

## **A Brief History of the ISU Horticulture Research Station: A Review and Timeline 1967-2017**

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On September 16, 2017, the ISU Horticulture Research Station celebrated 50 years of research, teaching, and extension at its current location, seven miles northeast of campus. The station, opened in 1967, is home to a wide variety of projects and activities focused around field-scale horticultural research, teaching, and extension programs. The celebration was marked by a public field day, tours of the station, a market of station produce, and a program. The program was hosted by Charity Nebbe, Iowa Public Radio personality, and Jeff Iles, chair, Department of Horticulture, with remarks by Wendy Wintersteen, dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). More than 300 people attended the event.

The 230-acre station features a 12-acre lake (used for irrigation), vineyards, orchards, a hop yard, turfgrass plots, prairie, fields for growing fruit and vegetables, and shade and ornamental trees. During the 50 years following its relocation from campus to the current site, the station has hosted thousands of students, growers, faculty, and staff as they learn, network, and enjoy the park-like setting. Iles referred to the Horticulture Station “as one of the best (horticultural research stations) that I’ve seen in my travels around the country.” He gave much credit to station superintendent Nick Howell, who has led the operation since 2006. Howell is the fifth station superintendent.

The station has 85 projects led by 24 faculty from five ISU departments, and hosts 3,000 visitors annually, 11 distinct field days, plus numerous ISU classes.

In the fall of 1956, when E.S. Haber, head of Iowa State’s Department of Horticulture, learned the Horticulture Farm southwest of campus would have to be relinquished, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Haber and his colleagues to imagine the eventual relocation of the farm to the Albert Pritchard farmstead northeast of Ames. But 11 years later the relocation was complete, and in retrospect, what a fortuitous relocation it turned out to be. Because in the estimation of many, the Horticulture Research Station, established in 1967, is one of the crown jewels of the Research and Demonstration Farms system. Situated on 239 acres of gently rolling farmland with a 12-acre lake as its centerpiece, the “Hort Farm” is the place to go in Iowa if you are interested in learning about every kind of horticultural crop imaginable. From peppers and hops to turfgrass and trees, the Horticulture Research Station is Iowa’s horticultural epicenter.

Research, extension, and teaching are the three pillars of any land grant institution, and those pillars remain the foundation on which the ISU Horticulture Research Station was constructed.

*Research.* The concept of designing and conducting original research to solve problems is as old as Iowa State University itself. And that important business is alive today at the Horticulture Research Station. In the world of plant research, field studies are critically important. Theories, concepts, and plain old good ideas must be tested “in the field” to

gauge their effectiveness in real world conditions. The Station is the perfect place to conduct field studies because of its remote location and challenging environmental conditions. Hot in the summer, colder than town (Ames) in the winter, and a welcome breeze that can quickly turn to full-blown gale are common climate/weather variables that simply cannot be duplicated in the laboratory. From demonstrations to carefully designed field plot investigations, the Horticulture Research Station was created to support original research.

*Extension.* Research findings alone are useless unless they are communicated to audiences who can understand and apply them to their everyday lives. And the sharing of information between researcher and practitioner happens on a frequent basis at the ISU Horticulture Research Station. From field days and grower meetings, to demonstration plots and guided tours, visitors to the Station are able to see, smell, and touch life-changing research multiple times throughout the year. The Station is the place to go to network, learn, and appreciate the beauty and impact of this wonderful tract of land.

#### **Current Farm Staff**

Nick Howell, Superintendent  
 Brandon Carpenter, Agriculture Specialist  
 Ben Pease, Research Associate (Turfgrass)  
 Jeff Braland, Farm Equipment Operator  
 Lynn Schroeder, Field Laboratory Technician

#### **Turfgrass Research Managers**

Jeff Nuss  
 Rick Moore  
 Ken Diesberg  
 Jim Dickson  
 Rodney St. John  
 Chris Blume  
 Marcus Jones  
 Dan Strey

*Teaching.* Both undergraduate and graduate students benefit from the ISU Horticulture Research Station. The living, growing plants rooted in Iowa's rich soil create powerful teaching tools. The lessons cascade forth to both the knowledgeable teacher and the attentive learner. First, as a place to learn and practice the art and science of horticulture, and perhaps later, as a worker or researcher themselves. Many a graduate of the Department of Horticulture or the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences have spent quality time at the Station working alongside professors and learning what it means to conduct research that will withstand the scrutiny of peer review.

For 50 years, the ISU Horticulture Research Station has held fast to the worthy and laudable tenets of the land grant tradition. But there is work yet to be done, and we owe it to all who have come before us, to protect this jewel of the research and demonstration farm system and to continue helping and educating all who find their way here.

#### **Horticulture Station Superintendents**

Al Kemp 1968-1985  
 Mark Stoskopf 1986-1993  
 Richard Moore 1993-1999  
 Will Emley 2000-2005  
 Nick Howell 2006-current

#### **Former Farm Employees**

Paul Dayton  
 Bill Connolly  
 Tim Wiegler  
 Ken Bickelhaupt  
 Al Morris  
 Adrian Lucas  
 Rich Clayton  
 Dennis Portz  
 Jim Kubik

## ISU Horticulture Research Station Timeline

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1856	Franklin Township landowners include John H. Keigley and Giles Swans.
1871	James Dodds purchases property from Giles Swan.
1890	James Dodds owns 450 acres, family of 10.
1897	James Dodds and wife transfer property to W.M. Greeley.
1908	W.M. Greeley owns 295 acres in Franklin township.
1940	George F. and Rose Veenker purchase land from Bert Anderson.
1948	Albert and Ina C. Pritchard purchase property from Veenkers.
1964	Farm sold to CAD, an affiliate of ISU College of Agriculture.
1966	Original Chieftain apple orchard established at new station.
1966	Crimson Sweet watermelon released.
1967	The ISU Horticulture Research Station opens. Al Kemp appointed superintendent of the station.
1967	CAD transfers ownership of station to the ISU Research Foundation.
1973	ISU Research Foundation transfers ownership of station to ISU.
1977	Carefree Beauty rose, trialed at Horticulture Station, released.
1981	Sunrise Forsythia, trialed at Horticulture Station, released.
1984	Red Prince Weigela, trialed at Horticulture Station, released.
1985	Flowering crabapple trial established.
1985	Al Kemp retires as superintendent.
1986	Mark Stoskopf appointed superintendent.
1988	Six cane kniffin vineyard established.
1989	C52 root stock apple orchard established.
1990	Shade tree trial established.
1991	Corn gluten meal, a natural herbicide developed at the Horticulture Station, receives U.S. patent.
1993	Richard (Rick) Moore appointed superintendent.
1994	Irrigation expanded to the north and south edges of the station.
1995	Home Demonstration Garden established.
1997	High fence installed around the perimeter of the station to keep out deer.
1998	Leopold wine/cultural practices vineyard established.
2000	Will Emley appointed superintendent.
2001	Rural water installed.
2002	Aquatic Research Facility constructed with 6, ¼ acre ponds for aquaculture research.
2002	Domoto Persian Walnut, developed at the station, released.
2003	ISU Research and Demonstration Farms assumes management of station from Horticulture Department.
2005	NREM storage building constructed.
2005	Elm tree trial established.
2006	Nick Howell appointed superintendent.
2006	Student Organic Farm relocated to station.
2006	High-tunnel constructed, one of first in Iowa.

- 2007 Original Chieftain apple orchard replaced with a new Chieftain trellis apple orchard.
- 2008 NE1020 vineyard established.
- 2008 Permanent water level of the lake raised 18 inches.
- 2008 Organic practices research began.
- 2009 Three mini-tunnels constructed.
- 2009 Station supports 79 research trials lead by 22 principal investigators and had a \$140,000 operating budget.
- 2009 Station hosted 1,388 visitors and 6 field days.
- 2010 New trellis orchard established to replace semi-dwarf apple orchards.
- 2011 Station-funded graduate assistantship program began.
- 2012 New wet well and irrigation pumping station installed on south shore of lake.
- 2012 Growing system vineyard established.
- 2012 Bee building for honeybee and wasp research constructed.
- 2012 President of Kosovo visits Station as part of U.S. ag tour.
- 2012 Second high-tunnel constructed.
- 2015 Sports Turf Field constructed for sports turf research.
- 2015 Fiber optic lines installed.
- 2015 Hops yard constructed and planted for hops research.
- 2015 Irrigation expanded to the central portion of the station.
- 2015 10-acre prairie established.
- 2016 Organic certification obtained for five acres of land for research purposes.
- 2016 Station supported 85 research trials lead by 25 principal investigators and had a \$300,000 annual operating budget.
- 2016 Station hosted 2,000 visitors and 11 field days.
- 2017 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Horticulture Research Station celebrated.

Abbreviations:

ISU = Iowa State University

CAD = Committee for Agricultural Development

NREM = Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department