

Grassroots

A Bi-Monthly Newsletter
from the Iowa Farmers Union

August - September 2011



Solar-powered system at Radiance Dairy, photo from Francis Thicke

Powered by On-Farm Energy

Francis Thicke, IFU Board

Iowa has been a leader in alternative energy development. Twenty percent of Iowa's electricity generation capacity today comes from wind power, and Iowa is the national leader in ethanol production.

What has been largely overlooked in Iowa's alternative energy development are systems that produce energy to power agriculture, and that put the profits generated in the pockets of farmers. For example, the ethanol we produce powers cars, not farms. And, the profits of large Iowa wind farms go mostly into the coffers of out-of-state corporations, while the farmers who lease to wind farms continue to pay retail rates for electricity to power their farms. We can do better in powering agriculture with renewable energy and keeping profits on the farm and in rural communities where the energy is produced.

On my own farm I am trying to install a number of small-scale renewable energy systems to reduce -

perhaps someday eliminate - my dependence on fossil fuels. As the writer Bill McKibben put it, instead of looking for a single silver bullet to solve our energy problems, we should look for silver buckshot: a lot of things that together can fill our energy needs.

Several years ago I installed a solar-powered watering system for my 60-paddock pasture system. Solar panels on the edge of a pond power a pump that sends water to a 4,000-gallon tank at the top of a hill. Water from the large tank gravity-flows to water tanks in the paddocks throughout the farm. I also installed two stock watering tanks that source water from ponds and use geothermal (ground-source heat) to keep the tanks from freezing in the winter.

Last year I installed a solar water heating system to heat water for use in my milking parlor and on-farm dairy processing plant. I also use solar-powered fence chargers throughout the farm paddock system, and am working on plans to install a mid-sized wind turbine on the farm to offset my electrical usage.

The mission of the Iowa Farmers Union is to strengthen the independent family farm through education, legislation, and cooperation.

Our goal is to achieve sustainable production, safe foods, a clean environment, and healthy communities.



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Grassroots is the official publication of the Iowa Farmers Union. It is published six times a year as a service to its members.

Annual membership is \$50.

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Hello everyone,

Another summer half gone and the legislature just adjourned after dragging on. The older I get the shorter the summers seem! When I was young it seemed to work the other way, now it seems winter lasts forever before a quick taste of fresh tomatoes.

The politicians are a mixed bag – some are bad and some are good, some need a reality check and some are at the forefront working for change. These leaders are working to help the middle class which comprises 98% of us by creating strong social safety nets. In urban and rural areas the net protecting us includes social security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, food stamps, and capped farm subsidies. The pieces of the safety net need to be reformed to cut waste, fraud, and interferences.

Government (us-as we own it) and the private sector can and should connect as long security is not compromised. Are vouchering medicare and privatizing social security really a good thing for working and retired people? This will cause more problems than we have now and create unnecessary risk and insecurity.

What I do know and feel good about is the recent NFU Board of Directors resolution regarding the U.S House Democrats proposed dairy reforms. The Democrats want a floating base instead of a fixed base. The floating base favors the large dairies and processors by encouraging forward-contracting. This results in the family farm dairies having a depressed and diminished market. We rejected the House Democrats proposal as it would not provide a safety net for all producers, particularly family size operators. What is currently going on in dairy is the same as the industry scenario of the 8 cent hog disaster in 1998 – get rid of traditional producers. Get on the NFU website to find more information.

In closing I would like to remind all our members and potential members how important NFU and Iowa Farmers Union work is to family-size traditional producers, food safety, the environment, and communities. All of these pieces stitch together of the social fabric of rural America. We fight for justice and opportunity for the 98%.

Sincerely,

Chris Petersen, IFU President



Membership (circle one)

\$50 for one year

\$80 for two years

\$150 for four years

\$25 for one year Friend of the Family Farmer**

\$15 for one year Student* (ages 16 years and up through university)

*non-voting, limited benefit membership

Mail form and check or cash payment to:
Iowa Farmers Union, PO Box 8988,
Ames, IA 50014

Pay by credit card or PayPal at our website:
www.iowafarmersunion.org



Support the Farmers Union
in working to protect the family farm,
integrity of our food supply, and
landscape by becoming a member!

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Would you like to receive Grassroots by e-mail? _____

Membership Update

The IFU has over 1,250 members;

We're glad you are one of them!

Please help us this fall as we start a membership drive – talk to your friends and neighbors about the importance of making policy change for family farms, renewable energy, and local food.

Thank you for your support!

Welcome
to Our
New
Members!

- The Schlagel Family, Ames
- Therese Harms, Pleasant Valley
- Megan Hartwig, Des Moines
- Phyllis Franzen, Altoona
- Sam Hammond, Malcom
- Diane Ford, Des Moines
- Peter Komendowski, Waterloo
- Bruce Will, Milford

When I built my house, I installed a geothermal heat exchanger that uses a nearby pond as the heat source and sink for heating and cooling the house. However, I seldom need to use the system for cooling because I built a cupola on the house roof with windows that open by remote control. When we open windows on the cupola and the first floor, a natural convection current flows through the stairwell and out the cupola, cooling the house.

The Practical Farmers of Iowa and Iowa Farmers Union are sponsoring a field day on my farm to showcase the renewable energy systems in place and to discuss additional options for on-farm renewable energy. Gregg Heide, IFU vice-president, will be on hand to discuss his experience with on-farm wind systems. The field day will be held August 27, 1-4pm in Fairfield. Call 641-919-8554 for directions. Looking forward to seeing you there and hearing about your plans for your on-farm energy project!



Francis and Susan Thicke at Radiance Dairy in Fairfield

Join Farmers Union members to help feed America's Hungry

\$1 = \$34 WORTH OF FOOD FOR OUR HUNGRY NEIGHBORS!



One in 6 Americans is struggling with hunger, including 1 in 4 children. Right now, thanks to a \$50,000 matching gift from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, every dollar given through any National Farmers Union member will be doubled — with the member-driven donations going back to the food banks that serve hungry people in their community.

DONATE NOW — use the mail-in form or go online
www.feedingamerica.org/NFU



TOGETHER WE'RE FEEDING AMERICA

I want to double my gift to help feed America!

YES! I want to take advantage of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation's generous matching grant to help hungry families in my community Enclosed is:

- \$15, which will double to help provide \$510 worth of food.
- \$20, which will double to help provide \$680 worth of food.
- \$35, which will double to help provide \$1,190 worth of food.
- \$50, which will double to help provide \$1,700 worth of food.
- \$100, which will double to help provide \$3,400 worth of food.
- \$ _____ which will double to help provide as much food as possible.
- I'm giving by credit card. *(Please see section on back.)*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

(We will use your zip code to make sure your donation goes to food banks in your area.)

OXNONFUO

~~NO~~ MATCH MY GIFT



TOGETHER WE'RE FEEDING AMERICA

To donate securely online, visit www.feedingamerica.org/NFU

Thank you! Please make your check payable to Feeding America, and return this form with your gift in the enclosed envelope to Feeding America, P.O. Box 96749, Washington, DC 20090-6749. Or donate securely online at www.feedingamerica.org/NFU. Contributions to Feeding America may be tax-deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. If you have any questions, call us at 1•800•771•2303.

Upcoming Events



Farm Camp 2011

Natasha Hoover

An enthusiastic group of elementary-age youth learned about the complex interactions and ecosystems that make up farms at IFU Farm Camp. The ideal location for Farm Camp, Onion Creek Farm is a small organic vegetable farm that provides local restaurants with farm fresh lettuce, greens, onions, sweet potatoes, and a variety of other seasonal produce.

Nestled among perennial gardens, woods, a restored prairie, vegetable gardens, and Onion Creek in Ames, the diversity of the landscape of Onion Creek Farm provided a unique opportunity for the youth to learn about the farm. Farm Camp participants studied the complex interactions of farms and the environment as they splashed through the creek, harvested lettuce, and built forts. Farm Camp provided a great opportunity for youth to get an in depth look at a farm as part of the landscape enveloped in the surrounding environment.

The youth learned about farm living while observing Onion Creek Farmers Lonna Nachtigal and Joe Lynch collecting eggs, tending to the gardens, and preparing the lettuce and greens for delivery to local restaurants. The group got to sample a variety of lettuce and greens, and was surprised by some of the unique and strong flavors – especially the mustards. Participants

learned about the basics of vegetable gardening, how to identify vegetable parts and made farm-inspired art.

IFU Farm Camp would have hardly been complete without some interaction with farm animals. Though the neighboring horse remained out of sight the entire week, the group did get to meet chickens and ducks. The youth enjoyed collecting arugula and bedstraw to feed the birds. The fowl also got a taste of the occasional scraps from lunch boxes – who would have guessed chickens love bananas?

A strong component of Farm Camp was learning about the various ecosystems within Onion Creek Farm. The participants escaped the summer heat by exploring the creek to learn about aquatic life and the erosive power of the rushing stream. The youth recorded biodiversity in the restored prairie, woods, and grassed pathways. They learned about food webs and habitats as they observed wildlife – tree frogs, deer, fungi, bugs, and birds. While learning about animal habitats, the group built habitats of their own out of fallen branches in the woods.

The Iowa Farmers Union was glad to be able to provide this opportunity to connect youth to farms. Thanks to all of the families that participated and to Onion Creek Farm!

Natasha Hoover is a graduate student at Iowa State University. As the Education Assistant, she planned and ran the IFU 2011 Farm Camp.

From the Org. for Competitive Markets:
Food & Agriculture Conference
August 12–13,
Kansas City, MO

From IFU & Practical Farmers of Iowa:
Field Day
August 27, 1PM
Radiance Dairy,
Fairfield, Iowa

From the National Farmers Union:
Fall Legislative Fly-in
September 12–14,
Washington, DC

From the Center for Cooperatives:
Farmer Cooperatives Conference
November 3–4, 2011
Minneapolis, MN

From NCR–SARE:
Small Farm Trade Show & Conference
November 3–4, 2011
Columbia, MO

From Iowa's Center for Ag Safety and Health:
Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety & Health Forum
November 16–17,
Des Moines, IA

Legislative Update

Kent Hartwig

After 25 weeks and 172 days in session, the 2011 legislature finally adjourned on June 30th, narrowly averting a government shutdown. The governor has thirty days to review legislation passed in the final days of session. However, with the current budget ending on June 30th, the legislature was forced to pass a one month budget extension to ensure the continuation of government services while Governor Branstad considers the final budgets.

For the Iowa Farmers Union, this session should be considered a success!

PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

We were influential in shutting down several efforts to move important environmental programs from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, including water quality monitoring.

LOCAL FOOD

Most importantly, the Iowa Farmers Union was instrumental in securing funding for a local foods coordinator and commission. The funds were included in the final

Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget (SF 509) in the final days of session. The conference committee report included \$75,000 for the first year and \$37,500 for the second year of the program (all budgets contained reduced funding for the second budget year to preserve legislative authority to appropriate funds). The commission was significantly reduced in number to make it a more manageable entity and we were fortunate to secure the Iowa Farmers Union a seat on the Commission in the final hours of the session. This is an incredibly exciting opportunity for IFU to influence local food policy for years to come and to help grow our rural economies.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Regarding renewable energy, HF 672 was signed into law. This bill extends the wind energy tax credits that are set to expire at the end of this year until 2015. The bill also shifts some of the unused credits from the large scale wind program to the smaller scale program and an ethanol co-generation facility.

NUCLEAR ENERGY & INTERFERENCE WITH AG

Unfortunately, there were two major bills IFU was monitoring that failed to pass this session. A bill allowing MidAmerican Energy to build a nuclear power plant (HF 561) and legislation establishing



Kent Hartwig

increased criminal penalties for trespassing and recording at agriculture facilities (HF 589) were both returned to committees in the Senate. Although these bills did not pass this session, they are still eligible for debate and we expect will be given consideration next year.

With the legislative session now complete, Advocacy Strategies will begin the process of working with the Iowa Farmers Union Board to develop member priorities for next session. Once those priorities are set, we will begin reaching out to legislators during the interim to work toward success next session. As always, it is a pleasure to serve your organization at the Iowa Capitol.

“I warn my countrymen that the great recent progress made in city life is not a full measure of our civilization; for our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness, and the completeness, as well as the prosperity, of life in the country. The men and women on the farms stand for what is fundamentally best and most needed in our American life. Upon the development of country life rests ultimately our ability, by methods of farming requiring the highest intelligence, to continue to feed and clothe the hungry nations; to supply the city with fresh blood, clean bodies and clear brains that can endure the terrific strain of modern life; we need the development of men and women in the open country who will be in the future, as in the past, the stay and strength of the nation in time of war, and its guiding and controlling spirit in time of peace.”

President Theodore Roosevelt, April 1910



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Youth at IFU Farm Camp spinning the lettuce that they picked and building a fort in the woods of Onion Creek Farm in Ames

**Information about the 2011 Iowa Farmers Union Convention will be coming soon!
We will be gathering in Central Iowa on Saturday, December 3, 2011 to
celebrate family farms, renewable energy, and local food.**