

Relocating the ISU Horticulture Farm in the 1960s

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Mark Honeyman, associate dean
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Beginnings. The story of the ISU Horticulture Research Station starts with the Iowa State University campus. Iowa State University began as the Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm with the act of the Iowa Legislature in 1858. After a competition between several locations across Iowa, the Story and Boone counties delegation proposal, valued at \$21,355, was accepted. Story County was on the edge of the frontier. The county only had been organized for five years, had no railroad, and was “reputed to be unusually swampy” (Ross, 1942). The campus was acquired as a prairie site of 648 acres near the Story/Boone County border on the Nevada to Boonesboro stage line. A Fourth of July 1859 celebration on the site had a toast to “The Rising Generation, the Hope of the World and a Mighty Sure Crop in the Hawkeye State!” The first building, the Farm House, was built in 1861 and the first class enrolled in 1869. The first horticulture classes also were offered in 1869. From ISU’s earliest days, horticulture was a key component of the college. Early horticultural college leaders included Bessey, Budd, and Beach.

Early fieldwork on the Iowa State campus. The Iowa Model Farm was operated as primarily a demonstration site until 1888 when the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station was established, funded by the federal Hatch Act. The Hatch Act was authored by Seaman A. Knapp, an agricultural professor and later first dean of the Iowa State College agricultural division. The process of converting the college farm to experiment station began. The experiment station caused more research plots to be planted around the

campus. The Hatch Act generated stable funding for agricultural research and resulted in organized experimentation. The results of the research became the foundation of the agricultural curriculum and later the basis of extension programming to farmers.

According to C.V. Hall, “In 1922, 220 acres were purchased southwest of campus for fruit research on which structures were built for handling and storage. The previous site was north of campus from 1886 to 1924 in the area encompassed by Pammel Courts and Veenker Golf Course.”

In the 1920s, the horticultural plots were moved off the central campus to land southwest of the campus. At the corner of Sheldon Street and Knapp Street was the horticulture farm headquarters. Orchards and vineyards continued south and west across State Avenue and south of College Creek and the area called the ISU Arboretum. The farm was acquired in 1922-1924 and consisted of about 220 acres, including the arboretum. Facilities included a “seed laboratory, underground storages, machine sheds, turf field laboratory, sales barn, and other (minor) buildings.”

The need to relocate. By the 1960s, the “old” Horticulture Farm was a collection of 17 buildings and two residences including a brick seed lab, two barns, potting shed, aluminum turf building, metal seed storage, sales building, four underground cement storage caves, a landscape house, three vegetable storage units, media storage shed, and “old iron,” which contained an assembly room, tool room, and herbicide storage. Today, the only remaining building is the small shop on Arbor Street.

Also by the 1960s, this “old” horticulture farm was located in an area that was feeling campus expansion pressures. Construction of Beyer Hall, relocating tennis courts, and widening of Bissell Drive, as well as expanding needs for new residence halls and athletic department needs all contributed to the pressure to relocate the horticulture farm. The land was needed for recreational and athletic fields and facilities. The City of Ames also was growing. In 1964, the Iowa Board of Regents issued a policy statement to relocate university farm areas north of the new Highway 30 bypass.

After the horticulture farm operations moved from the Sheldon Avenue and Knapp Street area, athletics and student recreation took over the area. The Cap Timm (baseball) Field was constructed and the area was renamed the ISU Southwest Athletic Complex. The ISU softball field and the track/field facility were constructed. The ISU Cross Country course also was added. In 2010, the ISU Athletic Department built the Cyclone Sports Complex east of the Towers Residence Complex at Mortensen Road and Ash Avenue. The Southwest Athletic Complex was reassigned to ISU Recreational Services and renamed Southwest Recreational Complex. A paintball court and bike path also were added.

Efforts to relocate the Ames Horticulture Farm in the early 1960s were part of a college-wide priority to move plots, livestock, and farms farther from campus to create land areas for critical campus growth. The animal science beef, sheep, and swine teaching herds were moved two miles south of campus on State Avenue where the old Agronomy and Ag Engineering Farm had been. The new Agronomy and Ag Engineering Research Farm was opened west of Ames in Boone County in 1964. The Poultry Farm was moved from the south edge of Ames where the Towers residence halls are now to an area

adjacent to the Animal Science Teaching Farms on South State Avenue.

Plans to relocate. The Horticulture Department appointed a Farm Planning Committee in 1964. The committee consisted of horticulture faculty A.E. Cott, J.P. Mahlstede, L.C. Pierce, E.C. Roberts, and E.L. Denisen, chair. They developed a “Prospectus” for a new Horticulture Farm. The committee identified three critical aspects for a new farm: lead-time, water, and location.

Lead-time emphasized an 8-year transition needed to replace existing orchards and vineyards. Water was critical for irrigation. A lake or reservoir was deemed the best water source of the area near Ames. Location was important for student, faculty, and the public to access.

Several trends were identified by the committee:

- greater urbanization in Iowa
- increased mechanization of horticultural crops
- growing student enrollment
- increasing academic staff
- needed irrigation
- broad partnering across ISU
- expanded use of field days
- continued use of outlying research farm
- needed marketing assistance by Iowa growers
- hort farm used as a teaching laboratory
- increased operations budget

Land needs were projected as:

General	12 acres
Turf	10 acres
Vegetables	40 acres
Ornamentals	25 acres
Tree fruits	30 acres
Small fruits and vineyard	20 acres
Buffer areas	<u>23</u> acres
	160 acres

Proposed buildings and improvements were:

- field laboratory with shop, storage, labs, pesticide storage, offices and classroom
- foreman house and garage
- propagation structures
- irrigation system capable of serving 10 acres of vegetables and 10 acres of turf

In June 1964, the committee gave an evening tour of the Sheldon Avenue and Knapp Street Hort Farm to the Des Moines Men's Garden Club. Topics included small fruits, turf, shade trees, fruit, and evergreens. J.P. Mahlstedt spoke on "The (ISU) Department of Horticulture, its programs with an Eye to the Future." The Horticulture Farm was described as a "multiple use area (for) teaching, research, and extension." No doubt the potential relocation of the Hort Farm was discussed. Nine faculty and staff were involved.

The new location. The Pritchard Farm, 8 miles northeast of Ames, or 2¾ miles east of Gilbert, seemed ideal for the new Horticulture Station. The rolling topography offered a suite of soils and slopes, the old farmstead was in the corner of the property, and there was a new 100-foot cased well. The farm was only 1¾ miles from U.S. Highway 69 (the Gilbert Corner) on a county gravel road. The crown jewel was the 12-acre lake located in the center of the 229-acre tract.

The decision to move the horticulture farm from the southwest edge of campus to the Pritchard Farm, 8 miles northeast of Ames on a gravel road, must have been a difficult choice for the horticulture department. Probably, the 12-acre lake as an irrigation water source was a major factor, plus the topography and a diverse range of soil types. The committee calculated the lake contained

3.2 million cubic feet of water compared with the 1962 usage of 180,000 cubic feet at the old hort farm near campus. Seven soil types were identified at the Pritchard Farm with a variety of 1 to 20 percent slope.

The Committee for Agricultural Development purchased the Pritchard Farm in 1964. The land was transferred to the ISU Research Foundation in 1967 and ultimately to ISU in 1973.

The acquisition of the Pritchard Farm was complex. The file is thick with leases, deeds, memoranda, financing plans by several entities and individuals including B.H. Platt and Wayne Moore of the ISU Business Office; Ralph Bean, Committee of Agricultural Development; the Board of Regents; Daniel Griffin, ISU Research Foundation; and the Executive Council of Iowa. The ingenuity, persistence, and foresight of these individuals resulted in the Pritchard Farm being owned by ISU, nine years after original acquisition. Funding was ultimately generated by the sale of land from the Ankeny Munitions Plant for the Des Moines Area Community College. The munitions plant had been transferred to ISU by the federal government after WWII.

Sources

Hall, C.V., History of the ISU Horticulture Department.

<https://www.hort.iastate.edu/about-us/history/>

Research Farms files, Curtiss Hall and ISU Horticulture Station, ISU Ames, IA including the New Horticulture Prospectus.

Ross, Earle D., 1942. A History of Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. 451 pp.