



Green Lands
Blue Waters

Voices From Our Network

The Civic Scientists

The next generation of continuous living cover (CLC) researchers reflect on the current moment in history and reimagine the future.

The Farmer

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I slug through the day. Screen to screen. A sea of eyebrows, another screen. On a bathroom break, a rare venture into the eerie common space, I look out the window. I see a praying mantis, bigger than my hand. Upside down, calmly peering in from outdoors. I wiggle with excitement, and I search for some eyebrows. I see some sandwiched by headphones, walking towards me. 'There's a praying mantis on the window!' The eyebrows don't move, but the eyes look at me. I point and step back, creating a six foot invitation to look. The eyebrows turn around and walk the opposite way.

I slug back to the office, pack up a screen to take home. I pass by the praying mantis again. I think it's dead.

At home I talk to a screen, make lunch, then sit down to listen to a screen talk to me. It's the first installment of the Department of Agronomy's seminar series. That morning, when I read the email invitation, I could smell the cheap cookies and coffee. No cheap cookies this year. The speaker is a farmer. A graduate of the department. Younger than me. I'm slouched in my chair, my hands full of green beans and hummus as he starts.

He is very articulate. He reads his farm's mission statement, and it's beautiful. What farm has a mission statement? I sit up straighter. He says something I want to write down. I get up to find a pen and rush back. I write it on my arm. He says another thing I want to write down and I write it on my leg. I realize this isn't sustainable, so I trot to get a notebook. When I come back into the room he is listing things he wants.

...to be able to swim in the local lake.

I want to have time to swim in the local lake.

I want my farm to have diversity, and connections.

I want my farm not to lose soil when it rains.

I want to raise 300 bushel corn.

I want a crop to replace corn.

I want my cows to eat thistle.

I want my cover crops to feed my cows.

I want labor to replace my 60-something dad.

I want...

I'm still standing, notebook in hand, and I yell and make a touchdown sign.

I want those things for you too!

I pace around for the last bit of his talk. He thanks everyone for listening, invites us to his farm, and I end it. I close my screen, and I am grinning. I stack four books on my dresser by the window, and set the screen on top. I open it, and work the rest of the day standing up, looking at all the life outside my window.



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Gina Nichols is a doctoral student in the Department of Agronomy at Iowa State University where she researches the benefits of diversified cropping systems. Much of her recent work has looked at the effects of cover crops on weeds. Gina enjoys data science, winter biking, and eggplants.