



ICE SAGE

Living and Loving the Land Poems

LEVI LYLE

Praise for *Living and Loving the Land Poems*

In his new timely book of poetry *Ice Sage: Living and Loving the Land* Levi Lyle has managed to touch us all, in the same and different ways. From “*My Dinner ‘Tis of Thee*” to “*One Trip Farming*” he weaves a message of loss of jobs and the saving of soil into one unique tapestry. He recalls a past not so pure, a present not always perfect and a future to long for. This one book of poetry captures the essence of life on the prairie for an organic farmer from space to our own backyard.

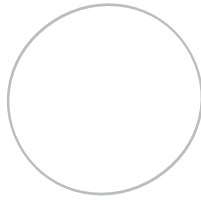
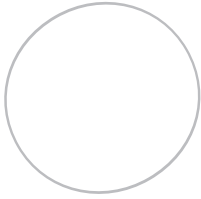
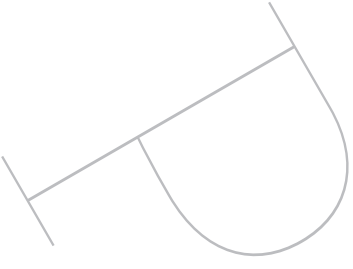
Jeff Moyer, Fellow Farmer and CEO/Rodale Institute

Travel through life on an Iowa farm with Levi Lyle, as he serenades us with poems resembling a summer song of hope and renewal. From poignant reflections on nature’s mysteries in the soil to careful criticism of our current food system, Levi transports you across time and seasons, urging us to pause and embrace the beauty around us.

Kathleen Delate, PhD. Extension Organic Specialist,
Iowa State University

Levi Lyle is an Iowa farmer and poet who cares deeply about being a good steward of the land and protecting the environment and about producing nutritious food on his farm. He beautifully expresses the need for regenerative, healthy soils as well as his concerns about “modern” industrial agriculture with its toxic pesticides, and the need to revive rural Iowa and America through his poems.

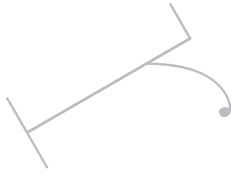
Ken Roseboro, Editor/Publisher *The Organic & Non-GMO Report/The Non-GMO Sourcebook*



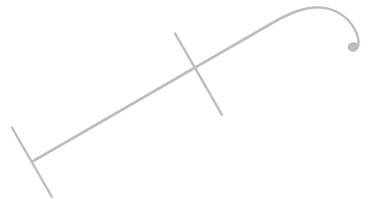
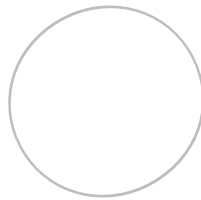


Ice Sage

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Levi Lyle



ICE SAGE



Ice Sage: Living and Loving the Land Poems

Levi Lyle

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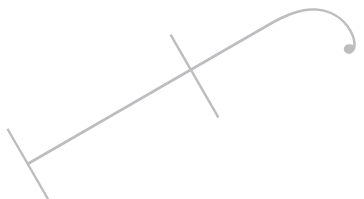
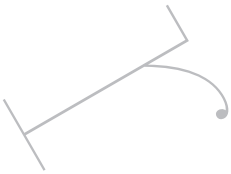
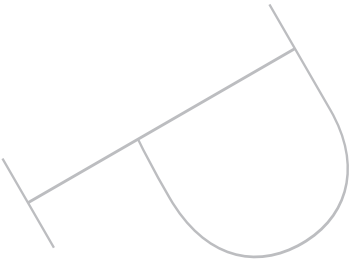
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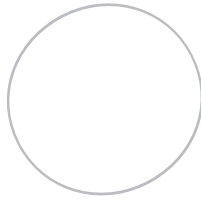
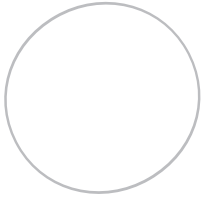
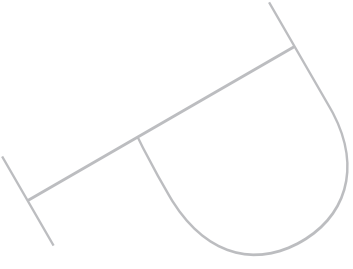
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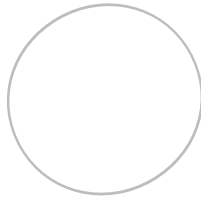
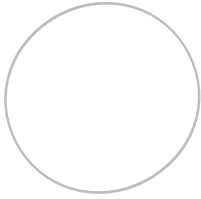
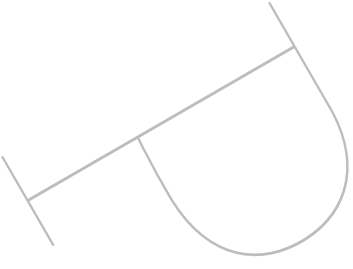


About the Co-Publisher

Levi's Indigenous Fruit Enterprises was conceived for the purpose of coalescing forward thinking ideas about community under one umbrella. The common thread interconnecting all community relationships is reverent intentioned consciousness — ecological communities, human communities, and where they overlap (aka. our planetary community).

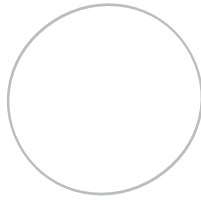
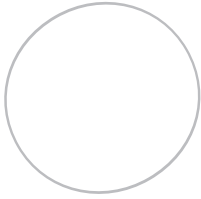
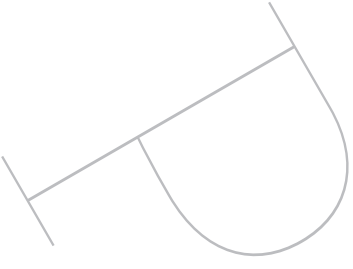
The use of the word "Indigenous," is intended to represent a balanced relationship with our planet — a symbiosis with Nature. The word "Fruit" is intended to refer to fruits-of-labor and a call to action.

If you value a vision for a more integrated and connected relationship with Earth, please share our works with others. Together we'll celebrate the communities we share.



About the Author

Levi Lyle grew up on a farm near Keota, Iowa, and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with a BA in Science Education with an Environmental emphasis and a MAE in Post-Secondary Education. After ten years of teaching, counseling, and working as an academic advisor, Levi and his wife Jill returned to the farm where they raise their four children. Along with his interest in growing a variety of native fruits, Levi and his family grow and distribute fresh Aronia berries seasonally to local markets. Processing and marketing wild fruits is a passion that Levi feels brings balance to his other agricultural endeavors. Levi has worked as an organic inspector and now consults on the topic of organic transition. He has been a local leader in conservation no-till farming using roller crimping, a practice applied to cover crops that boosts sequestration on the prairie ecosystem – a role once filled by the buffalo in stampede. He passionately speaks about solving the global greenhouse gas dilemma by innovating Midwest farm policy to allow farmers to lead, which is the focus of the third book in this series.



Acknowledgments

Thank you to my parents, Trent and Joy Lyle, who taught me how to live and love.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the following people and organizations: my mother Joy for editing, contributing poetic form to my ideas, and also for the cover art; my father Trent for supporting my ideas regarding agriculture and for contributing back cover art; James Galvin for support as the first reader of the manuscript; Guang Han for Chinese translations of two poems; and Practical Farmers of Iowa for their support and providing statistical information from the USDA.

Guang Han is an International graduate student pursuing a Ph.D co-majoring in Sustainable Agriculture and Agricultural Extension Education at Iowa State University.

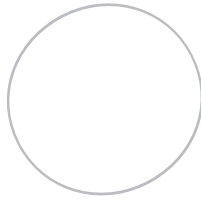
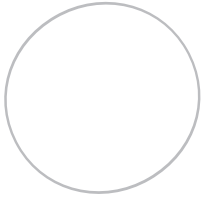
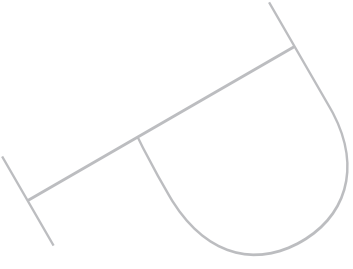
For more information about Practical Farmers of Iowa, see their website practicalfarmers.org or give them a call 515-232-5661.

Thank you to the Iowa Poetry Association for first publishing the following poems in *Lyrical Iowa*: "Square Mile," "Lawn," "Prairie Ledger," "Seed Distributors (By Volume)," "Michael, the Tailor," "Loam" (originally titled Sod), "Green Manure (Cover Crops)," and "Prairie Volcanoes." Also, thank you to Iowa Telepoem for publishing my first audio recorded poems: "Square Mile," "Green Manure (Cover Crops)," and "KE TI WA (Meskwaki Indian word for Eagle)."

—Levi Lyle

*“Winter under cultivation
Is as arable as Spring.”*

Emily Dickinson



Foreword

Iowa is a land formed by ice and fire. Change here took place gradually, over eons – until it suddenly accelerated. For thousands of years, glaciers covered the state, scouring slowly across the land. But as they melted, the places we know today as quiet streams were raging rivers, cutting tons of soil and rock from the landscape and hauling it downstream. Mudflats blew dirt for miles and stacked it up hundreds of feet deep, and hard ice and rock dredged holes in the ground, bequeathing marshy potholes that laced the land with wetlands and lakes. Geologically, the landscape was changed overnight. When the first people arrived in Iowa thousands of years ago, they saw a land of opportunity, and transformed raw material into a massive pastureland for grazing animal production, managed woodlands and farms around the edges. They wielded fire to encourage grass to grow, and sprawling oak savannas took root, nurturing interlinked communities of people and animals. Vast herds of bison thundered through the prairies, nourishing the soil and sustaining the people – and the haze of smoke hovering over the land, wafting the promise of green grass and the sustenance it signified, must have been a sight to behold.

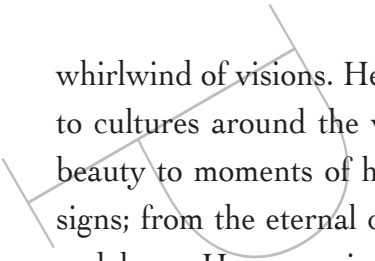
When the first ploughs broke the prairie sod as the colonial pioneers sought land and opportunity in Iowa's fertile valleys, the pace of change quickened more. Railways followed and bison dwindled, while the first peoples and their nurturing fires were displaced. Over the last 75 years, the scale of change has been even

more exponential. Dramatic transformations have succeeded one after another. Developments in technology, coupled with government policy encouraging research and specialization, have resulted in corn, soybean, hog, cattle, chicken and egg production numbers utterly unthinkable even as late as World War II. This tremendous output born of mechanization has not benefited everyone. While the number of farmers and the rural communities where they live has been in decline for decades, these losses have accelerated over the past 40 years, ushering in a cascade of unplanned consequences. As the farmers fled or sold out, the backbones of those rural communities – schools, churches, and small-town businesses – consolidated and shrank.

In the 1980s, that process reached a crisis point. Farms – and the rural institutions such as banks, hardware stores and even schools – were shuttering. Concerned Iowans formed Practical Farmers of Iowa to use science – on-farm research – to figure out farming solutions that kept profits, and soil, on their farms. PFI, like Iowa as a whole, has continued to rapidly evolve since its inception.

PFI's founding farmer, Dick Thompson, once said of the group: "We don't have all the answers, we're just trying to ask the right questions." That rings true today. We don't have all the answers, and the answers we do have are often different from those of our neighbors. But the curious, questioning farmers in our ranks are always asking new and bigger questions, never satisfied to stop searching for answers. PFI farmers are driven to seek – and somehow, however incompletely, find their own answers.

In this book of poetry, Levi embraces those questions with a



whirlwind of visions. He takes us from the ice age to the future, to cultures around the world and back in time; from stunning beauty to moments of horror; from purple coneflowers to stop signs; from the eternal change of seasons to the work of wasps and bees. He recognizes the challenges, but his words bend towards hope. There is peace, for him, in the road to resilience – the clover, the earthworms, the dirt staying put, the rye pollen in the spring.

But more than anything, his visions force us to ask: Where did we come from? Where are we going? Where do we want to go?

As Levi wonders, “Where will we set off walkin’ / beyond dreams by dawn / with our daughters on our backs?”

Nick Ohde

Practical Farmers of Iowa



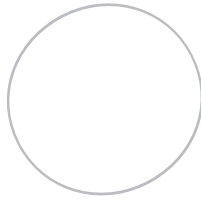
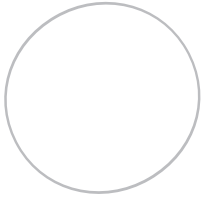
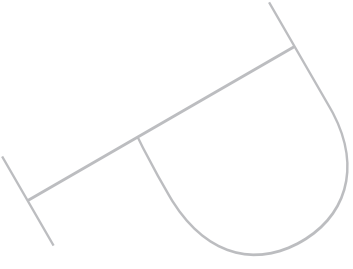
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Ice Sage

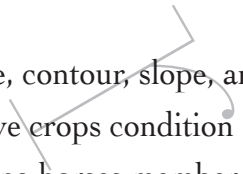
Living and Loving the Land Poems




Tone



The fitness of farmland:
epitaph in hieroglyph,
Venus of Milo in a grotto.




On shape, contour, slope, and grade,
productive crops condition
the stamina horses member.

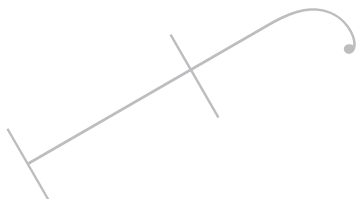


Like a living organism's flagella
volitions her muscles,
field of winter cover crop wags

in a rain storm. Hell
or high water,
weather front upon weather front,



season upon season,
self contain a community;
rejoicing resiliency!

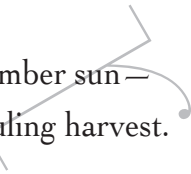


For ecosystems everywhere,
setting the tone.

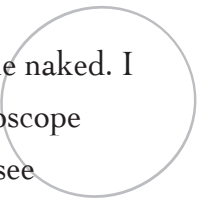
Humus



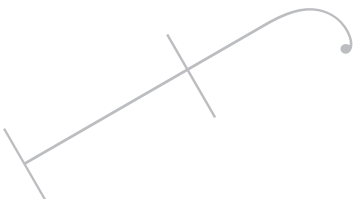
Hues of borealis blue morning
glories between corn rows
seven species in awe
burst
in September sun —
days hauling harvest.



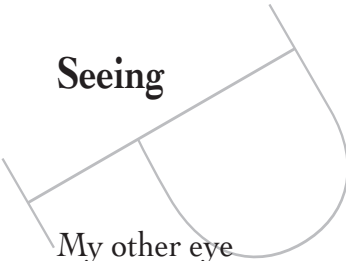
Without interseed, his workers (microbes)
take winter siesta,
pretend sleep to the naked. I
peer into the microscope
fully expecting to see
rations.




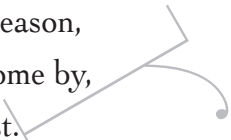
Bacteria unpack noguled roots,
feasted upon by cannibal nematodes — both predator and prey;
devoured by slugs and worms and impelled by
a mycorrhizal fungi hyphae —
the electromagnetic tide
spiders through the “life bread.”



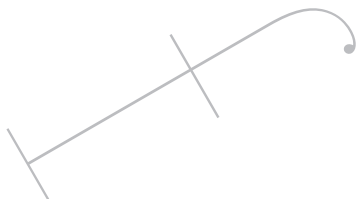

Seeing



My other eye
perceives a world
where throughput is reason
and real reason,
hard to come by,
is compost.



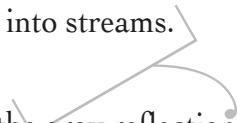
Rain showers and sunshine adorn
my skull, millennia since,
bleached white
half emerges
the rich black garden.
A peach stone germinated within
a sprout lifts through the socket
of the eternal one.



March Sheen

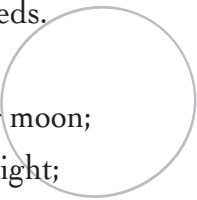


Not the equinox
nor first sign of spring
when imminent rains
stain into streams.

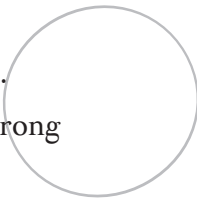


Not the gray reflection
overcast brings
nor the browns and reds
bled from virgin beds.

White shimmering moon;
breeze broad day light;
push and pull land
in high tide green sky.

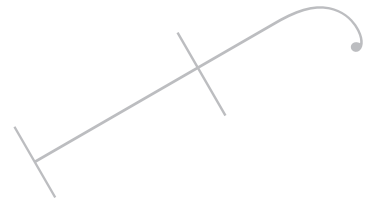
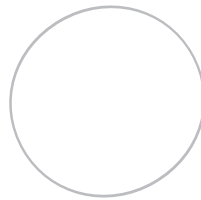
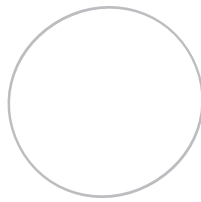


The thought of it hiding there...
Just think, present all winter strong
beneath her slip—
cover crop.



Seed Distributors (by volume)

1. wind
2. water
3. bird, a dove or maybe a lark
4. mammal
5. Dow Chemical DuPont
6. BASF
7. Syngenta-ChemChina



Legacy of the Tortoise Afghan

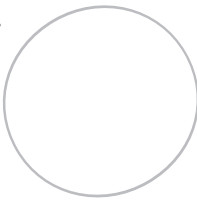


The dense black loam of Mother Earth
is interwoven with the root tapestry of tall native grass—
a circuitry of neurons whose depths are her cortical brains.

A symphony of intelligence distinguishable by
diversity, reliance on community, and nature's selection
has become displaced by a noisy cloth tangle.

Underground annihilation of root, rhizome, and fungi;
retro cycles of water, carbon, and nitrogen;
besieged earthworms, emaciated small mammals, and monarchs
in silent want.

The Earth has become disjunct.
Man is but a ghost,
empty— treading on her shell.



Square Mile

One family, two families, three families, more
640, 320, 160 acres divided by four
steward oats, corn, soybean, hay and
rotate- the families multiply and stay.

Consolidate the farms
mechanize the man
increase the acres
mine what ye' can.

Progress
4, 3, 2, 1
close down the school
the kids have all gone.

In this book of poetry, Levi embraces big questions with a whirlwind of visions. He takes us from the ice age to the future, to cultures around the world and back in time; from stunning beauty to moments of horror; from purple coneflowers to stop signs; from the eternal change of seasons to the work of wasps and bees. He recognizes the challenges, but his words bend towards hope. There is peace, for him, in the road to resilience – the clover, the earthworms, the dirt staying put, the rye pollen in the spring.

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As Levi wonders, “Where will we set off walkin’ / beyond dreams by dawn / with our daughters on our backs?”

—Nick Ohde, *Practical Farmers of Iowa*



This collection offers an intriguing glimpse into the reflections of a young organic farmer with a mind as fertile as the Iowa soil he nurtures. These are not simple homespun rhymes, but poems that express a discerning array of insights and emotions elicited by life close to the land. There is grief over the appalling loss of family farms and our bankrupt wildlife; admiration of the prairie, where “perennials reign”; anger

and despair over the damage done to soil, food, and human health by Big Ag; and humor and delight in the imagery of kids as “shoelaced seed-savers,” soil microbes “taking winter siesta,” and many others. There is (justified) cynicism here, but there is also a good deal of hope in the author’s determination to farm and live a healthier way.

—Kathy Woida, author of *Iowa’s Remarkable Soils: The Story of Our Most Vital Resource and How We Can Save It*.



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