

## Northwest Research Farm: A Brief History

### RFR-A1910

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In 1954, farmers, businessmen, and farm leaders formed the Northwest Iowa Experimental Association and incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the laws of the State of Iowa. Over 21,000 shares of stock were sold to more than 4,000 individuals and firms in Lyon, Sioux, Plymouth, Osceola, O'Brien, Cherokee, Ida, Clay, Buena Vista, and Sac Counties. An examination of the soils of these counties revealed that a research farm at a single location may not be satisfactory because of soil differences between these counties. Stock sales were used to purchase land for experimental work at two separate tracts. A 76-acre tract known as the Galva-Primghar Experimental Farm was located one mile northeast of Sutherland in O'Brien County. A 37-acre tract known as the Moody Experimental Farm was located on Highway 75, nine miles south of Rock Rapids near Doon in Lyon County. The Northwest Iowa Experimental Association and ISU Ag and Home Economics Experiment Station joined together and established research at the Moody site in 1956 and at the Galva-Primghar site in 1957. The Galva-Primghar and Moody monikers refer to major soil types represented. The first experiments dealt with crop variety testing, tillage, plant populations, and moisture and fertility reserves.

The farms were collectively referred to as the ISU Northwest Research (or Experimental) Farms. In 1989 and 1990, two new tracts were added for expanded research – 60 acres in Lyon County and 152 acres in O'Brien County. The association launched a major fund drive that was well received. The original farms were sold, except for an acreage in

Lyon County. In 2001, an adjacent 120-acre tract was added to the O'Brien County farm with the assistance of the ISU Agricultural Foundation.

Ray Nicholson served as the first superintendent of these farms until 1961. Ken Ross served as superintendent from 1961 until 1976 when Alan Vogel became superintendent. David Haden became superintendent in 1989 and continued in that position until 2007. H. E. (Gene) Myers started at the Doon Farm in 1956 and provided supervision until his retirement in 1990. Table 1 lists the superintendents for the ISU Northwest Research Farm through 2019. There have been eight superintendents since 1956.

David Haden was superintendent and instrumental during the relocation of the research farms from the original sites to the new sites acquired in 1989 and 1990. The relocation process was extensive with the layout of new plots and roadways, construction of new buildings, planting a windbreak, mapping soils, installing tiles and waterways, cleaning up the old farmstead, and closing old field trials. Haden was ably assisted by the farm staff and Dennis Shannon, research farms manager from Ames.

Noteworthy among the superintendents were Ryan Rusk and Josh Sievers. These young enterprising managers added two key programs at the research farm. First, working with extension field agronomist Joel DeJong and the association leadership, a new demonstration program with strip trials in cooperating farmers' fields was started in 2005/2006. With the advent of GPS capability on tractors and combines and the support of extension and research farm staff, the program became popular. The teaching farm at Dordt

College, Sioux Center, Iowa, also joined the program. Later, this on-farm trial program was expanded statewide. Rusk and Sievers also initiated extensive youth field days and programs at the research farm hosting about 1,000 area youth each fall. These programs greatly enhanced the breadth and scope of the research farm in northwest Iowa.

The new Sutherland site had excellent soils and location—with frontage on U.S. Highway 59 and a county pavement. The current farm has 277 acres, a residence, an expanded headquarters with air-conditioned shop/meeting room, grain storage, and windbreak. In 2019, the research farm had 42 research trials on-site, 30 demonstration trials on area fields, served about 30 researchers, hosted 15 field days and about 2,000 visitors.

Of note is the partnership between the research farm staff and extension staff in northwest Iowa. Farm staff has consisted of a superintendent and 1 or 2 assistants, plus a summer student. Extension staff partners originally consisted of area extension staff and the agriculturists from each county. The county staff, particularly in the early years, were important to communication about the farm and the results of trials. Many were involved. Among the notables were Roger Baldwin, Lyon County; Roger Hansen, O'Brien County; Don Rouwenhorst, O'Brien County; David Hessman, Clay County; and Forrest Kohrt, Cherokee County. These individuals often served as association secretary or treasurer. Also, the area extension agronomists were essential partners at the farm. Notables included Dean Barnes,

Spencer; Joel DeJong, Orange City; and Paul Kassel, Spencer. These and many others were critical in communicating the research results, articulating needs of the area and organizing trials and field days. In 1957, the progress report stated, "Regular field days are held on the farm to show the various lines of work in progress." These field days have been held each year since the 1950s.

The field research trials have been extensive over the last 60+ years. And although new trials were started each year and others completed, and farming changed in scale and technology, the research topics have been consistent. In 1957, the progress report stated, "These farms provide facilities (land) for crop variety testing, weed and disease control experiments, and for study of the effects of different soil and crop management in yields, soil fertility, soil tilth, and erosion control."

Information also was to be collected on soil moisture. Several years in the 1950s were dry, particularly in western Iowa. For example, in 1958, less than 11 in. of precipitation occurred during the April through October growing season (about 50% of the long-term average). The field trials of today generally follow the 1957 list with the addition of insect management and water quality research and much less crop variety testing. The activities at the Northwest Research Farm—research trials, demonstrations, field days, visitors, area association leaders, trial results, extension programs—are all testament to the vision, need, and commitment of Northwest Iowans and Iowa State University for an exceptional outlying research farm.

**Table 1. Superintendents of the ISU Northwest Research Farm(s), 1957 to present.\***

Ray Nicholson	1958-1961
Ken Ross	1961-1975
Alan Vogel**	1976-1988
H.E. "Gene" Myers***	1956-1990
David Haden	1989-2007
Ryan Rusk	2008-2012
Josh Sievers	2012-2016
Terry Tuttle	2017-present

\*According to the printed annual progress reports. A complete set is located in Curtiss Hall, ISU, Ames, IA

\*\*Alan Vogel served as superintendent of both sites from 1976 to 1987 and manager of the Sutherland site in 1988.

\*\*\*H.E. "Gene" Myers served as manager of the Doon site from 1956 to 1990 and superintendent of both sites in 1987 and 1988.

**Table 2. Presidents of the Northwest Iowa Experimental Association, 1954 to present.**

Kermit Kloppenburg	O'Brien Co.	1954-1956*
Fred Vanderhan	Sioux Co.	1957-1958
Lyle Fogelman	O'Brien Co.	1959-1961
William Turner	Cherokee Co.	1962-1964
Harrison Fisch	O'Brien Co.	1965-1966
Glen Halling	Sac Co.	1967-1970
Paul Diehl	Buena Vista Co.	1971-1976
Lee Moret	Sioux Co.	1977-1979
Gus Kai	Cherokee Co.	1980-1983
Keith Iverson	O'Brien Co.	1984-1986
Curtis Jones	Clay Co.	1987-1989
Bryon Storm	O'Brien Co.	1990-1994
Don Belson	Ida Co.	1995
Jerry Vander Sanden	Lyon Co.	1996
Ron Christensen	Clay Co.	1997-1998
Bernie Vander Griend	Lyon Co.	1999
Jim Hultgren	Buena Vista Co.	2000-2009
Brian Waldstein	Buena Vista Co.	2010 to present

\*The association was organized in 1954. Records are not complete enough to show if K. Kloppenburg, the first president, was president until 1957.