

## Adding a new generation to Iowa's sustainable farms

**Abstract:** Making a graceful transition from one generation to the next is a challenge for any Iowa farm family. The Practical Farmers of Iowa organization looked for ways to smooth the path to farm operation for new farmers interested in sustainability.

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*We can help Iowa farm families transition a new generation onto the farm more successfully by providing programming that is welcoming and friendly and provides many opportunities for family members to work together on vision, goal setting, business planning and other skills.*

### What was done and why?

Many Iowa farm families, including founding members of Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI), have children who want to come back to farm the family homestead. Still others are transitioning their operations to non-family operators. Many conversations and negotiations need to happen to ensure that these transitions proceed successfully. In responding to a survey of PFI members who are transitioning their operations, the families reported that they needed:

1. Communication skills, including appreciative inquiry and conflict resolution training;
2. Vision clarification, unification and goal setting;
3. Business and financial planning;
4. Production expertise for those adding a new enterprise; and
5. Learning communities to come together and walk through the transition with other farm families.

### What did we learn?

This project found that helping families communicate with each other requires ready and willing participants—some families are simply not at a point where they can comfortably share with each other at events provided to help facilitate that communication. Helping also requires a welcoming environment with good food that includes space for the families to talk with each other away from the farm atmosphere, limited formal presentations, some activities for family members and other activities where the older generation and younger generation talk separately. Finally, successful interaction requires significant upfront efforts to arrange meeting times that work best for the participants, who often have multiple jobs and limited time available to leave the farming operation for these activities.

The 28 farm families who participated in the PFI program for aspiring farmers were pleased with their experiences, and nearly all who attended would recommend the program to others. Particularly valuable to the participants was a discussion between the generations on the difference between “wants” and “needs” for the farming operation, and activities that lead the families from “pie in the sky” ideas, as one participant called it, to the concrete details of transitioning the farming operation.



**MARKETING**