you haven't cooked with before, like spaghetti squash or ground turkey.

6 Focus on lean proteins.

Iowa-raised beef, pork, dairy and poultry can be part of a healthy diet when choosing leaner cuts and balanced portions.

7 Snack smart.

Pair protein and produce — an apple with cheese, Greek yogurt with honey and berries or veggies with hummus.

8 Read labels with confidence.

Choose foods with ingredients you recognize and that are balanced in nutrition. Iowa producers work hard to deliver trustworthy options.

9 Get outside when you can.

Even a few minutes of fresh air can improve mood, energy and focus — yes, even in an Iowa winter!

10 Celebrate progress, not perfection.

Small steps add up. Treat yourself to a new recipe, a wellness class or a quiet moment to appreciate how far you've come.

By weaving these small habits into your routine, you'll lay the foundation for a healthier, more energized year — long after the challenge ends. 🌿



HOMEGROWN HOSPITALITY

MAKE A STOP AT THE
MACHINE SHED FOR A BEST-OF-THE-MIDWEST
DINING EXPERIENCE.

By Haley Banwart

Machine Shed server, Kenzie, balances a tray of fresh and hearty breakfast fare during a busy morning at The Shed.

For nearly five decades, The Machine Shed has served as a time-honored tribute to the heartland and the people who keep it running — American farmers.

Since opening its doors in 1978, the farm-to-table inspired family of restaurants has remained true to founder Mike Whalen's original vision: To celebrate Midwest farming values through homemade comfort food and hospitality.

Every Guest is a Friend

"The Shed," as it's fondly known, was born out of a simple, yet enduring, concept to create a place where people could gather and enjoy the flavors and fellowship that define farm life.

"Every guest is treated as a friend. That's the mentality we live by, and it goes back to farming communities and the idea of sitting down for a shared meal," says Brandon Uehran, vice president of operations with Heart of America Group. "We've always stuck to our roots, and that's what has allowed us to be successful."

Today, Heart of America Group operates five Machine Shed locations across the Midwest, including the original restaurant in Davenport and the iconic Urbandale location, a familiar landmark situated between Iowa's major interstates.

Scratch-Made & Proud of It

Serving breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, The Shed has become a beloved dining destination known for its classic homestyle cooking. The menu hasn't changed much in nearly 50 years, but according to Uehran, that's precisely the point.

"We've been consistent since day one in giving customers the best experience we can and serving some

of the same dishes everyone knows and loves," he explains. "That includes our famous baked potato soup and our scratch-prepared mashed potatoes still made with lumps from the original recipe."

Whether it's sourcing sweet corn and cheese locally or being meticulous about meat selection, The Shed continues to prioritize quality ingredients, including some of the best farm-raised pork, turkey and eggs that have earned regional and national recognition.

"You didn't really see pork on menus before The Shed," says Uehran. "We were one of the first restaurants to feature pork prominently, and now our pork loin and Iowa chop are among our award-winning dishes."

Rooted in Relationships

Over the years, The Shed has found thoughtful ways to evolve while preserving its traditions and character. Seasonal menu features complement long-time classics, and small updates — like the addition of wine service — have kept the dining experience fresh and relevant without changing what makes it special.

While the recipes have stood the test of time, Uehran says the real secret to The Shed's success is its people. Many staff members have been part of the team for decades, some since the doors first opened, and others with multiple generations of their family employed.

"The Shed isn't just a restaurant, it's home," shares Uehran. "Our people are the heartbeat of our company. They play a critical role in creating relationships and an experience that keeps guests wanting to come back for more." 🌿



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when it matters most

ISU Extension and Outreach helps Iowans find strength and resilience.

By April Pearson

ISU Extension and Outreach (Extension) connects Iowans with education, research and expertise to help address challenges unique to our state. With support from dedicated specialists and a presence in every county, Extension strengthens communities by exposing Iowans to Iowa State resources. We sat down with Health and Human Sciences Manager Tammy Jacobs and Behavioral Health State Specialist Dr. David Brown to learn more about how they help Iowans.



BROWN: Extension is a broad organization comprised of four programs: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Community and Economic Development, 4-H Youth Development, and Health and Human Sciences.

Health and Human Sciences is further split into two areas: Nutrition and Health, and Family Well-Being, which is where Tammy and I are. We have a large scope, covering early childhood to end-of-life issues.



JACOBS: Extension is the arm of the University that reaches out to the community to provide educational offerings through those four programs. We have an office

Top: Dr. David Brown, behavioral health state specialist
Bottom: Tammy Jacobs, health and human sciences manager



Farmers experience higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression due to weather, markets and workload — making mental health education essential in agriculture.

in every county, with specialists from each program. Approximately 870 faculty and staff support the statewide initiative.

coping with crisis

Farming is a stressful, unpredictable job that can negatively impact mental health. Brown and Jacobs work to create a supportive community around the farmer, providing practical information, relevant resources and access to qualified professionals.

JACOBS: Since 1985, we've run the Iowa Concern Hotline, which began because of the farm crisis but has since evolved to meet the needs of more Iowans across the state. We're available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There's always somebody there to answer the call.

Our staff is trained in stress counseling, because there are many stressors in a farmer's life. We talk about their stressors and get them started on self-care, because we know that if they take better care of themselves on

Farming is a stressful, unpredictable job that can negatively impact mental health.

“It’s about building a community that understands the signs of distress, knows how to respond and can point farmers in the right direction.”

DR. DAVID BROWN

a regular basis, they’re going to be able to handle future crisis situations.

There are also on-staff attorneys who, at no charge, can help explain legal situations. They don’t represent or advise, but they can provide insight. We work closely with the Center for Ag Law and Taxation, especially when creating succession plans. It can be difficult for farmers to transition the legacy they created.

Through the program, a farming counselor can work with individuals on planning and determine if insurance is required.

BROWN: We knew there was a barrier to farm workers seeking mental health care, so around



Hands-on trainings help Iowans learn in a more personal and practical way.

2019, with funding from USDA NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture), we began providing stress-assistance programming to farmers and farm advocates across Iowa.

Mental Health First Aid helps community members identify and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges. *Question, Persuade, Refer* teaches people how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis. *Relationships Can Heal: Knowing the Farmer Client* trains mental health and health care providers on farm culture, so they have a better idea of how to communicate with farmers and farm family members in a way that won’t inadvertently push them away from their services.

Our programming isn’t necessarily for the farmer; it’s for individuals who support the farmer, because we know that a person is more likely to seek help if someone close to them suggests it.

JACOBS: A lot of times, we don’t hear from the farmers directly. We hear from children. We hear from spouses. We’ve even heard from concerned bankers who want to know how they can help.

BROWN: It’s about building a community that understands the signs of distress, knows how to respond and can point farmers in the right direction for mental health resources. And of course, one of those resources is the Iowa Concern Hotline. If we can get a farm worker to call the Iowa Concern Hotline, that’s a win.

weathering the storm

In 2024, Iowa Concern responded to more than 4,700 calls related to stress, agricultural issues and natural disasters. After the tornado in Greenfield and flooding in Northwest Iowa, Extension offered youth day camps designed to help kids process their experiences. After Spencer was flooded, Extension served meals for more than 1,000 people and provided educational resources. After the Lyon County fairgrounds were damaged by flood, Extension found alternative locations for 4-H and FFA judging events and livestock shows.

BROWN: In the fall of 2024, we did a lot of training for our programs: *Mental Health First Aid; Question, Persuade, Refer; Self-Care Strategies; and Money Smart*. From October 2024 to August 2025, we conducted

Top: *Mental Health First Aid* training is designed for those who support farmers.



Bottom: An ongoing assistance event was held in Greenfield one year after the devastating tornado.



In 2024, Iowa Concern responded to more than 4,700 calls related to stress, agricultural issues and natural disasters.



77 training sessions for about 1,700 people across the 21 counties affected by the disasters. We brought in our farm financial analysts to conduct outreach to agribusinesses and to provide one-on-one financial education. We obviously promoted the Iowa Concern hotline. Additionally, we launched a website and created social media content to reach even more communities.

JACOBS: Another thing we did later in the year in Spencer and Greenfield was to collaborate with the Rural Action Partnership on events that offered free resources and information. We partnered with many organizations — including Childcare Resource and Referral, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and the Iowa Insurance Division — to create a one-stop shop for people impacted by the disasters. 4-H staff and volunteers had activities

“A lot of times, we don’t hear from the farmers directly. We hear from children. We hear from spouses. We’ve even heard from concerned bankers who want to know how they can help.”

TAMMY JACOBS

If you are struggling, call or text the Iowa Concern Hotline at 800-447-1985. It’s free, confidential and available 24/7. Language interpretation is available.

for kids, and there were speakers on mental health, finance, insurance and legal issues.

This was a way to provide ongoing assistance, because there’s always help right after a disaster. Then, months down the road, when people finally have their heads on straight and realize, “Oh, I don’t have my social security card,” we can help them keep moving forward.

We held Greenfield’s event on the anniversary of the tornado. They brought the whole community together and hosted a large remembrance celebration. They had free breakfast, lunch and supper, as well as various activities throughout the day. Individuals who’d been impacted still had a lot of recovery to do, but they came to the celebration, and I think it helped them in their healing. It was a very moving day.

supporting all Iowans

This is just a small fraction of the work Brown and Jacobs do in their relatively small corner of Extension, which offers all Iowans workshops, courses and events addressing youth innovation, food insecurity, technology and the arts, professional development, conservation, community leadership, and more. Yet Jacobs and Brown’s impact is exponential, reaching individuals, families and communities across the state.

BROWN: Between Tammy and me, we have just done an amazing amount of work with all our staff, supporting farmers over the last seven years. I think we’ve touched most commodity groups, most farm groups and many co-ops in Iowa with everything we’ve done. We’re excited to continue this work to support Iowa’s farmers and farm community.

JACOBS: There’s still a lot more work to do. 🌱



To explore the many opportunities Extension offers, visit extension.iastate.edu.



Iowa Bred, European Made, Home Grown

CHEF JOE

HE'S COOKED FOR THE PRIME MINISTER OF FRANCE — NOW HE'S COOKING FOR IOWA'S NEXT GENERATION.

By Anna Toot

What do the Prime Minister of France, tourists visiting San Francisco's famous Fisherman's Wharf, customers at the Iowa State Fair Cluck 'N' Coop stand and 10,000 students in the Ankeny Community School District (ACSD) have in common? Chef Joe.

Rather, they have all eaten a dish prepared by Joe Weisz, who's affectionately known as Chef Joe. As the executive chef at ACSD, he's famous for turning simple ingredients into memorable meals.

The 43-year-old has a laundry list of accomplishments: French- and Italian-trained gourmet chef, restaurateur, cruise ship chef, sushi master, pâtissier and micro farmer. The list goes on.

Culinary Experience Across the Atlantic and Back

Weisz traces his success to his Iowa beginnings. A Johnston native, his mother's home-cooked meals were so good that his family only dined out twice a year.

"My mom is a phenomenal cook and had fresh meals on the table for us every day. That's where my passion for homemade meals and fresh cuisine began," Weisz says.

After briefly pursuing education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Weisz enrolled in culinary school in Denver, Colorado, where he learned menu development, knife skills, meat preparation and more. He also had his first of many celebrity encounters, rubbing elbows with Julia Child's pastry chef.

From there, he took his talents to Asti, Italy, and Marseille, France. In Marseille, he gained an even deeper appreciation for fresh produce, seafood and meat.

"Every morning, we traveled to the Old Port of Marseille for the fresh-caught fish and veggies we

were cooking with for the day. In the evening, I staged at a restaurant inside the Les Bords De Mer Hotel, where we cooked for the Prime Minister of France, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, every Friday night."

Once he perfected his fine dining skills in Europe, Weisz bounced from Denver to Hawaii to San Francisco. There, he prepared high-end cuisine, learned the art of sushi and improved his pastry skills while working 18-hour days on Fisherman's Wharf.

The jobs were exciting and glamorous, but something was calling Weisz and his wife, Julie, back to Iowa: starting a family.

Food With a Local Touch

In 2009, the couple moved to an acreage outside of Panora, where Weisz nurtured his passion for the outdoors through gardening, raising beef and poultry, fishing and the occasional four-wheel ride. Four kids later, he proudly bears the title of "dad" alongside his other accolades.

After years of adventure, a catering gig in Ames, and owning and operating P.J.'s Diner in Panora, Weisz found his calling in education. He started as executive chef for the Dallas Center-Grimes School District and later joined ACSD.

"Entering this world felt like a full-circle moment for me. My first idea of what I wanted in life was to be an educator, and now I have been handed the opportunity to be a chef and an educator. That really spoke to me."

In Ankeny, Weisz manages 12 kitchens, providing food for 18 schools, and runs the district's catering business. His menu development is creative, incorporating fresh ingredients and scratch- and batch-cooking.

"We avoid canned or frozen food, and we don't add a lot of sugar and salt. Instead, we focus on adding high-quality flavors and seasonings. You would be



shocked by the kids' favorite dishes — for example, they can't get enough roasted cauliflower."

By incorporating "Try it Thursdays," students can sample foods they may not have eaten before. Recently, Center Grove Orchard in Cambridge sent enough hand-picked apples for every student in the district.

"Most people have had an apple before. But most kids eat apple slices instead of the whole apple in their hand. Even though it seems simple, inspiring them to try new things and learn more about the food they eat is incredibly rewarding."

Weisz sources ingredients from American vendors, with less than 5% of ACSD's food purchased from international distributors. Much of it comes straight from Iowa businesses.

By building healthy habits for students, Weisz's meals introduce kindergarteners to new foods that will hopefully stay with them throughout adulthood.

"We're focused on incorporating nutritious foods into kids' diets as soon as possible. When kids start eating fresh, homemade food in elementary school, it becomes part of their normal diet."

His love for healthy, fresh food makes his partnership with the Iowa Egg Council (IEC) a natural fit.

An Egg-cellent Partnership

A diet that includes eggs is one of the easiest ways to eat healthy. Each egg has 6 grams of protein, is rich in healthy fats and contains vitamins and minerals essential for brain development and health. Eggs are also versatile in the kitchen.

"As a chef, one of the first things you learn is that there are 100 ways to cook an egg, according to an old French saying. I like to say, 'Respect the egg.'"

Promoting the benefits of eggs and egg products is a top priority for the IEC — an agricultural checkoff organization supported by Iowa poultry farmers. Iowa is an egg production hub, accounting for about 1 in 5 eggs consumed in the U.S. each year.

The IEC asked Weisz to develop unique recipes for the organization's flagship sales event: the Cluck 'N' Coop booth at the Iowa State Fair.

"Most people know the Iowa Egg Council from our 'free egg on a stick' booth, but we wanted to create a booth that offers creative egg- and chicken-based recipes," said Elycia VanVacter, director of health and education with North Central Poultry Association (NCPA), an IEC partner. "In the past couple of years, Chef Joe has taken the Cluck 'N' Coop booth to the next level."

Some of the recipes Weisz has developed include jalapeño popper egg salad, crab rangoons, hand-breaded chicken sandwiches and flavored egg skewers, many of which attract repeat customers.

Like all his accomplishments, Weisz approaches the Cluck 'N' Coop with tenacity and an appreciation for freshness and nutrition.

"Chef Joe has demonstrated a great deal of commitment to making Cluck 'N' Coop a success," said Kevin Stiles, former CEO and executive director of NCPA and IEC and current agricultural consultant.

"From organizing and setting up the trailer, to the menu planning, product procurement and staffing, Joe truly runs the business."

The Future is Bright

Looking ahead, Weisz wants to continue nurturing the Ankeny community while educating students about the importance of quality food.

"I see myself retiring as the executive chef in Ankeny," Weisz said. "My big picture is to continue in this role and be happy knowing that the generations of students I served were fed good food and provided a quality education that set them up for success in the future."

As for what-ifs, Weisz said if he could start over again, he would be a farmer — not shocking given his love for the outdoors.

But as history shows, if there's anyone who can do it all in this lifetime, it's Chef Joe. 🌿

"Try it Thursdays"
ALLOW STUDENTS TO SAMPLE UNIQUE FOODS THEY MAY NOT HAVE EATEN BEFORE.

LAND, LIVESTOCK AND LEGACY

HOW ONE FARM FAMILY IS FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE BY HONORING THE PAST.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers

Famed American novelist Wendell Berry once said, “We have neglected the truth that a good farmer is a craftsman of the highest order, a kind of artist.”

Farmers are indeed craftspeople, artists and visionaries. The creativity, patience and focus it takes to run a successful farm operation are often learned through significant dedication of time and ingenuity. It’s usually inherited, part of one’s lineage and heritage.

That is certainly the case for Tim and Heather Marek of Marek Land and Livestock. Tim Marek’s family has been

farmers in eastern Iowa, just outside Riverside, since 1896. Heather, Tim’s wife, comes from a century farm just on the other side of the county.

Together, they have four daughters who have grown up showing pigs, sheep, goats and cattle. The family recently welcomed the seventh generation of farmers — a grandson — who will have the opportunity to continue this rich agricultural tradition, rooted in raising and caring for their land and animals.

“Tim has always loved animals,” laughs Heather. “Going to the local sale barns from a young age with his grandpa whenever he could. And then he started taking a real interest in genetics in junior high and high school. He was showing

hogs and cattle at the county fair, and hogs at the state fair and nationally as well. You name an animal; he has probably had it at some point in his life.”

Generational Farming

The focus for Marek Land and Livestock is right in its namesake. The land their family and animals live on is to be tended to and nurtured for future generations. And their animals are to be exceptionally bred and well cared for.

“As far as a mission for the farm, we’re really passionate about teaching the new generations,” Tim explains. “We want to be able to maintain and care for our land. When opportunities arise to grow, we will be able to have all generations involved.”

The Mareks steward a century-old family farm founded in 1896.





A variety of menu favorites at the Northside Diner and Café Dodici feature the Marek's beef.

There is significant involvement from the entire family. Like most family-run farms, everyone pitches in to help. In addition to farming about 1,500 acres of corn and soybeans between Tim, his dad and brother, Tim and Heather specialize in breeding Hereford-Angus cattle. They run a 200-head cow-calf operation of Hereford-Angus. This is a cross between British breed Hereford cattle and Scottish breed Angus cattle, yielding a tender, flavor-filled cut of meat.

Tim has a background in genetics and breeding. After attending Iowa State University, where he was on their livestock judging team, and years of hands-on experience, Tim ventured into Hereford-Angus breeding.

“We’ve always liked genetics, and as our cow herd evolved, we’ve tried many different things,” Tim explains. We’ve looked at a lot of different breeds of cattle, and the more I did it, the more black and white it got that British-bred cattle are going to grade and marble better. They’re the ones that are going to basically create a better eating experience and have great maternal and economic traits.”

Tim goes on to say that this specific breed also has a wealth of data — its expected progeny difference (EPD) — that helps producers better understand the animal’s genetic worth. This data can help improve decision-making on weaning, feed efficiency, reproductive and maternal traits, and other characteristics, enabling the farmer to better understand the herd. Downstream effects of using the EPD can include improved herd genetics, greater predictability and better alignment with targeted market needs.

Top-Tier Steers

For Marek Land and Livestock, this has resulted in a healthy and happy herd that produces a premier cut of beef. The cattle roam the pastures surrounding the farm, where they are free to graze. Tim also moves the cattle to enjoy the alfalfa and rye cover crops that are used rotationally in their row-crop fields, which also plays into the Marek’s focus on land stewardship and sustainability. This means the soil is naturally enriched while providing a healthy, renewable food source for the cattle.

“The longer I’m grazing cattle on the fields — whether they are corn one year or soybeans the next — my yields just continue to get better,” says Tim. “That rye is getting processed through a cow and spread back over the field. I think it’s doing great things for infiltration and soil health.”

It’s this ecosystem that creates ideal conditions for both cattle and crops. By focusing on a diversified operation and using all components together, the Mareks are sustainably creating opportunities for their crops and cows to thrive.

After thriving on pasture, the cattle are finished on a corn-based grain ration that creates a rich, distinctive flavor that Marek beef has built its reputation on. Around 15 months of age, the cattle are processed nearby at a state and federally inspected locker.

It’s this commitment to pasture-raised cows that are free to graze and then,



CUSTOMERS LOVE BEING ABLE TO EAT SOMETHING THAT COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE PASTURE TO THEIR PLATES.

(Left to right:) Heather Marek, Isabella Santoro and Jen Santoro at Northside Diner in Washington.

when the time comes, finished nearby, that has garnered the attention of local restaurants and customers.

Pasture to Plate

In nearby Washington, Marek beef can be found on restaurant menus. At Café Dodici and Northside Diner, it is a customer favorite. Lorraine Williams, along with her husband Ed, have owned and operated Café Dodici for 21 years, and have always longed for a local beef supplier.

“We have purveyors that bring us food, and we’re always trying to get in the best we can,” says Lorraine. “I have a finer dining restaurant, so I want to be sure that I have the best quality. So, it was really a dream come true, again, that the Mareks approached us and had this opportunity to share their beef with us.”

Lorraine shares that her customers love being able to eat something that comes straight from the pasture to their plates. As she walks through the dining room

**FARMERS ARE INDEED
CRAFTSPEOPLE, ARTISTS
AND VISIONARIES.**

each night, checking in with the full tables, she hears how happy people are with their different steaks and beef dishes.

“People want to support local,” she notes. “I think that’s the future. We must rely on each other, and supporting local farmers is something everyone is on board with.”

Isabella Santoro, owner, operator, and daughter of Lorraine, shares her mother’s sentiment about buying a quality product and supporting the local economy, which is one of the many reasons she purchases her beef from the Mareks.

“I want to buy local because we feel it’s more sustainable and environmentally conscious,” Isabella explains. “It cuts out multiple middlemen, and the quality is so much higher — they don’t use hormones. It’s reassuring to personally know the people raising and, ultimately, producing the meat we serve.”

Both Lorraine and Isabella explain how beneficial it is to know a local product’s consistency and quality compared to something shipped in from elsewhere. “Restaurants are an unpredictable business,” laughs Lorraine. “It’s reassuring to know we can call them, and they are so helpful. They have the same vision we do about community and sustainability, and it really drives what we all do.”

Farming For the Future

Like most farmers, Tim and Heather feel grateful to do this work. They also feel grateful that their four daughters and their husbands share the same love of farming and the passion needed to continue the work. The future is always uncertain, but the Mareks know that their families’ hard work and dedication are a blessing. 🌿

Lorraine Williams and Heather Marek enjoy supporting each other’s businesses in small-town Iowa.



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Behind the fresh salads at Clayton Farms is the work of team members like Sirena Lindsay, serving as a prep assistant.



Edible flowers boost both the taste and visual appeal of food.

No Field, No Problem.

HYDROPONIC FARMING ENABLES FARM-FRESH VEGGIES TO REACH EVEN MORE PEOPLE.

By Gretchen Westdal Centers

Imagine traveling back in time and telling a 19th-century farmer that one day they won't need to rely on the sun, rain or soil to grow their crops. They'd probably laugh at you and get back to using their wooden plow. Technological advancements in farming have made so much of farm work less dependent on finicky factors. True, many farmers still deal with ever-changing weather and pests, but with hydroponic farming, growing hearty, thriving crops can be done indoors with a few key elements.

Hydroponic Know-How

Hydroponic farming is a method of growing plants without soil, using a nutrient-rich water solution to deliver all the essential minerals directly to the plant roots. Instead of drawing nutrients from the soil, the plants are supported by an inert medium such as perlite, coconut coir, vermiculite or rockwool. This medium — some

of which are naturally occurring and others synthetic — helps anchor the plant while allowing oxygen and moisture to circulate freely.

The key advantage of hydroponics is control. Farmers and growers can precisely manage water, nutrients and light, allowing plants to grow faster and often produce higher yields than traditional soil farming. It's a sustainable and environmentally friendly option that uses up to 90% less water than standard agriculture, and it enables year-round growing in indoor or greenhouse environments regardless of weather or soil quality.

Hydroponic farming allows for more opportunities for people to engage with agriculture. From urban farming to supplying food deserts, hydroponics is an efficient and effective way to feed more people with the fresh foods that so many cannot access.



Lettuces (above) and microgreens grow year-round at Clayton Farms.

Wesley Life Meals on Wheels

Nowhere is this more apparent than at the Prairie Meadows Hydroponic Farm operated by and located on the campus of WesleyLife Meals on Wheels. WesleyLife's Meals on Wheels program has long been a lifeline for older adults in central Iowa. In 2023, that mission expanded — literally underground — with the launch of the hydroponic farm beneath the Meals on Wheels campus.

“We've always been passionate about health and well-being,” says Shannon Draayer, executive director of community nutrition. “We wanted to grow our own food and produce fresh, local greens that go directly to the people we serve.”

930

clients are currently served by WesleyLife's Meals on Wheels.



Hydroponics allows for soil-free cultivation of greens, offering a sustainable way to enjoy fresh, nutrient-rich salads.

Good Food Fast

Started in 2017 by Clayton Mooney and cofounder Danen Pool, Clayton Farms began with a simple mission: “better food for more people.” Frustrated by the inefficiencies of traditional indoor farms — either too large and unprofitable or too dependent on middlemen — they set out to create a model that grows food close to consumers while owning the entire supply chain.

“We wanted to literally grow food that went directly to people,” Mooney explains. After years of developing their own hydroponic technology, they opened their first “farm-to-table” restaurant in Ames, where salads and smoothies are made from greens harvested just minutes before serving. The model took off, serving more than 100,000 customers in under two years.

The farm operates a vertical hydroponic system that maximizes indoor space and efficiency. “It’s a controlled environment — no soil, just nutrient-rich water constantly circulating,” explains Amanda Kanehl, head grower. “We harvest about 150 pounds of leafy greens a week — sometimes more. The system lets us grow nutrient-dense varieties that taste great, not just what can survive outside.”

Beyond providing food, the urban farm strengthens community ties. Volunteers help with planting, harvesting and packing greens for Meals on Wheels and the Food Bank of Iowa. “It’s amazing to see people connecting — students, retirees even corporate groups,” Draayer says. “They come together over a shared mission to nourish others.”

WesleyLife's Meals on Wheels now serves around 930 clients, offering daily meal choices that include the greens grown on-site. “We had a woman call who hadn't eaten for three days,” Draayer recalls. “When she finally received her meal, she cried. That’s why we do this — because we’re more than a meal. We’re a connection.”

Looking ahead, the team hopes to expand into retail and inspire others to explore urban farming.

At the heart of their success is a closed-loop hydroponic system that uses a fraction of the water of traditional farming. “For every month we grow food in our equipment, we save one year’s worth of water compared to traditional farming,” Mooney says. “That’s about three gallons of water saved per meal.”

Consistency and environment are key. “You can have the best growing technology in the world, but if the environment isn’t right, you won’t have healthy plants.” The team tightly controls light, humidity and nutrients to keep plants thriving 52 weeks a year.

Their commitment to sustainability extends beyond the farm. “We were awarded the highest sustainability award in Ames because everything we do — packaging, sourcing, operations — is designed to reduce waste.”

Looking ahead, Mooney envisions expanding into new markets, such as San Francisco. “If we can give people years back on their lives by replacing unhealthy fast food with fresh, local meals, that’s 200 million years given back to humanity. That’s what drives us.”

SET IT, FORGET IT AND ENJOY RICH, FLAVORFUL MEALS MADE FOR WINTER COMFORT.

By Lydia Zerby

cook low & slow

Winter is the perfect season to slow down and savor the simple pleasures of home-cooked comfort food. Whether it's locally raised beef, hearty root vegetables or farm-fresh dairy, these recipes highlight the best of Iowa's winter bounty. With long, gentle cooking, every ingredient shines — creating meals that warm both heart and home.

Warm Lentil & Pork Bowls

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 white onion, diced
- 4 boneless pork chops, large diced
- 8 ounces spicy sausage (chorizo, andouille or Italian sausage)
- Pinch of salt and black pepper, optional
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 bag (16 ounces) dry lentils
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 sprigs rosemary, chopped
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 6 cups water

In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add onion; sauté for 2–3 minutes until softened. Add pork chop pieces, sausage and a pinch of salt and black pepper, if desired. Cook, stirring occasionally, until pork and sausage begin to brown.

Add garlic, celery and carrots; cook, stirring for another 5–7 minutes. Add lentils, bay leaves, rosemary and smoked paprika. Stir and cook for 2–3 more minutes.

Add 6 cups of water; stir until incorporated. Season with

salt and pepper, to taste. Bring mixture to a boil then reduce heat to a simmer.

Cover pot with a lid and simmer lentil mixture for 30–40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cook until lentils are tender, and pork chops reach an internal temperature of 145 degrees F, followed by a 3-minute rest, and sausage reaches 160 degrees F.

Divide lentil and pork mixture evenly among 4 bowls. Serve immediately with a crusty baguette, if desired.

Photo and recipe credit: National Pork Board





Irish-Inspired Beef Pot Roast and Vegetables

- 1 beef bottom round roast (3 to 3 ¼ pounds)
- 2 packages (24 ounces each) fresh pot roast vegetables (potatoes, onions, carrots, celery)
- 2 packages (.75 to .88 ounces each) mushroom or brown gravy mix
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup beer
- Chopped fresh parsley, optional

Prepare pot roast vegetables: Cut potatoes in half (or into quarters if large), onions into ½-inch wedges, and carrots and celery into 2-inch pieces; set aside.

Combine gravy mixes, flour, salt and pepper in large bowl. Add vegetables to bowl; toss

to coat well. Remove vegetables from flour mixture; set aside. Place vegetables in 5 to 6-quart slow cooker. Add beef bottom round roast to bowl, turning to coat evenly with flour mixture. Remove roast and place in center of the vegetables in slow cooker.

Whisk beer into remaining flour mixture until smooth; add to slow cooker. Cover and cook on high 6-7 hours or low 9-10 hours or until beef and vegetables are fork-tender.

Remove roast and vegetables. Skim fat from gravy. Carve roast into thin slices. Serve with vegetables and gravy. Sprinkle with parsley, if desired.

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



Crockpot Mashed Potatoes

- 5 pounds russet potato, and/or Yukon gold potatoes
- 1 cup butter, salted and cut into cubes
- 32 ounces chicken broth, low-sodium
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened and cut into cubes
- Milk, to taste
- Salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste

Place the cut potatoes into the bottom of a 4.5-quart or larger slow cooker. Dot the potatoes with 1 stick of cubed butter. Pour chicken broth on top of potatoes.

Cover the slow cooker with a lid and cook on high for 4-5 hours. Potatoes are ready when fork tender.

Carefully drain the excess broth from the cooked potatoes. If desired, cooking broth can be reserved and used for making a flavorful gravy or sauce to accompany the potatoes.

Run the drained potatoes through a potato ricer and return to the slow cooker.

Cook's Tip: A potato ricer creates an ultra-light and fluffy consistency for mashed potatoes. If desired,

a potato masher can be used instead. Simply place drained potatoes in a slow cooker and use masher until the desired consistency is reached.

Add in the remaining stick of cubed butter, cream cheese and milk. Season with salt and pepper. Stir together until combined. Add more milk if needed until potatoes reach desired consistency.

Cover the slow cooker and keep potatoes on the warm setting until ready to serve.

Photo and recipe credit: usdairy.com



Slow Cooker Veggie Lasagna

- ½ cup part-skim ricotta cheese
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup low-sodium fat-free marinara sauce, plus additional for serving
- 1 medium zucchini, diced
- 6 no-boil lasagna noodles
- 1 bag baby spinach
- 1 cup mushrooms, thinly sliced
- Basil leaf, optional

Spray crockery pot of slow cooker with non-stick cooking spray; set aside. In a small bowl, mix together ricotta, parmesan, egg, oregano and garlic powder as well as 1 ½ cups of the mozzarella.

Spread 2 tablespoons of pasta sauce in bottom of pot. Sprinkle

½ of zucchini over sauce and top with ½ of the cheese mixture. Break 2 noodles into pieces to cover cheese.

Spread 2 tablespoons of sauce and then layer ½ of the spinach and ½ of the mushrooms. Repeat layering, ending with cheese and the remaining sauce. Firmly press ingredients into pot.

Cover and cook over low heat for 4-5 hours. Allow lasagna to rest 20 minutes before adding remaining ½ cup mozzarella to top, then change setting to low and cover for about 10 minutes or until cheese is melted.

Slice to serve. Spoon a little extra sauce over each serving and top with a basil leaf if desired.

Photo and recipe credit: usdairy.com

WINTER

EXPLORE THE SNOW-DUSTED RIDGES, COZY STOPS AND HIDDEN WONDERS OF THE LOESS HILLS.

By Haley Banwart

WANDERINGS



There's no other place in the Midwest quite like the Loess Hills. Stretching along Iowa's western edge, these windswept ridges rise unexpectedly from the plains. Their only likeness lies halfway across the world in China — a geological rarity found in just two places on Earth.

And while the Loess Hills are stunning in every season, they seem to soften under snowfall. The layers of fine silt left behind after the last Ice Age wear winter well, turning the landscape into gentle waves of white.



Winter is the season when this sliver of the state takes on a quiet beauty. Small towns tucked into the contours glow softly at dusk, their storefront windows twinkling with light. Just beyond city limits, outdoor adventures await in the hills and hollows.

So, fill up your thermos, bundle up and see where the roads through the Loess Hills lead.

Start the Journey in Council Bluffs

There's no better place to begin the journey than Council Bluffs, where the surrounding scenery features the characteristic ridgelines and valleys that define the Loess Hills region. Several overlooks showcase the landscape's sweeping views, including the Lincoln Monument, Vincent Bluff Nature Preserve and the Lewis & Clark Monument.

The city's energy contrasts beautifully with the stillness just beyond it. For a dose of excitement, stop at Joe's Karting, Iowa's fastest indoor go-kart track, where engines and squealing tires echo in the ultimate racing experience. The adrenaline rush is a fun reminder that winter doesn't have to mean slowing down.

From there, take to the road — the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway — to be exact. Council Bluffs serves as the gateway to this 200-mile route that winds along the Iowa-Nebraska border, revealing one scenic vista after another.

Hit the Slopes in Honey Creek

Heading north, you'll find elevated outdoor adventures in Honey Creek, where the winter season transforms the hills into a playground of snow and motion. Crescent Hill at Hitchcock (formerly Mt. Crescent Ski Area) is a family favorite offering more than 2,400 feet of downhill runs and a Swiss-style lodge perfect for warming up with a cup of hot cocoa between rides.

Just down the road, Hitchcock Nature Center offers even more ways to enjoy the Loess Hills' terrain. A network of four-season trails connects the park directly to the ski area, creating opportunities for hiking, snowshoeing and wildlife watching.

From the park's observation tower, the snow-covered hills unfold toward the horizon, and on a clear day, you can even spot the Omaha skyline. For a burst of pure joy, head to the park's notorious Chute Trail sledding hill, a local favorite for fast, laughter-filled rides.

Antique Adventures in Walnut

A bit further east, the town of Walnut invites travelers to come in from the cold for a day of indoor discovery. Known as Iowa's Antique City, its streets are lined with a variety of specialty shops brimming with collectibles, crafts and vintage finds.

As you stroll downtown among the historic storefronts, follow the warm notes of sugar and spice to Frosting Inc., a local bakery serving cookies, cakes, gourmet cupcakes and other sweet treats — a perfect reward after an afternoon of browsing.

Find a Different Tempo in Clarinda

When the open road calls again, follow it southeast to Clarinda, a town that hums to a familiar rhythm. It's the birthplace of Glenn Miller, the big band leader whose music carried America through the 1930s and '40s. At the Glenn Miller Birthplace Museum, visitors can explore his life through memorabilia, recordings and one-of-a-kind artifacts.

Just a few blocks away, the Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum offers another kind of creative experience. Housed in the beautifully restored Carnegie Library, the museum has been reimagined as a space for

Enter to win a \$150 Kwik Star fuel card to power your road trip to the Loess Hills area at iowafoodandfamily.com/contest/loess-hills



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arts, enrichment and education. Its bright galleries feature rotating exhibitions and an extensive collection of modern and contemporary works.

Beyond the Byway

Exploring the topography of the Loess Hills region, which is home to some of the largest remaining prairie remnants in Iowa, the drive between towns becomes a destination of its own. Frost clings to tallgrass, hawks circle above the valleys and the fading daylight casts shadows across the ancient ridges shaped by wind and time.

Here, travelers are reminded winter isn't something to escape, it's something to experience. And, an adventure doesn't always require extreme distances. Sometimes, it's right ahead, waiting beyond the next curve in the road. 🍃



Crescent Hill at Hitchcock



Lincoln Monument

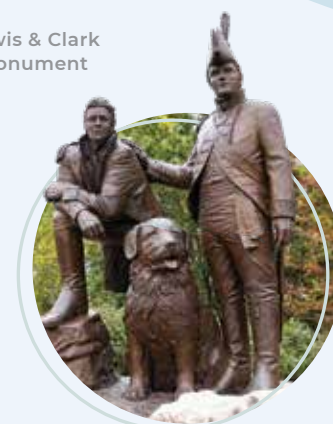


Hitchcock Nature Center



Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum

Lewis & Clark Monument



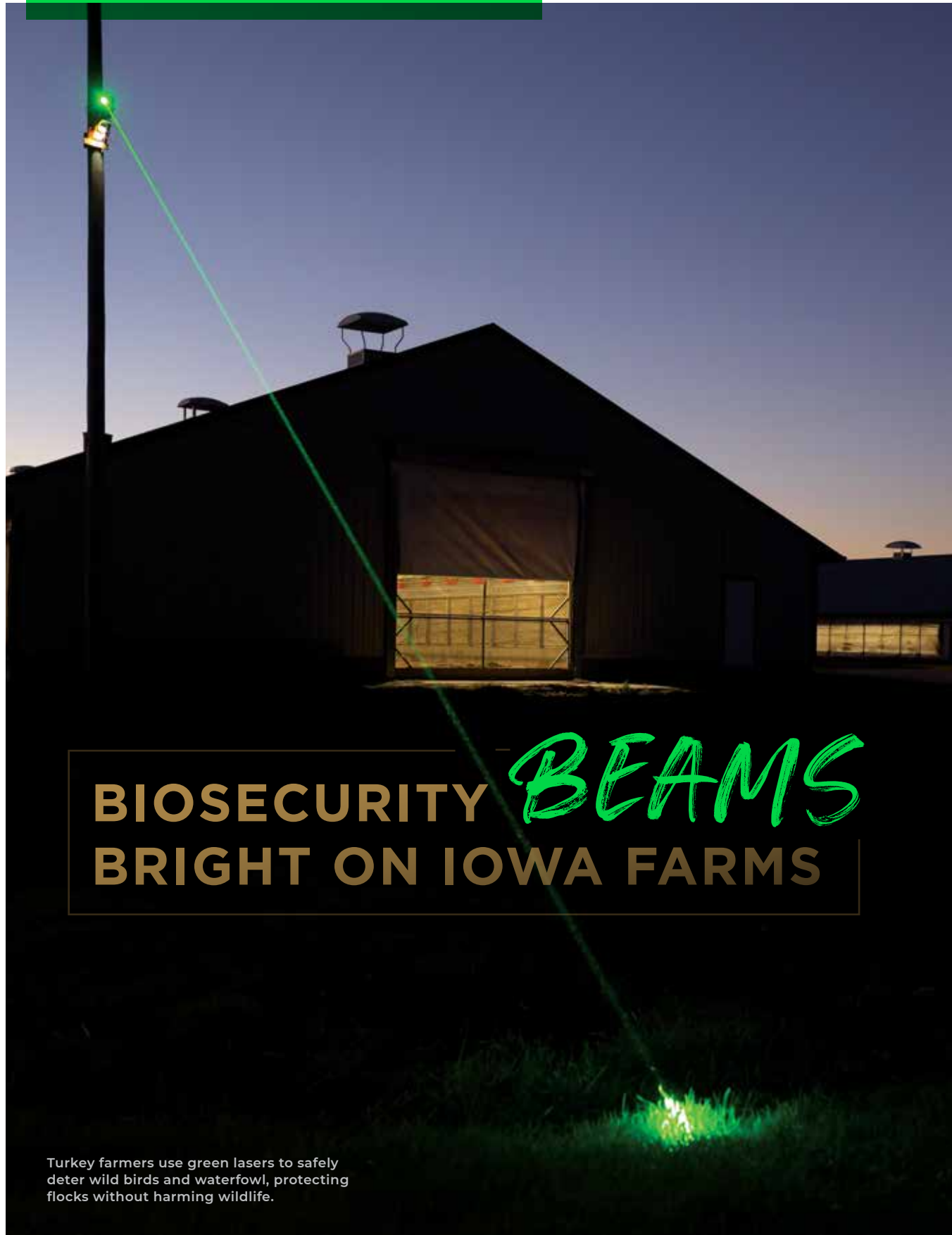
Antique Furniture Emporium



Glenn Miller Birthplace Museum



Joe's Karting



**BIOSECURITY BEAMS
BRIGHT ON IOWA FARMS**

Turkey farmers use green lasers to safely deter wild birds and waterfowl, protecting flocks without harming wildlife.

FROM LASERS TO SEED TREATMENTS, TAKE A BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR OF INNOVATIVE WAYS FARMERS ARE PROTECTING FOOD QUALITY.

By Darcy Maulsby

From eye surgery to tattoo removal, lasers handle a variety of medical tasks. Would you be surprised to learn they're also an invaluable biosecurity tool on some Iowa turkey farms?

"Our goal is to protect the health of our birds, especially since we dealt with a disease issue a few years ago," says Sheila Larson, whose family markets about 160,000 turkeys a year. "That's why we invested in lasers."

Larson, her husband, Chad, and their family raise turkeys in

Hamilton County in north-central Iowa, near Ellsworth. On March 28, 2022, they received devastating news — their birds tested positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

HPAI strains are deadly to domestic poultry (including turkeys and chickens) and can wipe out entire flocks within a matter of days. The virus is spread by migratory waterfowl through the feces of infected birds.

"We had to depopulate, clean and disinfect all our barns," says Larson,

who also serves as vice president of communications and membership for the Iowa Turkey Federation (ITF) in Ames. "Our birds were about a week away from harvest when we had to put them all down. This was extremely emotional for us."

As the family prepared to restock their barns, they considered new ways to improve biosecurity on their farm. Biosecurity is a critical component for safeguarding the health of animals and plants on the farm. Preventing the spread of diseases and pests also impacts



The Larson family of Hamilton County raises turkeys with care, blending tradition and modern farming practices.



Photo courtesy of Iowa Farm Bureau

food safety, food availability and food prices.

Waterfowl pose an ongoing biosecurity challenge for turkey farmers, especially during spring and fall migrations. These wild birds are common around the Larson's farm, which is near Little Wall Lake and a wildlife preserve.

When Larson's sister in Montana saw an article about using lasers at airports, golf courses and other venues to keep birds away, she shared it with her Iowa relatives. "I found it fascinating," Larson says.

After researching this technology, the family purchased AVIX Laser Bird Deterrents from the Bird Control Group. One laser is installed on a 60-foot pole. A smartphone app can control its bright green light.

The laser offers a humane option for discouraging birds from nesting, roosting or feeding in specific areas. The Larsons can control how bright the laser shines, when it operates and whether it projects a randomized pattern of light. "Migratory geese see the light as a threat, so they stay away," says

Larson, who also has a manual, hand-held laser to help repel unwanted waterfowl.

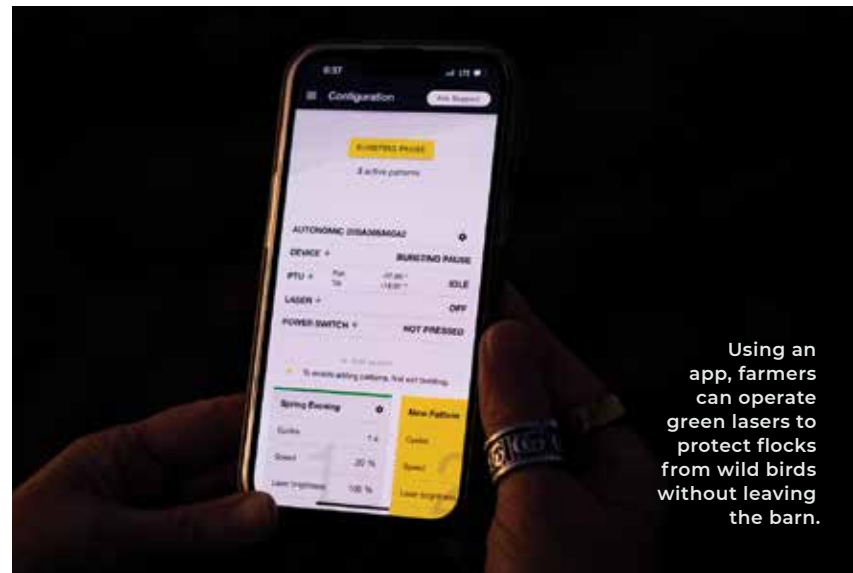
The family runs the pole-mounted laser from daybreak until about 10 p.m. The Larsons checked with their neighbors to make sure the light wasn't a nuisance. So far, the technology has worked well to keep unwanted birds at bay. "Biosecurity never stops on the farm," Larson says.

Biosecurity Is a Team Effort

Biosecurity isn't just for farmers. Everyone plays a part to ensure the health and productivity of



Installed above the turkey barns, the lasers cover a broad radius to keep flocks safe.



Using an app, farmers can operate green lasers to protect flocks from wild birds without leaving the barn.

BIOSECURITY NEVER STOPS ON THE FARM.



USDA Beagles are trained to sniff out multiple scents, such as fruits and meats, and the most experienced can recognize as many as 50 different odors.

America's crops and livestock, and maintain the integrity of the food supply. One of the first lines of defense occurs at international airports and seaports.

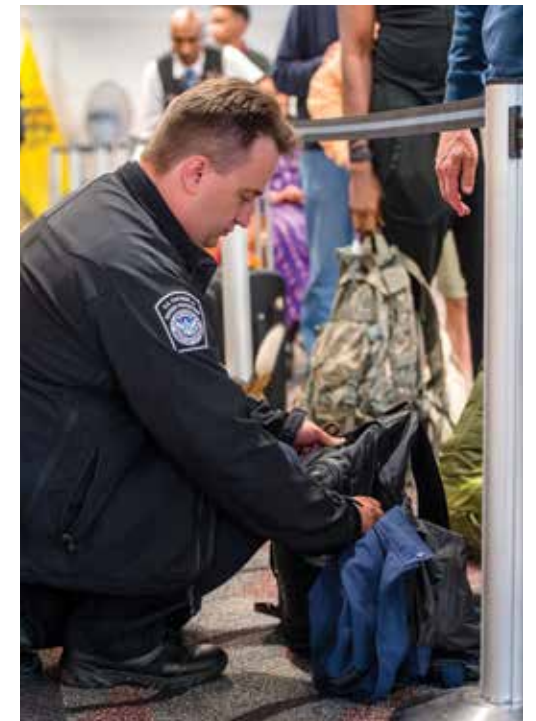
All travelers entering the U.S. are required to declare meats, fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, soil, animals and other related products they are transporting. Prohibited agricultural items can harbor plant pests and foreign animal diseases that could seriously damage America's crops, livestock and the U.S. economy.

Have you ever seen adorable beagles at major U.S. airports? They're part of the Beagle Brigade, a team of hard-working dogs employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to sniff out plants and animals that have the potential to carry harmful diseases onto U.S. soil.

That includes foreign animal diseases like African swine fever. By sniffing out and seizing prohibited pork products that can carry the virus, the Beagle Brigade helps prevent this highly contagious disease from entering the country.

This is important to Pat Gent, who raises hogs in southeast Iowa near Wellman. "We're always focused on preventing disease and keeping our pigs healthy. It's important to prevent the physical movement of harmful bacteria and viruses."

Biosecurity practices are a key to managing diseases like porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), which causes reproductive failure in breeding animals and respiratory disease in pigs of all ages. "This virus can spread through the air,"





Pat and Krista Gent work to instill family farm values and inspire their children's interest in continuing the farming legacy.

Photo courtesy of Iowa Pork Producers Association



says Gent, who adds that the virus can mutate quickly, making it challenging to control.

In the last decade, new barns built to house sows (mother pigs) often include air-filtration systems like those in hospitals. Since PRRS and other diseases can also be carried on people's clothing, shoes, equipment and vehicles, Gent limits who can access his family's swine farms.

"A lot of diseases can travel on your boots," Gent adds. "That's why we have rubber boots designated for each hog site."

A shower-in/shower-out system also bolsters Gent's biosecurity protocols. These showers are in separate rooms within the hog barns. "They're kind of like a locker room at a gym," Gent said.

Employees and farm visitors arriving at the farm must shower (clean towels are provided) and then put on clean coveralls, socks and boots before entering the areas where the pigs live. Before they leave, each person must shower out and change clothes. "We do loads of laundry every day," says Gent, who farms with his younger brother, Jared.

Most of the biosecurity practices at the Gent family's farms aren't time-consuming. "You spend five minutes here and five minutes there, but it adds up to good biosecurity," says Gent, who has received the Iowa Pork Producers Association's Iowa Master Pork Producer award.

Biosecurity Never Stops

Biosecurity isn't just for livestock farmers. Iowa



Photo courtesy of Iowa Pork Producers Association

Monitoring feed, temperature and airflow, Gent maintains efficient barn systems and ensures swine biosecurity.

BIOSECURITY ISN'T JUST FOR LIVESTOCK FARMERS.



Greg Tylka examines soybean plants as part of his research at Iowa State University.



Soybean cyst nematodes are microscopic and can be found on plant roots, where they feed and reduce crop productivity.

soybean growers also follow biosecurity practices to manage yield-robbing soybean cyst nematode (SCN).

SCN is the single-most damaging pest affecting soybeans in America, according to Dr. Greg Tylka, director of the Iowa Soybean Research Center at Iowa State University. This microscopic, soilborne worm is present in nearly 75% of Iowa's fields. It can reduce soybean yield by 50% or more, he notes. "Biosecurity to manage SCN isn't

just agricultural security; it's economic security for Iowa."

SCN is not native to Iowa. It was first discovered in North Carolina in 1954. By the late 1970s, it started appearing in soybean fields in northern Iowa. It can be transported by soil stuck to farm machinery and by wind-blown soil.

"SCN is a chronic problem, but it's not a death sentence," says Tylka, who appreciates funding from the Iowa Soybean Association that

supports his SCN research. "Some key management practices can make a big difference."

That includes rotating fields with a non-host plant, such as corn, planting SCN-resistant soybean varieties and using seed treatments that provide a highly targeted approach to biosecurity. "Seed treatments are a great ecological improvement, compared to broadcasting soil-applied nematicides," Tylka says. 🌱

The Best Freezer is a Full One

KEEPING YOUR BEEF AT ITS BEST

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.

Buying beef in bulk can be a significant investment — and one of the smartest ways to fill your freezer with wholesome, homegrown protein direct from a local farm family. The peace of mind that comes with a stocked freezer of meat for the unknown months ahead is invaluable. Once that beef comes back from the locker, the key is storing it correctly so it tastes just as good as the day you picked it up. Here are a few farmer-tested tips to help you make the most of your freezer beef.

Plan Ahead for Space

Before the beef leaves the locker, take a look at your freezer. It's important to cycle out and defrost your freezer. Plan for roughly one cubic foot of freezer space for every 35 to 40 pounds of meat.

That means:

- A quarter beef takes about 4–5 cubic feet.
- A half beef needs closer to 8–10 cubic feet.
- A whole beef will fill around 16–20 cubic feet.

Chest-deep freezers work best as they hold a steady temperature and keep the cold air in when you open the lid. Upright freezers are handier for organizing, but they tend to warm up faster. Keep a sensor thermometer tucked inside and make sure it stays at 0 degrees F or colder for the best long-term quality. You can check your freezer from your phone in case of a power outage.

Sort It While It's Fresh

When you bring your beef home, take time to sort it right away. Group your cuts — steaks, roasts, ground beef. You can mark the older packages with a sticker or highlighter to remind you to use those first. Put the new packages underneath the old.

A simple freezer inventory sheet saves a lot of digging later. Cross things off as you use them, so you always know what's left. You'll thank yourself when you're trying to find that last chuck roast in February.

How Long Does It Keep?

Beef can stay good in the freezer for up to a year if it's sealed tightly and kept cold.

BUYING BEEF IN BULK IS ABOUT STRETCHING YOUR DOLLAR AND SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMERS.



Fresh from the farm, wrapped for long-lasting flavor.

Thawing the Right Way

It's tempting to leave meat on the counter to thaw but resist the urge. The safest way is to place frozen packages in a bowl and thaw them in the fridge, allowing them to slowly defrost over a day or two. A good rule of thumb? "Cold to the fridge, fridge to the heat." Once thawed, use the meat within a couple of days. Refreezing is fine if it's been kept cold.

Cook It, Enjoy It and Keep It Moving

The best freezer management tip of all? Use it regularly. Don't let your beef sit so long that it becomes "out of sight, out of mind." Rotate your packages so the oldest gets used first. Plan a few meals each week that feature your beef — burgers, pot roast or steak night.

Buying beef in bulk is about stretching your dollar and

supporting local farmers, but it's also about enjoying great meat all year long and the peace of mind that no matter what happens, you have enough protein stored for your family for the months ahead. With a little prep and organization, your freezer can be your best friend — keeping your family fed, your meals simple and your beef tasting just as good as the day it was processed. 🌿

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Where's the Beef?

FOOD MARKETING

It's a common belief that beef is the most popular protein in the United States. While that may be true, the industry is facing a number of challenges that could change that. From the loss of pasture to the loss of feed grains, the industry is in a bit of a bind. This article explores the challenges facing the industry and offers some solutions.

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The Incredible Edible Egg

Most people think of eggs as a simple food, but they are actually a complex and nutritious food. This article explores the many uses for eggs and offers some recipes. From breakfast to dinner, eggs are a versatile ingredient that can be used in a variety of ways.

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UPHOLDING A LEGACY

FARMERS IMPROVE IOWA'S LAND AND WATER FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

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Beef of your life... **What made you choose beef?**

Beef is a staple of many diets and is a source of high-quality protein. This article explores the benefits of beef and offers some tips for choosing the best cuts.

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Skirt steak and Grilled Vegetable Salad

A quick and easy recipe for a healthy meal. The recipe includes ingredients like skirt steak, bell peppers, and onions, and provides instructions for grilling and serving.



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

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KITLESON BROTHERS: POTatoes and Onions CAN BE FOUND IN STORES THROUGHOUT IOWA.

This article features the Kitleson Brothers, who are known for their high-quality produce. It discusses their farming practices and how their products are available throughout the state.



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