

# Letter

A NEWSLETTER OF THE LEOPOLD CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE VOL. 10 NO. 4 WINTER 1998

## Contract agriculture: Will it tip the balance?



By Neil E. Harl, Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor and professor of economics

The signs of increasing use of contracts are everywhere—especially on the production side of agriculture. Specialty grains, feeder livestock, even vegetables, are being produced under contract and have for some time. So what's the concern about the rising tide of contract agriculture? Basically, the concern is the possible shift in bargaining power that is barreling down the economic highway.

This topic is particularly important in light of the *Des Moines Register's* series, "Can Iowa Tap Its Wealth?" in September and that newspaper's editorial, "Iowa's Golden Challenge." I agree that the technology of processing and the exciting developments in corn genetics are important to the state. The key question is: Who will benefit from these breakthroughs?

### Concentration in seed companies

Except for those who are taking the scenic trip to Mars, it's clear what's happening with seed companies. Mergers, alliances and various other forms of arrangements are reducing the number of players and increasing the level of concentration.

But that's not the whole story. The revolution in ownership of germ plasm, the feature of cells that determines the characteristics of offspring, also is moving rapidly toward concentration in a few hands. The high-profile alliance between DuPont and Pioneer Hi-Bred International, the Monsanto acquisition of a greater interest in DeKalb and the Monsanto acquisition of Delta and Pine Land Company are recent examples of how the ownership and control

### CONTRACT AGRICULTURE

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*The outcome would be a smaller share of the revenue from production going to the producer, resulting in less compensation to the producer and less to capitalize into land values.*

—Neil E. Harl,  
Charles F. Curtiss  
Distinguished Professor, ISU

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## Swine Systems Conference February 17 Producers share lessons, experience

By Laura Miller, Editor

Vic Madsen knew it was a gamble to invest \$15,000 in a relatively unknown technology four years ago. But his existing facilities needed a facelift. And his gamble is paying off.

Now with three hoop structures on his Audubon County farm, Madsen will join researchers and educators from Iowa State University in sharing their experiences with alternative pork production facilities. Their discussion, and reports on side-by-side comparisons with conventional systems, will highlight the Swine System Options Conference coordinated by the Leopold Center at Scheman Continuing Education

Building in Ames on Wednesday, February 17.

Madsen was one of the first producers in his county to put up a hoop house. He also spoke at the first successful Swine Systems Options Conference three years ago. Since then, he said he's learned more about the technology and believes an update is due.

"I'm more confident now than when I spoke about hoops in 1996," he said. "The only research we had to go on was some work in Canada. I'm convinced that hoops and deep bedding are economical and an environmentally sound way to raise hogs."

### SWINE OPTIONS CONFERENCE

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## SWINE OPTIONS CONFERENCE

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Mark Honeyman, coordinator of ISU research and demonstration farms, agreed the conference will provide an important forum to share information and learn from experiences. He will announce results of several Center-funded projects including:

- a side-by-side study of 450 pigs in hoop buildings and 130 pigs in confinement facilities at the ISU Rhodes Research and Demonstration Farm;
- a comparison of 150 gestating sows in each of three systems at the Lauren Christian Swine Farm near Atlantic and
- a study of pig behavior and stress levels under conventional and alternative systems.

Producer panels and representatives from the swine industry as well as specialty niche markets for hoop-raised hogs also will be featured during the day-long conference (see program details on page 10). Rich Pirog, Leopold Center education coordinator and chair of the February 17 conference, said Iowa producers were eager for information three years ago. Sixty-five percent of the producers who responded to a survey six months after the 1996 conference indicated the conference played a role in changing swine management and production practices on their farm.

“Our planning committee has developed a program that addresses the production, management, marketing and environmental concerns of swine producers using alternative production systems,” Pirog says. “We want to build on what we’ve learned since 1996 to keep Iowa producers competitive.”

“Getting good information out and having more experience knowing what to expect under different weather conditions really helps,” Madsen added. “By no means are we experts. We just want to share what we’ve learned and move ahead.”

## More about the swine conference

To register for 1999 Swine System Options Conference on February 17, contact Extended and Continuing Education at (515) 294-5961 (after January 1). For program information, contact the Leopold Center at (515) 294-3711 or email <leocenter@iastate.edu>. Registration is \$10, which includes session handouts and post-conference proceedings; or \$15 if lunch is included. A printable registration form also can be accessed on the Center's Web site at <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu>.

The Leopold Center is organizing the conference with help from other sponsors, including ISU Extension, the Iowa Pork Producers Association, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, ISU Pork Industry Center, the ISU Beginning Farmer Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Advance registrations are requested by February 15.

### Producer participants

As of press time, the following swine producers will participate in panel discussions: Paul Brown, New Providence; Dave Deyoe, Nevada; Dean Ekstrom, Duncombe; Tom Frantzen, New Hampton; Al Hoefling; Marcus; Gary Johnson, Osco, Ill.; Archie Kunz, Brooklyn; Cindy Madsen, Audubon; Vic Madsen, Audubon; Dave Odland, Clarion; Homer Showman, Shellsburg; David Struthers, Collins; Don Struthers, Collins; Fred Tilstra, Steen, Minn.; Cory Weichman, Hubbard; Steve Weis, Osage; Bruce Williams, Villisca; Paul Willis, Thornton; Colin Wilson, Paullina; and Dan Wilson, Paullina.

Other invited panel discussants include Danny Burns, veterinarian and live-stock producer, Maryville, Mo.; Bill Ehm, Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, Creston; Dave Pyburn, National Pork Producers Council, Des Moines; Gary Malenke, Sioux-preme Pack, Sioux City.



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The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture seeks to identify and reduce adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts of farming practices, develop profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources, and create educational programs with the ISU Extension Service. It was founded by the 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act.

The Leopold Letter is available free from the Leopold Center at 209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-1050; (515) 294-3711; <leocenter@iastate.edu>.

Editor: Laura Miller



## Soothsayers and sustainable agriculture

Forecasters of our future abound at the end of a year, multiplying when the clock also closes out a century as well as a millennium. Soothsayers aside, it is fitting that we probe what agriculture is leaving behind and where it might be going, not only in the first few years of the 2000s but over the next 1,000 years. *One thousand years, you say. Good grief, let's just get through 1999 in one piece.*

Yes, 1,000 years, 10 centuries, 30-plus generations, a millennium. Really, not much time in the course of the earth's history where the beginnings of life date back 4 billion years and *Homo erectus* appeared about 3 million years ago.

It is generally agreed that agriculture as we know it began to be a dominant force about 10,000 years ago in the "Fertile Crescent" of the Middle East. As humankind developed to the level of "civilization" we now regard as modern, native cultures were virtually eradicated and their way of living with the earth was forgotten. Food was—and still is—used for power. We kill those who compete for our food, be they people, animals or pests.

The spectacular developments of science and technology of the last century have made it a relatively easy task for humans to dominate the earth and its creatures. As we look to the next millennium, I challenge our readers to ask if this is the legacy we wish to leave for those who will occupy the planet in 3000. We have degraded nearly one-third of the earth's cropland. Water resources continue to decline in quality and other uses for water affect the ability to grow food. How long can this continue?

Public opinion polls indicate that those in the United States and other "developed" nations are generally optimistic about their future. I share this view, but not because I

have faith in current technologies or the world banking system, or the resilience of the planet's life support system. Rather, I believe that the next millennium will see dramatic changes in our view of the earth and how we live with it.

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Times Square*

*January 1, 3000.*

Changes are apparent even now, especially at the local level, as awareness of the fragile nature of the earth is being recognized. Oh, there will be kicking and screaming, denial, political posturing, and "Chicken Little" pronouncements. There are fortunes to be made—and lost—by using the earth's resources in an unsustainable fashion. But I suggest that humankind must progress beyond the human-dominant view if it wishes to see the lighted ball fall in Times Square January 1, 3000.

No one can predict what we might call progress in the next millennium. Every time I try to look into a crystal ball, I end up concentrating on the negatives of today's culture. I come up with a list of bad choices, most of which get explained away by economists as necessary for development of the economy. But economic prognosticators tend not to regard the future as a commodity worth protecting. I believe that attitude will change.

Who will set the natural resources agenda in the next millennium? The current political process seems to be in a stalemate. National

environmental groups have become ineffective. Much of science is based on improving (and defending) the status quo, and even citizen groups often are at loggerheads, minimizing their effectiveness. It will be fascinating to watch the new dimensions of leadership. But while we look to the future, let us not go through another "Great Forgetting," as it is termed by philosopher Daniel Quinn in his book *Ishmael* (Bantam Books, 1993). The earth is a beautiful place and its ecosystems mostly operate smoothly and in harmony. Individually, humankind retains a love, respect and admiration for the land as exemplified by Aldo Leopold in *The Land Ethic*. But our culture often doesn't.

So how do we get through 1999? Right now, one would say it looks like a good year coming up. The economy is back on track, the weather forecasters see no major floods or droughts, and no natural disasters are looming. Of course, this can change in an instant. In general, most of us will do what worked in 1998—with maybe a few tweaks in the game plan—and leave the future to chance.

Fortunately, many public and private organizations are quietly and progressively working for a sustainable future. The Leopold Center is one of them. Ninety-five years ago, Aldo Leopold wrote: "It is for us, then; and for this nation to guard and maintain a condition so indispensable to our future welfare." These words hold true nearly a century later, and for the next millennium.

We look forward to another great year of serving Iowa agriculture of today and of the next century. Now if I could just figure out a biological control for the Y2K bug ...

*Dennis R. Keeney*  
Dennis R. Keeney

# Concentration could lead to fewer options

## CONTRACT AGRICULTURE

(continued from page 1)

of genetic material in crops is falling into the hands of a few, economically powerful players.

This development is partly related to the changing role of the land grant universities, partly to the ability in recent years to manipulate germ plasm through genetic engineering, and partly to the consequence of the ability to obtain a monopoly-like position over unique life forms and over the process of genetic manipulation.

- For decades the land grant universities developed the basic genetic lines and made those lines available to the seed industry. Because of limitations on university funding and the near-revolution in genetic engineering, the private sector began pouring more money into basic research.
- The advent of genetic engineering meant that scientists could manipulate genetic composition—not through conventional crop breeding techniques but through laboratory procedures—to change the genetic makeup of plant and animal life. That has produced herbicide-resistant crops, for example.
- Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 1980 landmark case determined that life forms could be patented. In addition to federal Plant Variety Protection (PVP) and simply shrouding research efforts with secrecy, the ability to patent life forms provides a powerful tool to keep competitors at bay.

### Effect on contracts

So what effect will concentration in the seed business and control by the few resulting firms over germ plasm likely have on contract negotiations with producers? It depends on the options open to producers who don't like the terms of contracts offered to them. With numerous contract possibilities available from input suppliers, each offering inputs of roughly equal productivity and cost, the answer is perhaps "not much."

But if there are just a few options, with the next best offering a much less attractive set of inputs in terms of cost and productivity, the answer is "take what you're offered." The

outcome is likely to be a tilting in the terms of contracts in favor of the input supplier. The division of revenue from production, thus, would be expected to shift over time in favor of the party with the monopoly or near-monopoly position. Seed companies and other input suppliers can be expected to drive the best possible bargain which means, in the case of seed, capturing the greatest possible percentage of the value from any yield premium.

- The outcome would be a smaller share of the revenue from production going to the producer, resulting in less compensation to the producer and less to capitalize into land values.
- Seed companies would end up with a larger share of the pie with more to capitalize into the stock of the input supply firms. Even if unique corn derivatives produce revenue of \$2 million per acre, it's fairly clear that whomever holds the rights to the technology involved will capture the lion's share of the revenue, not the producer.

A good argument can be made that this perception of potential profits in the future is part of what is driving the intense push toward concentration in control over germ plasm and the process of genetic manipulation that is now occurring.

### Other shifts may follow

The negotiating power of seed firms could well have other impacts.

- In an effort to control the germ plasm more completely, seed companies are likely to negotiate for ownership of the product with the producer under contract to produce but with only a contract right to payment, without ownership of the crop or livestock involved.
- Similarly, the contract may contain what would appear at first glance to be an attractive feature—the input supplier bearing the price risks.
- These seemingly innocent shifts would mean, however, that the economic position of the

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# Shifts in power have many impacts

producer would be transformed from that of a risk-taking entrepreneur into a relatively risk-free world of fixed compensation. Thus, a shift not only of compensation would occur in favor of the input supplier but also a shift of management functions in the same direction. The outcome would be reminiscent of the limited role played by growers under broiler contracts.

## Natural barriers inhibited

In general, one would expect high-handed economic behavior by near monopolists to be met by entry of new competitors attracted by the generous terms of contracts in favor of the input suppliers. And that would likely occur if entry were possible. However, barriers to entry may be fairly high.

- One barrier is capital. Substantial capital may be needed to mount a research effort to maintain a product flow similar to that of the firms pressing for monopoly-like concentration levels.
- Existing patent and PVP may mean that potential competitors are frozen out of competition (as a practical matter) for the duration of the patent or PVP certificate.

One possible strategy for farmers is to forge alliances among themselves (specifically allowed by federal law so long as it does not “unduly enhance” price). The push to achieve such countervailing power was the driving force behind the formation of labor unions a century ago. Historically, however, farmers have been unwilling to accept such a disciplined approach to achieving bargaining power.

Another possible area of protection against a sharp tilt in the economic terms of contracts is increased vigilance by federal (or state) anti-trust agencies. Certainly, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Department of Justice should be sensitized to the potential for economic abuses down the road. It’s been

well established for decades that firms with monopoly power over a product should not be able to “tie” other products to the transaction and extend the monopoly position. Such arrangements, which involve tying products over which a firm does not have monopoly power (such as financing, insurance or risk management) to a product over which the firm does have monopoly power (such as a seed variety), are illegal per se unless it can be demonstrated that the product in monopoly status wouldn’t work as well with other firms’ products. And, that’s rarely the case. The FTC and the Department of Justice should scrutinize all seed industry mergers carefully for anti-competitive consequences and all practices by seed companies in tying credit, insurance, risk management or other needed inputs to seed availability.

## Prudent advice

It seems a bit far-fetched for agricultural production to be transformed so dramatically. And it may never happen to the degree painted by the scenario outlined in this article. But it’s well within the range of feasibility. Only time will tell.

In the meantime, the prudent course would suggest careful evaluation of mergers and alliances now occurring in rapid succession.



*Dr. Harl is director of the Center for International Agricultural Finance that conducts educational programs for individuals from Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltics. He is author or coauthor of more than 350 publications in legal and economic journals and bulletins and more than 800 articles in various farm and financial publications. He has spoken widely on debtor-creditor relations, estate planning and organization of the farm business with more than 2,900 speaking appearances in 42 states.*

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# Looking at sustainable agriculture

By Rich Pirog, Education coordinator

*What do farmers really need from educators to help make their operations profitable, environmentally sound and supportive of their community?*

Heading back from a Wisconsin lake vacation with my family this summer, we stopped in Baraboo to visit the Leopold Preserve and Aldo Leopold's famous "shack" (originally an abandoned chicken coop) for the first time. Leopold and his family spent many weekends nursing the worn-out farm back to health and making "the shack" a livable retreat. I had a vision of this building and surrounding land from photos, presentations and stories of Aldo Leopold, and was not disappointed when we hooked up with a busload of conservation-minded Eau Claire, Wisconsin, residents for a tour.

One woman lamented the lack of progress in conservation, despite wonderful education programs in Wisconsin. Her concern reminded me of what Aldo Leopold had written in *A Sand County Almanac* more than 50 years ago:

*Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride.*

*The usual solution to this dilemma is "more conservation education." No one will debate this, but is it certain that only the*

*volume of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the content as well?*

Do Leopold's comments apply to today's educational efforts in sustainable agriculture? You can find numerous sustainable agriculture publications, conferences, workshops and tours offered by a variety of organizations and agencies. But given farmers' time and economic constraints, would adding more educational programs make a difference? What do farmers really need from educators to help make their operations profitable, environmentally sound and supportive of their community? Perhaps, as Leopold suggested, we should consider changing the content of certain programs. That change may mean going beyond providing information to creating more cooperative learning environments.

One place to initiate change might be agricultural literacy education for urban consumers. We know from several focus groups conducted in eastern and central Iowa over the past three years that many in the farming and agricultural community think urban and suburban consumers don't have a clue where or how their food is produced. A number of Iowa-based agricultural groups offer programs to educate consumers about the importance of agriculture and food production. Urban consumers need to understand where their food

## Farmers and consumers learn about agriculture together



Deanna Hansen (center in white shirt) leads a tour of one of her gardens during a Customer Appreciation Day at Audubon County Family Farms.

Finding out where their food comes from involved more than just a trip to the supermarket for the Aasheim family of Earlham. They and 20 other Des Moines area customers of Audubon County Family Farms toured the orchards where apples are grown for cider, and the hoop houses where hogs are raised for pork burgers and chops. The event, which included a meal of locally grown food and discussion with farmers from Audubon County Family Farms, was funded by the Leopold Center.

"We recently moved from Wisconsin," wrote Wendy Solawetz, who brought her family to the event in September. "This has truly been a wonderful experience ... [it] helped our family connect with Iowa."

Other comments focused on the educational value of the tour as well as a snapshot of trends and diversity in

# Future education: Is more better?

comes from, but how many Iowa farmers can trace the path of their products from the farm to the consumer's table?

Changing the content of what we teach, as Leopold suggested, might mean shifting the focus. Instead of teaching urban residents about agriculture, we could help consumers and farmers learn about food system pathways *together*. New programs could be developed that show how food is produced, processed, marketed and distributed, a project that, in turn, could build relationships between producers and consumers.

Such cooperative learning already is taking place. A recent Leopold Center-funded tour had farmers visiting and learning about specialty markets and natural food stores in the Twin Cities. Another tour had urban consumers visiting farms where the meats and products they purchase at farmer's markets are grown (*see story on these pages*).

Iowa farmers tired of narrow profit margins and producing low-value commodities are listening to marketplace concerns and redesigning the way they do business. These farmers are finding more direct links with consumers and businesses, and are forming cooperatives to do their own marketing. Interest among farmers in programs about value-added and organic agriculture as well as local food systems is at an all-time high. Educators and researchers need to partner with innovative farmers to document the

profit and risk potential of these alternatives. In this way, the projects can serve as effective models for change.

Working with innovative farmers may hold some risk for educators. It may mean learning about areas of the food system traditionally outside our expertise. There also may be peer pressure to maintain the status quo and concentrate on dispensing information, rather than facilitating learning. Maybe the encouragement to take these risks is missing in our organizations, but take them we must. We cannot risk losing the trust and interest of farmers who are questioning the idea that producing more in the same way will be enough to give their families the quality of life they have always dreamed about.

As educators, we can choose to see the difficult times many Iowa farmers are now experiencing not as a call for more of the same, but as an opportunity to rethink the way we work with one another. We may not be able to develop programs that change national market prices or influence the global economy, but we can expand our role. We need to go beyond providing information to building cooperative leadership and entrepreneurial skills among farmers and stakeholders. These groups, in turn, can fully participate in efforts to solve farm business, community and environmental problems.

It is a risk well worth taking.

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Iowa agriculture. Backed by the Leopold Center, Audubon County Family Farms began participating in the Des Moines farmers' market in 1997, selling meat, honey, flowers, fruits and vegetables raised and processed by sustainable methods.

Finding where their produce ends up brought another busload of 30 Iowa farmers directly to the supermarket, or rather, several food outlets. In August, the Leopold Center sponsored a trip to specialty markets in the Minneapolis area. Included on the tour were Schroeder Dairy, processor of organic milk; Whole Foods, the nation's largest natural foods chain; and Wedge Co-op, supplier of organic produce and meats raised without antibiotics.

Both tours showed the enthusiasm and sense of community that can be created when producers and consumers learn together. — *Rich Pirog*



**Iowa farmers look at the possibilities during a tour of a Whole Foods, the nation's largest chain of supermarkets specializing in natural foods.**

# Hoop dreams: Can technology live up to the hopes?

Still not a familiar sight on the landscape, hoop buildings loom on the horizon, promising to solve a variety of problems for Iowa hog producers. At least that's the perception among hoop users and nonhoop users alike in a survey conducted by the Iowa State University Department of Sociology and partially funded by the Leopold Center.

Assistant professor Clare Hinrichs coordinated a survey of more than 2,600 stakeholders in the Iowa swine industry to determine their perceptions about hooped structures.

Questionnaires mailed were returned by:

- 57 producers who use hoop structures
- 322 producers who do not use hoops
- 218 farmers who do not raise hogs
- 80 large animal veterinarians
- 71 high school vocational agriculture teachers
- 82 ag lenders
- 38 extension educators (ISU administrators also were included but not used in this analysis).

"Not surprisingly, hoop users themselves were most likely to see a variety of favorable impacts with greater use of hooped structures," Hinrichs said. "These included greater farm profits, lower public concerns about animal welfare, increased quality of life on the farm, reduced risk of water pollution, and less odor from animal manure."

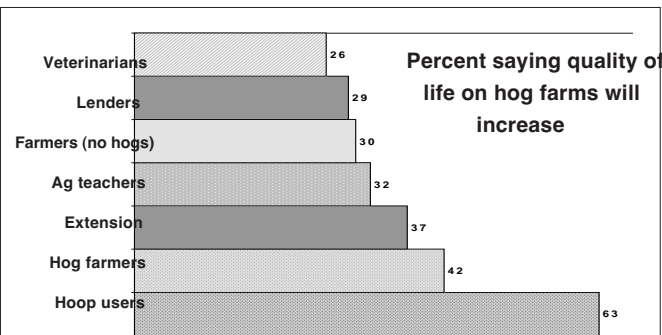
Relatively unknown five years ago in the United States, hooped structures were estimated to number 1,000 in Iowa about the time the survey was conducted in late 1997. The

structures consist of arched pipes, or hoops, covered by a polyethylene fabric tarp. They rely on composting manure and bedding for heat and natural air flow for ventilation. Because of their low construction costs and different method of manure management, hoop buildings are an alternative to large-scale confinement structures for swine producers who want to expand their operations or new farmers entering the business.

Hinrichs said veterinarians and hog farmers also were likely to predict positive impacts of hooped structure use.

"These groups are in regular, direct contact with hogs and thus, have a solid base of experience and observation for their mostly positive assessments," she explained. "Water quality and odor control were areas where all groups were more likely to see positive impacts with hooped structure use."

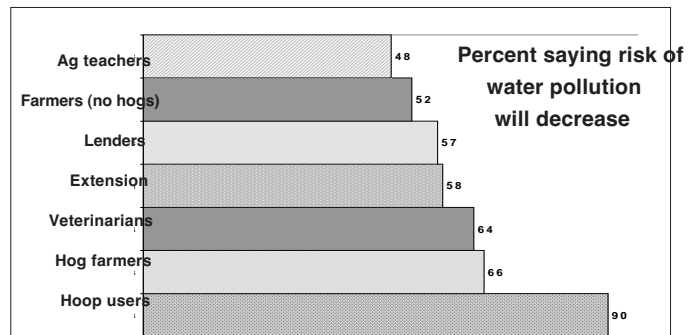
*This research was conducted in cooperation with the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service, with additional support from the Center for Rural Affairs of Walthill, Nebraska. Others involved with design and implementation included Mark Honeyman and Tom Richard of the Center's Hoop Group; Mike Duffy, the Center's associate director; Paul Lasley and Steve Padgitt of the ISU Department of Sociology; and Julie Tranquilla, formerly of ISU and now at the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. For more information, contact Hinrichs at (515) 294-5154, or email at <hinrichs@iastate.edu>.*



## Quality of life

Livestock housing systems affect more than farm profits or public attitudes concerning animal agriculture. Different systems can play a part in the experiences and interactions of people in livestock-producing households. Also, the desire of future generations to continue livestock production may depend on how they feel about the day-to-day aspects of farming.

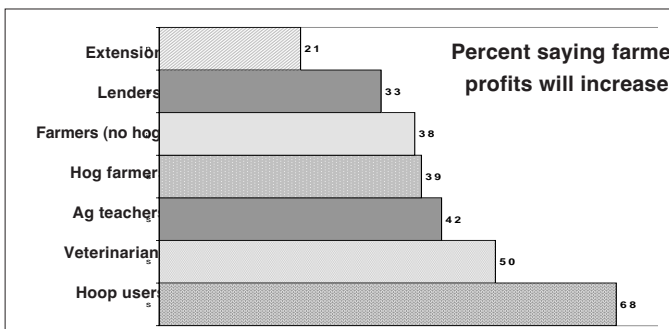
Sixty-three percent of hoop users saw quality of life on hog farms increasing. Slightly more than 40 percent of hog farmers not using hoop structures at the time of the survey saw quality of life on hog farms increasing with more use of hoop structures. Hoop users' assessments concerning quality of life may be based on their own positive experiences, but other hog farmers also identified the potential enhancement of quality of life.



## Water pollution

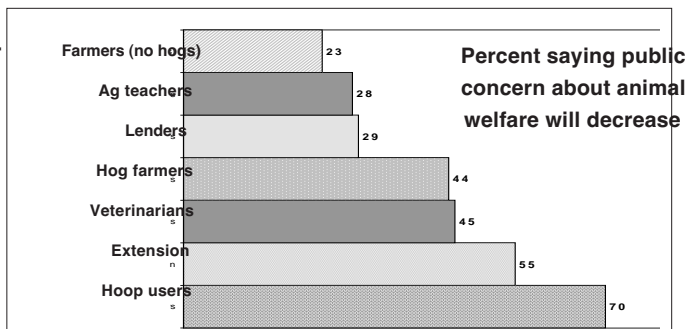
Growing concern about the protection of water quality is a factor in debates about swine production systems. Because they are based on a system of solid manure management, hoop structures, according to some, have environmental advantages over large-scale facilities. This chart shows the percent of the different groups saying that the risk of pollution to streams, rivers and lakes will decrease with more use of hooped structures in Iowa. A strong majority of hoop users (90 percent) took this view, while nearly two-thirds of the nonhoop-using farmers and veterinarians saw a potential to decrease water pollution.





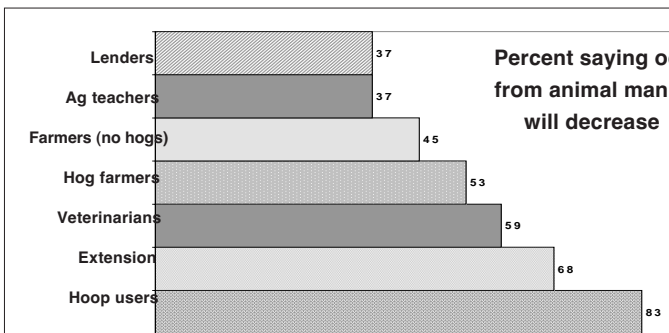
### Farm profits

Profitability is a major consideration in the adoption of any new agricultural technology. Hoop house users were most likely to take an optimistic view on profitability with use of the structures (68 percent). Lenders and extension educators were least likely to predict an increase in farmers' profits.



### Animal welfare

Animal welfare has become an area of growing contention in debates about swine production. Those directly involved in hog production or administering care to livestock were most likely to see public concern about animal welfare decreasing. Seventy percent of hoop users themselves saw greater use of hoop structures leading to a decrease in public concern about animal welfare.



### Odor control

Odor control is another area where hooped structures, due to their system of manure management, may have some advantages over large-scale facilities. This chart shows the percentage of different groups saying that odor from animal manure will decrease with more use of hooped structures in Iowa. Hoop house users strongly took this view (83 percent), followed by extension personnel (68 percent), veterinarians (59 percent), and hog farmers not using hoop houses (53 percent).

## NEWS & NOTES

Center director **Dennis Keeney** continues work on the committee to select the first chairholder for the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU. He has been named as head of a "search and screen" subcommittee, which will solicit nominations for the chair, advertise the position, and screen the applications before submitting them to the entire committee for their consideration.

Announcements about the position have been sent to interested parties, universities with sustainable agriculture departments, and electronic listserves in sustainable agriculture. Anyone interested in reading the position description for the Wallace Chair can find it on the Leopold Center Web site (<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu>) or call the Center to receive a copy. Application deadline for the Wallace Chair is February 1,

and the committee hopes to have the chairholder selected by the end of the school year.

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*Stewards of Our Streams*, a four-color publication developed by the Center's **Agroecology Issue Team** on riparian buffer areas, has received national recognition. The National Woodland Owners Association (NWOA) and the National Resources and Environment Division of USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service recently named it the best forestry publication in 1998. Portions of the material have been adapted for "Goin' With the Flow," an aquatic education program developed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. *Stewards* is available from ISU Extension and has been distributed by Trees Forever.

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Results of demonstrations and research on alternative swine production systems conducted in Iowa and funded by the Leopold Center are included in a new publication being developed by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. The *Alternative Swine Sourcebook* contains chapters on hooped structures, the Swedish deep-bedded system, pasture farrowing, non-traditional feed sources, antibiotic-free production, profitability and economics, and marketing. For more information, contact Julie Tranquilla at 1-800-909-MISA, or by email at <[misamail@tc.umn.edu](mailto:misamail@tc.umn.edu)>.

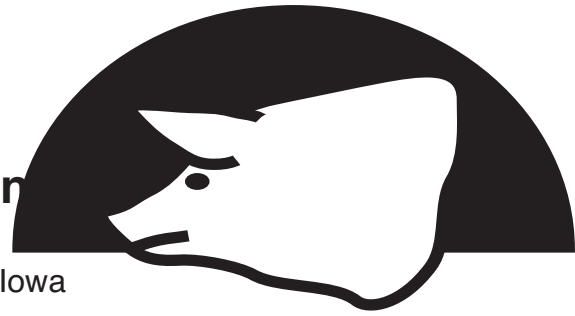
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Tentative Agenda

# Swine System Options Conference

## Wednesday February 17, 1999

Scheman Continuing Education Building, Ames, Iowa



For conference registration, contact (after January 1): Deb Schmidt, (515) 294-5961.

8:00 - 9:00 a.m. **Registration**

### CONCURRENT SESSIONS (continued)

#### GENERAL SESSION— Benton Auditorium

1:15 - 2:15 p.m. **Concurrent Session II**  
(choice of five sessions)

9:00 - 9:20 a.m. **Welcome and Overview**  
**Dennis Keen**, Leopold Center  
**Dave Struthers**, swine producer, Collins

- Getting started with hoop structures (design, handling, production and management)
- Regulatory and other challenges to pork production
- Adapting existing structures to deep bedded systems (including cattle and poultry barns)
- Outdoor production systems
- \* Research and demonstration updates: ISU research and PFI on-farm cooperator data

9:20 - 11:00 a.m. **Panel Presentation and Discussion**  
Moderator **Dave Struthers**, swine producer, Collins

- Four 15-minute presentations followed by question and answer session:
- How will Iowa remain the pork production leader? **John Lawrence**, ISU
  - Overview of swine system options **Mark Honeyman**, ISU
  - Swine marketing alternatives **Neil Hamilton**, Drake University (invited)
  - Decision-making (why choose alternative swine systems?) **Vic Madsen**, swine producer, Audubon

2:15 - 2:30 p.m. **Break and Refreshments**

11:00 - 11:15 a.m. **Break and Refreshments**

#### CONCURRENT SESSIONS

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. **Concurrent Session I**  
(choice of five sessions)

2:30 - 3:30 p.m. **Concurrent Session III**  
(choice of five sessions)

- \* Getting started with hoop structures (design, handling, production and management)
- \* Composting hoop structure bedding/manure
- \* Marketing opportunities with alternative swine systems
- \* Decision-making: identifying critical points, picking the system that's right for you
- Using hoop structures for gestation or breeding barns

- Composting hoop structure bedding/manure
- Marketing opportunities with alternative swine systems
- Using hoop structures for early weaning and farrowing
- Research and demonstration updates: ISU research and PFI on-farm cooperator data
- Decision-making: identifying critical points, picking the system that's right for you

3:30 - 4:00 p.m. **Closing Coffee**

An opportunity to visit with some of the speakers and discussants from sessions that participants were not able to attend, or to visit with new contacts made. Presenters/discussants will be seated by session topic at round tables.

12:15 - 1:15 p.m. **Lunch/Room 220-240**  
(Iowa-grown food served)

4:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

**NOTE** Concurrent sessions marked with asterisks are repeated.

## FROM THE FIELD

*"I have several friends who've been farming all their life and now they're looking for carpentry work, factory work or anything to help supplement their income this winter because of low prices. In the past, hogs or cattle would have provided that extra income but the reality is that you can't count on it anymore."  
— Dave Van Waus*



**Colo farmer and conservationist Dave Van Waus takes a measurement from a sedimentation box in one of his fields. The box shows the effectiveness of filter strips to prevent soil erosion.**

## When the profit margin narrows

The reality for Dave Van Waus is that the profit from a 1,000-acre, 1,400-hog operation will no longer support two families—his and that of his brother-in-law, Bill Schnur. After 14 years of full-time farming in Story County, Van Waus decided in September to leave the partnership. He will continue to custom-farm the acres he owns, but the “family” part of the operation will be gone.

“I would say that within the next one to two years if grain prices continue to be low, we’re going to see more and more small to medium producers gone or, like myself, farming will become a hobby and a job in town will become the reality,” he predicts.

Van Waus, who was born and raised on a farm near Victor, has been involved with the Leopold Center for several years. He is a past member of the Cropping Systems Issue Team and has reviewed conference and workshop proposals the past three years. He plans to remain active in Pheasants Forever and pursue his interest in creating conservation wildlife habitat.

## NEWS & NOTES

The Leopold Center is supporting a series of meetings about community food systems that will begin in January in the Des Moines and Ames area. Coordinated by Kent Newman from the Wallace House Foundation of Des Moines, the process will involve farmers, consumers, non-profit and agency representatives in a dialogue on local food systems. Other project sponsors include the Vision 2020 Project, Pioneer Hi-Bred International and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program. For information, contact Newman at (515) 243-7063.

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The American Society of Agronomy (ASA) recently presented its Agronomic Service Award to Center director **Dennis Keeney** during its annual meeting in Baltimore. One of the top honors in the ASA, the Agronomic Service award recognizes his outstanding contributions to agronomy, including his work in development of the Certified Crop Advisor program. The service award, along with awards in education, research, international programs and industry, go to “individuals known for original and significant research” and their “outstanding ability to inspire in students and others the qualities of sound thinking, objectivity, integrity and cooperativeness.”

\* \* \*

Chef Odessa Piper, Madison, Wisconsin, will speak about the “Spirit of Place: The Meaning and Practice of Regional Reliance” at the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) Winter Workshop January 8-9 in Ames. Her appearance is sponsored by the Leopold Center. She is executive chef of L’Etoile Restaurant in Madison.

\* \* \*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Jan. 8, Jan. 20, March 17 (Cherokee); Jan 21, March 19 (LeMars)**—Nutrient and Pest Management Workshop Series. Contact: Jeff Kestel, Iowa Lakes RC&D, (712) 262-2083; or Kevin Kuhn, (712) 732-3096.

**Jan. 9**—Practical Farmers of Iowa Winter Workshops, 8:30 a.m., Ames. Contact: Nan Bonfils, (515) 294-8512.

**Jan. 30**—Fourth Annual Iowa Local Food System Conference, Grinnell. Contact: Jan Libbey, (515) 495-76367; or Gary Guthrie, (515) 382-3117.

**Late January/early February**—Chariton Valley Beef Winter Networking Workshop, 14 ICN sites across Iowa. Contact: Joe Sellers, ISU Extension, (515) 744-2016.

**Feb. 4**—Beef and Forage Bonanza Conference, Creston (Southwestern Community College). Contact: Brian Peterson, NRCS, (515) 782-4218.

**Feb. 11**—Organic Workshop, Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers annual meeting, Cedar Rapids. Contact: Kathleen Delate, (515) 294-7069; or Mark Gleason, (515) 294-0579.

**Feb. 17**—Swine System Options Conference, Ames. Contact: Rich Pirog, (515) 294-3711.

**Feb. 27**—Cornbelt Cow-Calf Conference, Ottumwa. Contact: Byron Leu, ISU Extension, (515) 472-4166.

**March 4-6**—8th Annual Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. Contact: (715) 772-6819.

**March 10**—Forage Management and Grazing Systems Workshop, Peosta (Northeast Iowa Community College). Contact: Tony Harvey, ISU Extension, (319) 583-6496.

**March 16**—Designing and Evaluating Grazing Research Symposium, Des Moines. Contact: Jim Russell, (515) 294-4631.



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