

# Grow Your Small Market Farm<sup>TM</sup> Business Newsletter

TM

November 2006



**Special points of interest:**

- **Featured Graduates: Kathy and Greg Hohl**
- **Building Business Relationships**
- **Come Network with Us!**
- **Grow Your Small Market Farm<sup>TM</sup> Trademark**
- **Survey Announcement**

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**Featured Graduates: Kathy and Greg Hohl, by Bridget Diamond Welch**



From left to right: Amber, Greg, Kathy, Julie, Adam, and baby Jacob.

Kathy and Greg Hohl of Kathy's Pumpkin Patch and Harvest Park is this issue's featured graduate. Hailing from Donnellson, Iowa, Kathy and Greg graduated from the Grow Your Small Market Farm<sup>TM</sup> class in April of 2006. The Hohls began their family-oriented agri-entertainment business on their third generation farm after Greg went through several neck surgeries. He was no longer able to care for livestock, so the family turned their son's FFA project of selling a few pumpkins out of a wagon at the side of a road (which they had been doing for ten to fifteen years), into a diversified family-oriented business. Kathy says they made the switch to the pumpkin patch because "as a family we knew something about it, enjoyed it, and did some market research", and they found that there was a need and real desire for this type of business in their area.

This has truly been a

family project. Several months ago, the Hohl's son Adam and his wife Julie gave up their jobs as an insurance representative and fourth grade teacher respectively, to bring their young son Jacob to join the family venture. Just last month, the family formed a limited liability corporation

and now run it together. The Hohl's daughter Amber recently graduated from Iowa State University and is now attending a PhD program in genetics in Boston. Even while pursuing her degree, Amber still helps with the pumpkin patch by creating graphic designs for the farm.

gourds, scarecrow building, and a harvest-oriented play area called Harvestville. This year there are also two mazes: one that is corn, the other sorghum.

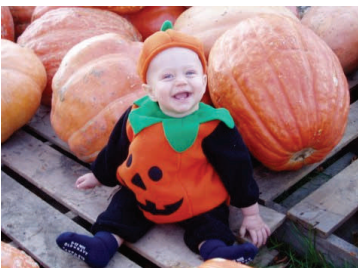
One of the benefits Kathy sees in running a market farm is the connection between customer and farmer. This connection allows the family to "tell the farm story" and connect the product with the process for their visitors. According to this graduate, there is a real movement in Iowa to understand the relationship between food and its source, and she's excited to be a part of that movement. To further this connection,



Basket of the farm's produce.

Kathy's Pumpkin Patch and Harvest Park provides a wide diversity of activities for its customers. The pumpkin patch includes activities such as an open air market, pick your own pumpkins, and wagon rides. It also provides family-oriented activities such as painting

Kathy's farm also allows educational field trips where local schools bring their students to learn more about the farming process. According to Kathy, "I am constantly amazed by the second and third grade classes who come, that even though they live in a rural



One happy customer.

## Featured Graduate continued...

area, don't know what farming is all about." Through opening their farm to the public, not only have the Hohls been able to turn a profit, they are able to share with the customers "what farming and agriculture is all about."

When asked about advice for other small market producers, Kathy stresses the importance of networking with other producers. One good way to do this, she says, is to take the class. It is also important to attend any conferences in your area. Kathy argues that it is vital to make connections and says that making connections with others, especially those farmers that have fall agri-

creation of their corn maze this year. "Talking to people who have 'been there, done that' gives you insights that reading the literature and listening to the experts does not provide."

Another piece of advice Kathy has for other producers is to build either a formal or an informal advisory team.

This team "can give you ideas and tell you what's nuts." Basically, the team can work as your



Gourd decorating—One of the many family activities offered at the pumpkin patch.

insurance. Her first problem has been addressed through utilizing resources available to specialty market producers (in particular, the Iowa State Lab Pathology) and through finally getting rain. She says that it was "the Iowa State Lab Path and God" that "solved our disease problem." She faced her second problem getting liability insur-

ance through perseverance and looking for the right agent. She argues "some issues you don't solve, you just tackle them head on."

More information and details on how to reach Kathy can be found on her website at:

<http://www.kathyspumpkinpatch.com/>



Aerial view of the farm and its operations.

entertainment businesses, has been invaluable to her. She points to getting advice on how to build a corn maze from another specialty market producer who has many years of experience with mazes as an example of how this has helped her business. Hohl was able to talk to them about the changes they've been through, how they design their maze, how they market, and even what type of seed corn they use and has implemented that information to aid in the

own mini-focus group. Selection of this team should be based on what types of customers you would like to draw to your business. Kathy's team consists of many types of people including: an extension director, two couples with children who have marketing and farming background between them, and an older couple. An example of how this aids the farm, Kathy and the older couple walked around the farm pointing to areas that are hard to traverse,

where there might be a good area to build rest spots, and pointing out that the distance between the parking lot and fields may be too far for some older individuals.

One of Kathy's biggest concerns when beginning this business two years ago was whether families would take time out from their many activities and responsibilities to attend an unstructured event. What Kathy is most excited about in her business is that her family has been able to develop a high quality experience that has led a significant number of families to spend, what Kathy calls, their "precious time" on her farm.

When asked about the problems her farm faced, Kathy indicated that two of her biggest problems have been crop disease and finding the right person to handle her liability



Scarecrow building is another activity.

## Building Business Relationships: Interview with a Cooperative Grocery, by Bridget Diamond Welch

Wheatsfield Co-op, in Ames, IA, is a cooperative grocery and natural foods store that focuses on providing an outlet for its members and customers to purchase locally produced and organically grown products such as: meat, produce, and dairy, as well as other local products such as soap, popcorn, honey and baked goods. We sat down with two members of the staff (Linda Johnson and Stacey Brown) to discuss the growth and change the co-op has undergone; what their plans are for the store's future; and how



position in the produce department and began to work with the local producers. She is currently holding this position as well as the position of Operations Manager, a position that

Wheatsfield is "an alternative type of food store. We try to carry all natural or organic foods and support a whole lot of local producers in produce, meat, eggs, dairy and baked goods, everywhere in the store that we can. We are owned by the community, so we really are what the community makes us. Our Board of Directors, which creates the vision that guides the cooperative into the future and maintains the fiduciary responsibility of the operation, is elected from the membership who are members of the community."

This store definition is strongly reflected in its mission statement: "Wheatsfield Cooperative's mission is to serve its members, employees, and the Central Iowa community by offering the highest quality local, natural and certified organic foods, related products and services in ways that best promote the health of the individual, the community, and the earth and honor the cooperative tradition."

The store has served this purpose by not only connecting local producers with consumers and providing 26 community members with jobs and benefits, but also through, as stated by Linda, having its staff involved in philanthropic efforts centered on "food issues, organics, the environment, and this

local community." Wheatsfield hopes to have an even stronger impact through its mission into the future as they are now looking to expand into a larger space where they can be more of a full service grocery store and offer more products and services for their members and customers.

During this interview, we were interested in discovering how Wheatsfield works with producers and how that has changed over time. According to Stacey, the process of working with producers has changed from an informal approach to a more formalized structure out of necessity—a trend that will likely continue as sales continue to grow. When Stacey took over the produce department, many growers would just walk into the store to sell their produce without any advanced contact or pre-ordering. Invoices, if received, were written on scraps of paper or even brown paper sacks. This wasn't the most effective way to run a department and coupled with the growth in business



On the left is general manager Linda Johnson. Stacey Brown, produce manager and operations manager, is on the right.

they work with local producers.

2006 GYSMF class member Linda Johnson has served as the General Manager of Wheatsfield since December of 1999 when she was asked to step into this position because the store was in "fairly dire straits because of some issues with the previous General Manager and the bookkeeper." Stacey Brown also quickly moved through the ranks when she started work at the co-op five years ago as a part-time cashier. Within just a few weeks, she was moved into the manager

has her "overseeing the front end—the cashiers, the produce department, the maintenance of the store, as well as cheese, and hopefully, in the future, a deli operation."

According to Linda, Wheatsfield began the way many co-ops were founded. Originally a buyers' club that operated out of a garage on Iowa State University's campus, it was incorporated in 1974 to help provide a way for its members to purchase goods that were otherwise not available to them. According to Stacey,



Bins for dried goods.

over the last few years, Stacey made it a priority to build a strong local growers program.

To achieve this, they "put some guidelines into

## Co-op Interview Continued...



Current store front in Ames, IA.

place specifying how we wanted produce to be delivered and invoiced and how we wanted to order a head of time, because at that time, our sales were growing and if I ordered from a distributor, I needed to know what else I would be getting in and from where it was coming." According to her, building a relationship between the store and the producer is the most important step. The first thing she wants to do with any new producer is to "know about them, who they are, what type of growing practices they are using." In order to make sure she finds out as much as possible, the store now has forms for the producers to fill out.

Key to this whole process is to find out the story of the producer and their product. This is because, "when we are selling local, we are really selling a story. People want to know where it is coming from, how it was grown, and who grew it." This process is not only important for the relationship between the producer and Wheatsfield, but is also a service that is of primary importance for their customers, and, according to Linda, may also become more formalized as they expand, to

have "that information up in the store, so customers can connect a face to the tomatoes they are eating or the eggs, or whatever it is."

The coming expansion may also increase the amount of products they can accept. The larger floor space will provide more room for produce and all existing products and they are hoping to add a deli, fresh meat, and a bakery. Stacey points out the addition of new products and related services, especially a deli, "would be a learning process for us and the growers we'd be buying from, so flexibility would be very important."

We also spoke to the



Produce, meat and dairy aisle.

pair about how producers should approach their local cooperative groceries about selling their produce or other items. Stacey offered the following: "Definitely make contact with the manager of the department your product would fit into before your product is available" and that it is "worthwhile to talk with us before they plant so the grower understands what our needs are. If it is a new and unique product, then that's not as necessary." This is because they will not be able to take

everyone's tomatoes; they only have room for so much. In order to meet the store's needs, and the needs of the producers, Stacey and Linda have initiated a yearly meeting in January to talk about which producers are going to provide what to the store. This helps both the store and the producers because it ensures that Wheatsfield has the products it needs and that the producers have a market for their goods.

Linda's advice for producers is to know what price they need for their wares. This price "has to include all of the things it took to get it here: all of their labor, the seeds, and whatever cost they had in producing that product. They need to have that under control and understand that so that instead of asking what we are going to give them, they need to come to us with the price they need for their product. We need to know what their cost is so we can give them a fair price, so we can turn around and sell it at a fair price as well." Stacey adds, "We want to pay growers what they need- not just expect them to take whatever we will give them, because I don't want them to feel like we're ripping them off or vice versa."

The class has also given Linda some introspection on the store-producer relationship. Talking with producers in the class gave her a "good per-

spective" on this relationship and showed her "how important it is for them to have a place like Wheatsfield where they can market their products. Because they can do all the growing they want, but if they don't have a

*"We are all players in the same picture, the same system, and how we can all work together. Maybe we've been around longer, maybe we're a different kind of business, but we still need each other."*

place to sell it, you know it doesn't do them much good. It was really eye opening for me, to see what these small growers were looking at and what obstacles they

faced in trying to put their own business plans together and get their start-up businesses off the ground." Stacey adds that this process "just shows how we are all players in the same picture, the same system, and how we can all work together. Maybe we've been around longer, maybe we're a different kind of business, but we still need each other to realize each of our visions to see more local food eaten here a reality."

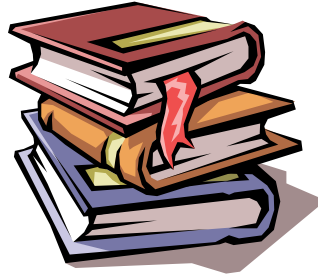
Wheatsfield Cooperative: <http://www.wheatsfield.coop/index2.php>



Local and organic produce display.

## Books to Read

**The Power of Nice**, by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval. Learn why the nice guy doesn't finish last. This book talks about how to use the power of being nice in both your business and in your day-to-day life to get what you want accomplished.



## Grow Your Small Market Farm™ is Now Trademarked

Grow Your Small Market Farm™ has officially been trademarked by the federal government. Penny Brown Huber says, "I wanted to protect the integrity of the name for this very unique business planning program and the trademark helps accomplish this goal." It is not difficult to do, and if you have anything you think needs a trademark, contact Penny for some direction on getting that done, at 515/232-1344.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**  
**Come Network with Us**  
**ALL CLASSES LUNCHEON**  
 December 2, 2006  
 Gateway Center in Ames, IA  
 11:45 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Come join us for an All Class Luncheon to see old friends, catch up on news and learn about the Grow Your Small Market Farm™ network. Terry Besser, a professor of sociology at Iowa State University, will be discussing the importance of networking. In addition, we will explore how to create a formal network with all GYSMF class members. Come with ideas for how you think the network could benefit you! Some possibilities include: having resources to ask questions from other small market farmers who have 'been there and seen that', share supplies and equipment that may be too expensive to buy on your own, or start a group health plan! There are so many options and we want this network to reflect what you need! We are hoping to see many of you there. Penny will be contacting you with more details as we get closer to the event. For more information on the benefits of networking, visit the business network website at: <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/ruralnetworks/>

**HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!!!!**

## Upcoming Events

### Iowa Organic Conference

November 20, 2006

This year the conference will include a new seminar, "How to Transition to Organic Farming" and will host the first meeting of the Iowa Organic Association. For more information, visit the website at: <http://www.uca.iastate.edu/mnet/organic06/home.html>



### PFI Conference

January 12-13, 2007

The theme for next year's conference is "Paths to Prosperity." Topics will range from information on how to protect your animals from the Avian flu to planning for farm succession. For more information on this conference, visit the website at: [www.practicalfarmers.org](http://www.practicalfarmers.org)

### Local Foods Conference

February 2-3, 2007

Next year the conference will be held in Marshalltown, IA and will be hosted by the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture. It is too early for much information about this conference but keep checking the website for updates. You can find the website at: [www.growinca.org](http://www.growinca.org)

### Food Safety Seminars

You should consider attending at least one of these one day seminars. I did and learned a lot—Highly Recommended!

Schedule:

Nov 14, 2006: Dubuque  
 Nov 15, 2006: Des Moines  
 Nov 20, 2006: Sioux City  
 Dec 20, 2006: Des Moines  
 Jan 24, 2007: Marion  
 Feb 07, 2007: Waterloo  
 Feb 27, 2007: Fort Dodge  
 Mar 21, 2007: Iowa City  
 Apr 18, 2007: Marion

Website: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/events/detail.cfm?CourseID=535>





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## BUSINESS NETWORKS & RURAL COMMUNITY ECONOMIC VITALITY

*Business Networks and Rural Economic Vitality is a research project funded by the USDA's Fund for Rural America and the National Science Foundation.*

WE'RE ON THE WEB @  
[www.iabusnet.org](http://www.iabusnet.org)

This project was funded in part by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Established by the 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act, the Leopold Center supports the development of profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources.

## Be on the Look Out for a Survey from Iowa State University

Did you know that the GYSMF network receives some funding from a study on business networks at Iowa State University: Business Networks & Rural Community Economic Vitality? We also receive newsletter help from a research assistant from the department of sociology because of this study. Part of the agreement for this aid is to help them collect data on network formation. Because of this, within the next few months you will be receiving a survey in your email from Iowa State University to assess the amount of networking that occurs between class members. Please help support this research and the help we receive by taking some time and filling the survey out. Your participation will be appreciated greatly.



For more information on this study, visit the website at:  
<http://www.soc.iastate.edu/ruralnetworks/>

## Check It Out!

Check out SBDC website @ <http://www.iowasbdc.org/calendar.cfm>—look at workshops in your area.

*"Grow Your Small Market Farm™ Business" Newsletter is edited by Bridget Diamond Welch, Research Assistant, Department of Sociology at Iowa State University. Please email submissions, classifieds, photos, and ideas to—[bkwelch@iastate.edu](mailto:bkwelch@iastate.edu)—We welcome your comments and suggestions.*