

# Resilient Farms gives back to planet

Tess Nelson  
The Red Oak Express

A favorite saying of Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman is, "There is no Planet B." The couple is focused on doing all they can to preserve and protect the land purchased in 1899 by McQuown's great-grandparents, John Erwin and Retta Taylor, who named the farm Pleasant Prospect.

Renamed Resilient Farms in 2012 by McQuown and Turman, one of the conservation practices used on the family farm, situated a couple miles west of Red Oak, is prairie strips.

The couple purchased and sowed native Iowa grasses and flowers into strips of ground not suitable for crop production. The strips provide habitat for wildlife, reduce soil and nutrient loss and improve water infiltration.

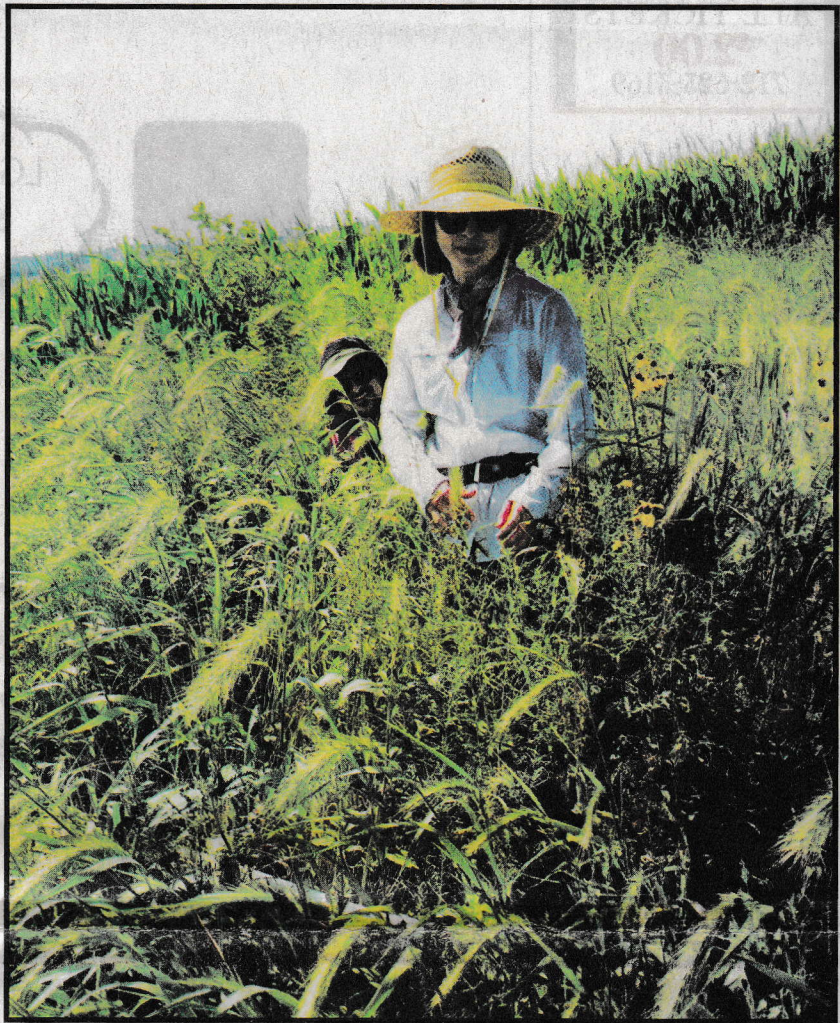
Working with ISU Prairie STRIPS, a second year audit was conducted on McQuown's prairie strips by Lydia English and David Delaney on Friday, July 26.

English, an ISU graduate student, used a 90 degree angled device she tossed in the air, to determine the area of prairie audited. She then sifted through the prairie, specifically naming off what she saw. Delaney, an Altamont, Ill. native, tallied up what English was seeing.

English, a native of Rhode Island, is working on a research project about patterns of the vegetation community in prairie strips across Iowa.

"In other words: I visit farms, 26 this year, that have installed prairie strips, and I survey the plants within those areas. I take information about what species are present and their relative abundance. This information gets communicated back to farmers and it helps Iowa State University understand if and how the prairie strips are changing over time," English described.

With the strips large in size, it took a few hours to conduct the audit.



Lydia English and David Delaney, Iowa State University graduate students, performed a second year audit on an ISU Prairie STRIPS area at Resilient Farms, just outside Red Oak. (Tess Nelson/Red Oak Express)

English found Black-eyed Susan, clover, Rattlesnake Master, Switchgrass, Canary Grass and hundreds more species of native prairie plants, along with a few unwanted species like Mares Tail and Nettle, which McQuown pulls and destroys when encountered.

Being active in conservation practices on her family's Century Farm is a far cry from McQuown's life after she graduated from Red Oak High School in 1970. She attended ISU,

graduating in 1974, and then worked in the fashion, advertising, marketing and fundraising industry in New York City, Chicago and Dallas. She married Turman in 2005 and they moved to Red Oak in 2012 after retirement. In addition to being active in conservation practices, the couple has an extensive produce garden and is active in the Red Oak Farmers Market and other community related events and activities.



# PRAIRIE

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Also owning property on the family farm are McQuown's siblings, Jud Isebrand and Laura Fisher, who resides in Kentucky. The trio also has farm ground on 180th Street. A fourth sibling, Wesley, wasn't interested in the farmground.

McQuown explained the three of them own separate pieces of farmland, but from an operational standpoint, they run the nearly 500 acres as one farm.

"We rent the land to our farmer using a flex lease – base rent plus a percentage bonus calculated using a price/crop yield formula," she said. "The primary goal for Resilient Farms is to preserve and increase the farm's resilience for the long-term by conserving and improving the soil, increasing biodiversity, improving water quality and providing wildlife habitat"

McQuown and Turman's top goal for the farm is to conserve and improve the sustainability of the farmland's use for the long-term. They utilize the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), added grassy waterways instead of tilled terraces, cover crops, and additionally constructed a riparian buffer along with creek.

"In May 2015, we planted 1,500 trees and shrubs to extend the riparian buffer the full length of our creek. We killed the invasive reed canary grass in preparation for the planting. Now, native wetland plants such as arrowhead and milkweed are recolonizing. Jud, a forestry consultant and conservationist, worked with us on this project."

The installation of solar energy, generating about 40 percent of the farm's electricity and an air-tight, highly insulated Passivhaus, cap off the couple's homage to Mother Earth.



Maggie McQuown pulls unwanted weeds from a prairie strip area at Resilient Farms outside Red Oak. (Tess Nelson/Red Oak Express)



The addition of native Iowa prairie grasses have increased the number of butterflies and birds, said McQuown. (Tess Nelson/Red Oak Express)