

May 2025

Dear Friends,

I spend a lot of time thinking about our mission and values as an organization and how they anchor us as we make decisions. In October 2023, the Wallace Centers of Iowa board of directors updated our mission statement to the following:

To preserve the Wallace family legacy of agricultural innovation and public service with programs and 2 historic locations that connect Iowa's food, land, and people.

Even though our staff members, board members, program attendees, visitors, and donors exist all along the ideological spectrum, most of us agree that right now is a time of change and uncertainty. In the face of this uncertainty, I decided to focus in on what we value and what we believe in. I created the following list that flows directly from our mission statement and am sharing it with you, as one of our treasured supporters, as a continuation of the “behind the scenes” look at our work.

We believe in connecting people to history – and trying to find new, interesting, and fun ways to do that. We've added a video recording of the American Dreamer play that anyone can reserve to watch, audio tours at both locations, and a new Sherman Hill Victorian tea. Be on the lookout for more history programs.

We believe in innovation. The Wallace family was known for its agricultural innovations in corn, chickens and more. When a severe windstorm destroyed our farm's high tunnel hoop houses, we decided to replace them with a geothermal greenhouse as a more innovative approach and technology to allow us to better meet year-round produce needs.

We believe in public service. Wallace family members spent decades serving our country in formal government public service roles and we celebrate the work they did through sharing stories – such as their role in soil conservation and school lunches. And while that service is critical, it's also critical for all of us to engage and respectfully connect over public issues.

We believe in the preservation of historic spaces. Over the past few years, we've made big investments in both of our properties to ensure they remain well-kept, safe, and accessible. We also have multiple projects in our plan for 2025 – repairing the Gathering Barn deck, expanding the bridges in the restored prairie, painting the Wallace House and the Gathering Barn, repairing a window leak at the Wallace House, and many more.

We believe in rural Iowa. We want the rural parts of our state to be as strong as the urban areas. We celebrate the fact that we bring people and investment into our rural community on a regular basis. In addition to individual visitors and participants in a wide variety of programs, we host hundreds of group travel participants coming from all over the US and have previously done zip code scans to show that 70% of our Pizza on the Prairie participants come from the metro Des Moines area.

We believe in good food - and helping increase its availability to everyone. Over the past several years, we have donated thousands of pounds of fresh, organically-grown produce to local food pantries, food programs, and schools. We intentionally grow a Garden for Good plot of sweet potatoes for donation (2025 marks its 7th year) and call in volunteers to glean our orchards after we've picked what we need for our kitchens.

We believe in conservation of our land. Our Wallace Farm includes a 9-acre restored prairie, terraces, cover crops, and organic management of our gardens and orchard. In addition to being a good way to manage our land, these practices are also a nod to Henry A. Wallace's work in establishing the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 when he was US Secretary of Agriculture.

We believe in providing spaces where people can gather. Both of our properties are open to visitors and many of our programs are rooted in bringing people together. I love seeing a community table filled with lively conversation and laughter – sometimes even more conversation and laughter than the folks who walked in the door knowing each other.

We believe in welcoming everyone. It doesn't matter who you are, you're welcome at both of our locations. Always.

We believe in being good neighbors. We celebrate both of the neighborhoods where our properties are located and the people who are our neighbors. Last year we started "Good Neighbor" open houses to give folks a chance to come by our properties, see what we're doing, talk with our staff and other neighbors, have a small bite to eat, and pick up some of our Abundance products. **Mark your calendars for Wednesday, May 19, 4-6pm at the Wallace Farm and Tuesday, May 27, 4-6pm at the Wallace House for these events.**

Is it easier (and sometimes cheaper and/or faster) to do things that don't align with this list? The answer is a resounding YES, but this list serves as a "north star" for decision making that aligns with who we are and keeps us grounded especially in times of change. I would encourage you to do a similar list for yourself personally or professionally. As one of our valued supporters, I'm assuming that there will be overlap between your list and our list, but I wouldn't expect there to be complete agreement.

I look forward to many conversations – including those about values – as we welcome you to our properties this year.

Sincerely,



Deb Houghtaling, President & CEO

P.S. – I've been asked a lot recently if the federal budget cuts have impacted our work. We've never relied on federal funding for our daily work, so the short answer is "not really." But we have occasionally accessed funding for projects and were one of the farms that worked with the Local Food Purchase Assistance program to strengthen local food systems and provide fresh produce to food insecurity programs. It's disappointing to see that support removed for Iowa farms, but we will continue to provide fresh produce to our neighbors in need as we are able.