

# The Land Stewardship

30 Years of Keeping the Land & People Together



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

## Letter

Volume 30

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Number 2, 2012



Land Stewardship Project members take on corporate control (see pages 9-11).

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- ◆
- *Remembering a Street Fighter & a Legislative Leader* —
  - *Local Control Remains Strong* —
  - *Senate Farm Bill Proposal Falls Short* —
  - *Farm Beginnings Deadline Aug. 1* —
  - *The Next Generation: Within & Between Families* —
  - *Beating Diabetes on the Street & in the Garden* —
  - *Making Soil Quality Pay* —



The *Land Stewardship Letter* is published by the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization. The mission of the Land Stewardship Project is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop sustainable communities. Members of the Land Stewardship Project receive this publication as a benefit. Annual membership dues are \$35.

All inquiries pertaining to the content of the *Land Stewardship Letter* should be addressed to the editor, Brian DeVore, 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407-2102; phone: 612-722-6377; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

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#### STAFF

##### Southeastern Minnesota

180 E. Main St., P.O. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952; phone: 507-523-3366; fax: 2729; e-mail: lspse@landstewardshipproject.org  
Karen Benson, Aimee Finley, Parker Forsell, Doug Nopar, Karen Stettler, Caroline van Schaik

##### Western Minnesota

301 State Rd., Montevideo, MN 56265; phone: 320-269-2105; fax: 2190; e-mail: lspwest@landstewardshipproject.org  
Amy Bacigalupo, Julia Ahlers Ness, Richard Ness, Nick Olson, Rebecca Terk, Terry Van Der Pol

##### Twin Cities/Policy

821 East 35th St., Suite 200  
Minneapolis, MN 55407;  
phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 6474;  
e-mail: info@landstewardshipproject.org  
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# Contents

## Commentary...3

- What is the value of land?
- People have power too
- Tom Taylor's passion
- Gary Kubly's quiet courage



## LSP financial update...6



## LSP News...7

- 2012 Family Farm Breakfast
- LSP staff changes
- New board members
- New LSP website to be launched

## Policy & Organizing...9

- Taking on corporate control
- Bad health care bill vetoed
- Citizens keep local control strong
- Lawmakers speak out for local control
- Senate Ag Committee's bill a disappointment
- LSPers testify on conservation, beginning farmer issues

## Farm Beginnings...14

- FB accepting applications for 2012-2013
- Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse
- *Fresh Faces-Fresh Farming*: Anna Racer & Peter Skold
- Summer-fall farm skills workshops

## Passing It On...18

- Making the farm attractive
- Some preventive maintenance
- Tales of transition

## Community Based Food Systems...24

- Highlighting food, skills & community
- Urban ag rules pass
- Beating diabetes on the street, in the garden
- Greenhouse skills
- Putting it on paper



## Profits from Perennials...26

- Restoring the resource
- Soil health workshop/field day in Sept.
- Monitoring soil health

## Reviews...28

- *Turn Here Sweet Corn*
- *Dirty Work*
- *Music for the Mountains*



## Membership Update...30

- Sustaining long-term stewardship
- Volunteer for LSP
- In memory & in honor
- Brasa LSP benefit June 17
- Get current with *LIVE-WIRE*
- LSP on the social media circuit
- Voices of the Land
- Support LSP in your workplace

## Stewardship Calendar...32

# What is the value of land?

By Ryan Batalden

How do you put a value on the land surrounding your community? We regularly hear from our neighbors and see in the media stories about the extremely high prices land is being sold and rented for these days. But those land prices only reflect one way of valuing land —its maximum productive value under current farm policy and in the current agricultural economy.

Surely land has a value regarding how much food, fiber or fuel it can produce. And, of course, it has the “top dollar” amount it could bring if sold or rented at auction.

But how else do we value our land?

Do you value the land for hunting and fishing? For camping and hiking? Maybe you value land for the memories it provided in your childhood, or how your farm’s history is interwoven with your family’s history. For some, it’s their only retirement plan and sense of financial security.

I value the land for many reasons. Of course, it allows my wife and I a way to provide an income for our family. But we also love the lifestyle it gives us. And the bountiful, weedy gardens where our kids can pick ground cherries, the apple and cherry trees that are just starting to produce; the place where my great-great-grandparents dug a hole in the ground and called it home. And we love seeing new farmers of all ethnicities and backgrounds moving to our communities to farm vegetables and fruit, or do other creative things with the land.

But what value does the land have to our communities? The land has the ability to support young farm families—the next generation. The land has the ability to support vibrant and growing communities. Care of the land ensures our communities’ vitality. So, the whole community has a responsibility to care for the land and decide how we will value it.

We all value the foundations of our communities: schools, local businesses and our houses of worship. If we value these things dearly—and I think we do—should we be putting other values on our land besides simply seeing it rented or sold for “top dollar?”

I am encouraged by an increasing number of landowners who have found creative ways to reflect their values when they transi-

tion their land to the next generation. When they do this, they receive so much more than just top dollar for their life’s work. They receive the satisfaction of seeing their legacy continue. They see children once again playing in the old barn. They see the community that they love and live in continue on for another generation. We need more farmers, not fewer farmers. In order for this to happen, we need to start talking openly about what

# People have power too

By Betsy Allister

In March, my partner Andrew and I attended a Land Stewardship Project meeting in Lonsdale, Minn., to talk with other farmers about the excesses of corporate power and the impact such power has on the lives of rural Minnesotans.

As young farmers, we went to the meeting concerned about our struggle to afford our high-deductible health insurance, which does nothing to improve the quality of our health. We were amazed to find more than 75 farmers and neighbors with similar concerns, ranging from health insurance to the high price of land. One couple gave up their hard-earned retirement savings to help their son when his home went into foreclosure. Another couple remembers when there were 13 family dairies on their road; today, there are none.

I came away wondering why people, not corporations, are the ones feeling the effects of this recession. How is it fair that

we truly value in our land. By doing this, we can find an approach to balance all of the different ways land is valuable to us, instead of letting only one value dominate the way our land is treated.

I encourage all of us—landowners and non-landowners alike—to talk with each other about what we most value about our land. I hope you will be surprised, as I always am, at how much we all have in common. □

*Land Stewardship Project member Ryan Batalden raises livestock near Lamberton, Minn. For more on issues related to passing farms on to the next generation, see pages 18-22.*

Wells Fargo got bailed out in 2009, didn’t pay taxes from 2008-2010, but continues to foreclose on people’s homes? How is it fair that insurance companies increase their profits every year while doing less to protect our health? I sat next to a couple who has farmed for more than 50 years, and they said it well: we have watched as the money in this country has moved into the hands of the few, and as money moves so does power.

People have power, too. Corporations have dominated our economy and our democracy for too long, and it’s time that we come together to remind our elected officials that they work for us, not the corporations.

It’s time we asked ourselves where our own power lies: only by organizing together can we reclaim control over our economy, our democracy and our lives. □

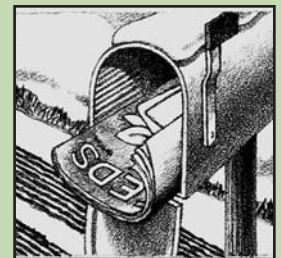
*LSP member Betsy Allister operates a Community Supported Agriculture farm near Northfield, Minn. For more on the LSP meeting in Lonsdale, see page 9.*

# What’s on your mind?

Got an opinion? Comments? Criticisms?

The *Land Stewardship Letter* believes an open, fair discussion of issues we cover is one of the keys to creating a just, sustainable society. Letters and commentaries can be submitted to: Brian DeVore, 821 East 35th Street, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55407; phone: 612-722-6377; fax: 612-722-6474; e-mail: bdevore@landstewardshipproject.org.

We cannot print all submissions, and reserve the right to edit published pieces for length and clarity. Commentaries and letters published in the *Land Stewardship Letter* do not necessarily represent the views of the Land Stewardship Project.



# Tom Taylor: 1955-2012

*He combined his passion for people, art, organizing & justice*

By Terry Van Der Pol

On March 21, after battling cancer for nearly two years, Land Stewardship Project friend, long-time member and Food Systems Program organizer Tom Taylor visited with his daughter, wife and sisters and quietly passed away. He was 57. He is greatly missed. Along with a treasure trove of great memories, Tom left immeasurable lessons and legacies to carry forward.

Tom moved to Minneapolis from Georgia in 1973 to attend the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Tom worked on behalf of community, healthy food, sustainable agriculture and sensible land use policies. He worked with the Mendota Mendakanton Dakota Community to protest the Highway 55 expansion's impact on sacred areas. He believed in the power of people to come together to build the communities they want to live in. Organizing was how he did just about everything he did. Tom helped organize the Northeast Farmers' Market, the first Underground Art Show, and he was a charter member of the Eastside Food Co-op. During a memorial held at the farm of LSP member Bruce Bacon, Tom's friend Jenny Fortman recalled how "Tom invited people to join their own community."

Tom was on the forefront of the movement to boycott Monsanto's bGH milk. In the early 1990s, with John Youngdahl of COACT, he supported his street theater passion with fundraisers featuring food



A poster Tom Taylor created in the 1990s to protest the use of genetically modified bovine growth hormone in dairy production.



Tom Taylor (photo by Mary Conway)

prepared by his chef friends. One event at the Minneapolis headquarters of dairy giant Kemps featured a cow and a farmer in chains with tiny syringes propped in glasses of milk.

"With Tom, you could always count

on great visuals and great food," recalls Pat Kerrigan, a fellow activist now with the Emergency Food Network's Harvest for the Hungry.

I hired Tom in the fall of 2007 and he moved to Montevideo to begin his dream job. Tom often introduced himself by saying, "I can't believe LSP is actually paying me to do this."

Any concerns I had about whether Tom would fit in rural Minnesota were quickly allayed. His was an agrarian soul and he made western Minnesota his home. He believed in relationships, community and in keeping it genuine. More than one of his colleagues had this observation of Tom: "He always made me feel the conversation he was having with me at the time was the most important thing he could be doing."

Tom brought passion to his understanding of farming and rural economies. His search for information about his new home was relentless. Driving through the country with Tom was like being out with a curious, wicked-smart kid: "What's that machine? How come the soil is different colors in that

Tom Taylor, see page 5...

## Tom & Mary Conway Taylor

Tom Taylor and Mary Conway met during the 1970s in the printmaking studio at Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Mary was a freshman, Tom a junior. "We talked several times but it was like two ships passing in the night," recalls Mary.

Mary left MCAD but returned in 1989 and finished with an internship in downtown Minneapolis. One morning she stopped in Black's Café, a favorite spot among artists, and a guy she recognized as Tom cooked up a beautiful plate of Huevos Rancheros for her. She and Tom reconnected at Black's over the next several months, but again, their life trajectories put them on divergent paths.

Fast-forward to the run-up to the 2008 Farm Bill. Mary, a long-time LSP member, volunteered in November 2006 with LSP's Policy Program to collect signatures on a petition demanding a bill that protected soil and water, gave farmers a fair price and supported local food. In the early months of 2007 her friend Jill, an apple grower from New York, was visiting. They decided to go to an LSP Farm Bill Town Hall meeting in the basement of Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. "I saw this really good looking guy. I kept stealing looks at him when he wasn't looking. Afterwards, I was kick-

ing myself for not going up and introducing myself. Then, when the LSP newsletter arrived I would peruse the upcoming events in the Twin Cities and think, 'Gee, I wonder if that guy might be there!'"

The first *Land Stewardship Letter* of 2008 found Mary busy cleaning house and she did not look at it immediately. "I almost recycled it before I read it," she recalls. "But then I flipped through it and THERE HE WAS! Tom Taylor joins LSP staff as an organizer with the Community Based Food Systems Program." Mary got his contact information and e-mailed Tom. They reconnected, met, talked. Mary asked Tom if he remembered the meeting at Trinity Church. "Oh, yeah! I saw you there," he said. "I was noticing YOU when you weren't looking at me."

Tom and Mary were married on June 13, 2009. Even though their time together was short and their lives had now diverged to opposite sides of the state, they were truly soul mates. Mary was a frequent visitor to the Montevideo area and when she gathered with Tom's friends and family to scatter his ashes around one of Tom's favorite mushrooming spots, she recalled with great fondness all the farms they had visited and her memory of the deep affection and esteem her Tom held for them.

field? What's growing there?" I recall stopping along a county road on the way back from Crookston with Tom one afternoon to look at an old fence line. Comparing the level of soil under the sod along that fence line with the level of the soil in the intensely row-cropped fields, I talked about the impact of wind erosion and dead soil that settles.

## Gary Kubly's quiet courage leaves a major legacy

By Paul Sobocinski

On March 2, family farming, sustainable agriculture and local democracy lost a great friend when Minnesota state Senator Gary Kubly passed away after a two-year struggle with Lou Gehrig's disease. He was 68. Kubly is survived by family members, including his wife Pat, their three children, and grandchildren. What also survives him is an impressive legacy as an elected official.

Gary, a Lutheran pastor from Granite Falls, was elected to represent Senate District 20 in 2002, and before that had served three terms in the Minnesota House. While in the Legislature, Gary was a strong Land Stewardship Project ally—as well as a long-time member—and consistently stood up for family farmers and local government. He was instrumental in getting funding for sustainable livestock research and outreach at the University of Minnesota.

I and other LSP staff and members had the honor of working with Gary throughout his legislative career. It's my experience that when lawmakers get elected to office, they are often faced with a key choice: what principles will they stick to as they go about the daily work of making public policy? With Gary, there was never a question where he chose to stand: it was with the little guy.

A prime example of this is when he first ran for office in the early 1990s. This was a time when people in his home district were struggling with the onslaught of huge industrialized hog operations, most of them erected by the now infamous ValAdCo. LSP members were leading the fight to make these mega-operations accountable as far as human and environmental health were concerned.

Gary stood up for the people who had no choice but to be victimized neighbors of these operations and their multi-million gallon liquid manure lagoons. This wasn't popular or easy—at the time firms like ValAdCo were being touted here and across

Tom got it. Instantly.

Tom was a dedicated and skilled organizer, ready to tackle any challenge he was given. But it wasn't all work. I recall introducing Tom to Chelsey Jo Huisman, a graduate of the University of Stockholm who was researching the economics of grass-fed beef. In a heartbeat the conversation did a complete 180 turn and the two of them were on an imaginary mushrooming adventure in Sweden!

Of all the great Tom Taylor conversations I've had these past several weeks, I believe our colleague Rebecca Terk said it best. "Don't know if there's such a thing as angels, but if there are, right now Tom's organizing them to raise hell!" □

*Terry Van Der Pol directs LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program and is based in the organization's office in Montevideo, Minn.*

the county as the future of livestock farming. The backers of this kind of agriculture were quick to label critics as "anti-farmer" and "anti-economic development."

But Gary knew better. He did what he felt was right and not what was politically expedient. He felt strongly that family farmers and other rural residents deserved a place at the table when it came to determining the future of our rural communities. He stood



**Senator Gary Kubly chatting with LSP member Barbara Finley-Shea at the 2011 Land Stewardship Project Family Farm Breakfast at the Capitol. (LSP photo)**

by these people and even more importantly, used his position at the Legislature to advance policies that would protect these communities and allow them to have control over their own future.

In a number of legislative fights, Gary was instrumental, along with LSP's organizing efforts, in keeping local control strong in Minnesota. With quiet determination and a willingness to dig into the issues, Gary went toe-to-toe with lawmakers who wanted to weaken a township's ability to put in place an interim ordinance (see page 10) or basically have any say in what kind of major development moved into the community. He was a key player in creating a nationally-recognized system for controlling hydrogen sulfide gas emissions as well as notification rules for proposed factory farms.

But Gary also knew it wasn't enough to simply oppose bad policy—one also had to work to promote farming systems that

offered an alternative to the industrialized model. During the 1998 Legislative session, he worked with Mark Schultz and myself as LSP members fought to establish and fund alternative swine research at the University of Minnesota's West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in Morris. The funding package at that time resulted in over \$1 million being spent for facilities and research positions. This program is now nationally recognized for its practical research and outreach on, for example, deep straw swine production. It has also spawned WCROC research and outreach on organic and grass-based dairy production systems.

I truly believe we would have fewer successful sustainable farmers in Minnesota if it were not for Gary Kubly.

It was during discussions over getting funding for the alternative swine position at WCROC that Gary really showed his skills as a negotiator who knew what it took to get good policy passed. Gary, at the time a Representative, worked with Rep. Henry Kallis, then-chair of the House Bonding Committee, to put funding for a research position into a bonding bill—something that's unprecedented. This successful maneuver showed how Gary, a Democrat, was able to work with legislators on both sides of the aisle without moving away from his core principles.

Gary's quiet courage and deep faith were never more evident than during the past two years when he soldiered on as a public servant despite being ravaged by a terrible disease. When I think of all that he could have accomplished at the Legislature during the next several years if it weren't for that illness, it saddens me. But then I consider the legacy he has left in the form of a brighter future for family farming, sustainable agriculture and our rural communities. We were lucky to have him, if even for too short a time. □

*Southwest Minnesota farmer Paul Sobocinski is an LSP Policy Program organizer.*

# Land Stewardship Project 2010-2011 Fiscal Year Financial Update

## Unrestricted Operating Revenue

Religious Grants	4%	\$81,333
<hr/>		
Foundations & Corporations, Including Released from Restriction	42%	\$885,204
<hr/>		
Government Grants	31%	\$659,668
<hr/>		
Membership & Contributions	17%	\$352,007
<hr/>		
Fees & Sales	4%	\$83,981
<hr/>		
Other	1%	\$21,088
<hr/>		
Unrealized Investment Gains (Losses)	1%	\$20,826
<hr/>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$2,104,107</b>

## Expenses by Operational Area

### Fiscal Year 2010-2011

Organizing/Policy	19%	\$405,204
<hr/>		
Food Systems	30%	\$625,765
<hr/>		
Farm Beginnings	23%	\$483,790
<hr/>		
Membership/Outreach	8%	\$169,967
<hr/>		
Communications	4%	\$74,673
<hr/>		
Other	2%	\$31,528
<hr/>		
Management & General	10%	\$199,489
<hr/>		
Fundraising	5%	\$101,661
<hr/>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$2,092,077</b>

## Statement of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2011

### Assets

Cash & Investments.....	\$610,215
Board Restricted Long-Term Reserve.....	\$400,336
Property & Equipment.....	\$77,230
Grants, Contracts & Pledges Receivable.....	\$911,922
Other.....	\$58,975
<b>Total Assets.....</b>	<b>\$2,058,678</b>

### Liabilities & Net Assets

Total Liabilities.....	\$238,009
<b>Net Assets:</b>	
Board-Controlled Long-Term & Short-Term Reserves....	\$927,093
Temporarily Restricted Grants for Future Fiscal Years....	\$893,576
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets.....</b>	<b>\$2,058,678</b>

- From audited statements based on generally accepted accounting principles for non-profits, which book temporarily restricted net assets raised for future use in the year granted.

- Expenses include contracts with collaborating nonprofit, university or government partners for jointly conducted work.

- Reserve funds under Liabilities and “Net Assets” include previous gifts of farms donated to LSP for long-term support and sold to family farmers in a way that protected the land for farming and open space.

- Mahoney, Ulbrich, Christiansen and Russ, P. A., expressed an unqualified opinion on the financial statements of the Land Stewardship Project.



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# LSP News

## LSP Family Farm Breakfast brings citizens & lawmakers together over local food

Over 250 citizens and lawmakers participated in the seventh annual Land Stewardship Project Family Farm Breakfast and Day at the Capitol March 6 at Christ Lutheran Church in Saint Paul.

As in the past, “The Best Breakfast in Town” featured food grown on the farms of LSP members. Over the years, this event has evolved into an excellent opportunity for citizens and legislators to come together over locally produced food to discuss policies that promote sustainable rural communities and vibrant family farms.

Following the breakfast, there was lobbying training on LSP’s 2012 legislative priorities: local control, corporate power and health care reform. Citizens then headed over to the Capitol to meet with legislators.

For a wrap-up of the 2012 session of the Minnesota Legislature, see pages 9, 10 and 11. □

## Wear your support for LSP

The new limited edition Land Stewardship Project t-shirts are now available. The LSP logo is easily recognizable on the front with “Land Stewardship Project” on the back. They are USA Union Made, 100 percent-preshrunk cotton and available in adult sizes: medium, large and extra large. The fit is true to size. The shirts are \$15 each.

To order a t-shirt, contact LSP’s Megan Smith at 612-722-6377 or megans@landstewardship-project.org.



Chef Brad Beal (right) worked with volunteers like Anton Ptak to prepare a breakfast sourced from the farms of LSP members. (LSP photo)



Over 250 citizens and legislators got together over locally-sourced food to discuss issues like local control and health care reform. (LSP photo)



LSP board member Alan Hoffman (standing) had a conversation with Senate Majority Leader David Senjem (second from left). Also pictured are LSP board member Dennis Johnson (middle) and LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski. (LSP photo)



After the breakfast, LSP members got together for a lobbying day training. (LSP photo)



LAND  
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# LSP News

## Rengel retires from LSP; Riemann is new finance manager

**R**on Rengel has retired as the Land Stewardship Project's manager of administration and finance.

Before coming to LSP in 2000, Rengel had an extensive background in accounting and financial management. He had worked for the Sustainable Resources Center and William M. Mercer, Inc. He has a degree in business administration from the University of Minnesota and served in the U. S. Army. Rengel is quite active in the community, and over the years has been key in organizing one of Minnesota's most well known fish dinners at Church of Saint Albert the Great in Minneapolis.

While at LSP, Rengel coordinated all aspects of its accounting system, and directed a significant upgrading of its financial management. He also managed the ac-



**Ron Rengel**

counting system for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership.

He and his wife Virginia live in South Minneapolis and Rengel continues to volunteer for LSP regularly.

Rengel's position is being filled by **Joe Riemann**, who joined LSP's



**Joe Riemann**

staff in 2010 as the Twin Cities office manager/administrative and accounting assistant.

Riemann has degrees in political science and sociology from the University of Minnesota, and recently received an accounting degree from Minneapolis Community and Technical College. He was an LSP communications intern in 2005-2006. Riemann

has worked in produce and research/development at the Wedge Community Co-op and served as the manager of the Fair Trade banana program at Equal Exchange. □

## Haugen steps off LSP board, Tomkins steps on

**B**onnie Haugen has stepped off the Land Stewardship Project's board of directors after serving two terms.

Haugen operates a grass-based dairy farm near the southeast Minnesota community of Canton. She and her husband Vance have



**Bonnie Haugen**

used their grazing system to reclaim land worn out by intensive row crop production. Over the years they have hosted numerous farmers, government officials, scientists and members of the general public on their farm to showcase ways agriculture can improve water

quality in the Root River watershed. Haugen has also served as a presenter at such events as the Upper Midwest Grazing Conference and has written for numerous agricultural publications.

In recent years, she had been active in developing a video that promotes sustainable livestock production's role in protecting the environment.

During her time on LSP's board, Haugen co-chaired the board develop-



**Juliet Tomkins**

ment committee and has been active working with LSP's staff in southeast Minnesota on policy positions, health care and racial justice.

**Juliet Tomkins** has joined LSP's board of directors. Tomkins is a pioneer in sustainable agriculture, and since 1994 has, with her husband Prescott Bergh, operated Four Winds Farm near River Falls, Wis. She has a law degree from William Mitchell College of Law and a bachelor's degree in psychology/sociology from Wesleyan University.

She is currently an adjunct professor at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and has taught courses on agricultural law, cooperatives, experiential learning, land use law and sustainable agriculture law issues. □

## Zachman serves as LSP organizer

**T**ara Zachman worked this winter and spring as an organizer in the Land Stewardship Project's Policy and Organizing Program. Zachman has a bachelor's degree in urban studies from Hamline University. She has worked as a field canvasser for TakeAction Minnesota and a community organizing assistant for the Hamline Midway Coalition. Zachman has also studied abroad in China and the Czech Republic.

While at LSP, Zachman helped organize meetings, events and actions related to federal and state policy. In May, she took an organizing position with Minnesotans United for All Families. □



**Tara Zachman**

## New LSP website to be unveiled this July

As the Land Stewardship Project marks its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and prepares for the future, the organization is unveiling a newly remodeled website in July.

Check out [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) for a dynamic new site that will provide the latest news and updates on our work, plus provide members an opportunity to interact online. □



## Taking on corporate control

Farmers, small business owners and other rural residents came together in the southern Minnesota community of Lonsdale March 20 for a special Land Stewardship Project meeting to discuss how corporate power negatively affects every aspect of their lives, from access to affordable health care to the kinds of seeds that are planted.



Rural residents gathered to discuss the negative impacts corporate power has on their lives. (LSP photo)

“Every place we turn, it’s corporate power that’s in the way of making our communities better,” LSP associate director Mark Schultz told the crowd of 75 people. “We are organizing rural people to create a positive future and oppose the corporate power that’s standing in the way of that future.”

One of the ways to begin taking power back from corporations is to drown out their message. This can be accomplished through the stories of real people who are working hard to create communities that are based on locally owned farms and businesses which are good for the economy and environment, said Schultz.

One of the people who shared their story at the Lonsdale meeting was Betsy Allister, a vegetable farmer from Northfield. She described how she and her partner Andrew Ehrmann are forced to pay 10 percent of their farm income annually for health coverage that has a \$10,000 deductible.

“It just adds a whole lot of stress

to our farm knowing we avoid going to the doctor because of the cost,” said Allister, who added that corporations make the insurance system too complicated for people like her who are seeking alternatives (*see page 3 for a related commentary by Allister*).

Southwest Minnesota farmer and LSP organizer Paul Sobocinski said more stories like that need to be told in coming months as the Minnesota government considers creating a health care “exchange” through which people can have better access to high quality health care.

“Such an exchange is in danger of being taken over by the same corporate interests that have already created the current broken health care system,” he said. “We need to send the message that this exchange must put people, not corporate interests, first.”

Attendees pledged to take several steps to fight corporate power in rural Minnesota. Among other things, this spring LSP members met with Minnesota Commissioner of Commerce Mike Rothman to talk about health care reform (*see story below*), collected signatures for a petition calling on elected officials to rein in corporate power, and stood up for local government control at the Legislature (*see page 10*).

“None of this happens without people taking action,” Schultz said. “We can talk all we want, but to bring about change we need to take action.” □

## Corporate insurance bill vetoed by Dayton

The Land Stewardship Project believes an important first step towards real health care reform is implementing a health benefits exchange in Minnesota that truly puts people, not just corporate profits, first.

The federal Affordable Care Act requires that each state set up a health care exchange through which individuals and small businesses can shop for health coverage and compare health plans. Minnesota is in the process of setting up such an exchange.

Some 50 Land Stewardship Project members joined over 400 Minnesotans from around Minnesota in Saint Paul on March 25 to deliver a simple message to state Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman: a new health care exchange should be controlled by the people it serves, not the corporations that have created a broken health care system in the first place.

But instead of moving forward legislation that would advance a people-first exchange, Senator David Hann (R-Eden Prairie) and Representative Steve Gottwalt (R-Saint Cloud) introduced a bill that would have

added complexity to our already confusing health care system. The Hann/Gottwalt “Unified Trust Accounts” bill would have allowed corporate HMOs to divert to “premium accounts” federal tax credits intended to make insurance more affordable through an exchange. These credits would have been mixed with private contributions from employers, family or individuals, and then managed by insurance brokers, not individual account holders.

Employers would have been able to restrict the use of their contributions, limiting access to medical services the employer doesn’t like. And insurance brokers, who are paid by corporate insurers, would be responsible for purchasing the coverage—a clear conflict of interest.

LSP members joined with TakeAction Minnesota to organize against this legislation. Towards the end of the session, Hann and Gottwalt revived the bill by swapping numbers with an old piece of legislation and quickly and quietly pushing it through committee, allowing only a corporate-backed think tank to testify on it.

The bill then passed the House and the Senate, but in the wake of numerous calls and e-mails from LSP members, Governor Mark Dayton vetoed it. Moving forward, LSP will continue to press Governor Dayton to advance a truly people-first health benefits exchange. □

### Listen, watch, read

To listen to an LSP *Ear to the Ground* podcast featuring LSP members Betsy Allister, Leslea Hodgson and Chad Kingstrom talking about the importance of a health care exchange controlled by the public, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html). It’s episode 115.

To view LSP members “pitching manure” to protest the “Unified Trust Accounts” bill, see the video link at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).

To read more about LSP’s work on the health care issue, see pages 11-13 in the No. 1, 2012, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter*.

Minnesota Legislative Update:

## Citizen power beats attempts to weaken local control

By Bobby King

On April 3, a bill weakening local control came up on the floor of the Minnesota Senate. It had passed key committees and the House floor despite strong opposition. But the Minnesota Senate got the message that Land Stewardship Project members, along with township officers, county commissioners and many others, had been sending them all session long: keep local control strong. As a result, the bill failed to pass. This was a far cry from the beginning of the session when many Capitol insiders had predicted the bill to be unstoppable. The fact that LSP members and others were able to beat this bill shows how grassroots opposition can overcome corporate special interests.

The proposed legislation would have gutted the power of townships, counties and cities to enact a moratorium, also called an interim ordinance. A moratorium allows local governments to quickly put a temporary freeze on major development, and is essential when the community is caught off-guard by unanticipated and potentially harmful proposals. This is particularly important when those interests represent controversial proposals such as frac sand mines, big box stores like Wal-Mart or a large-scale factory farm (see “Why moratoriums matter” on page 11 for details on the legislation).

The effort to pass the bill began in the first week of the legislative session when the House version was taken up at the initial meeting of the Government Operations Committee. This shows what a priority the legislation’s backers—mostly major developers—put on weakening local control. However, it quickly became clear that the bill was going to have a hard time. Citizens from around the state were there to speak in opposition. Among them was David Williams, a township officer from Fillmore County and Minnesota Environmental Partnership board chair, who educated legislators on how local control had been critical in southeast Minnesota. In that part of the state,

several counties and townships have used moratoriums to deal with the onslaught of frac sand mining proposals.

With the opposition strong, bill author Rep. Michael Beard asked that the legislation be tabled. Although it would pass the committee later in February, this rough start set the pattern for the bill—it met resistance at every step of the way.

This strong opposition at this first legislative hearing was possible because the work to defend local control had begun well before the start of the legislative session. Legislators had already been receiving calls, letter and e-mails on the

• • •  
*Beating this bill shows how grassroots opposition can overcome corporate special interests.*  
• • •

**Which makes a better Minnesota local control or corporate control?**

*“As a township officer for 25 years I know local control makes for a better Minnesota. Local governments must have the right to say no to corporate interests when they want to push harmful developments into our communities. Minnesotans value this. But some state legislators are proposing to weaken those rights.” — Alan Perish, Township Officer, Hartford Township, Todd County*

Corporate special interests are pushing legislation at the State Capital that would give the upper hand to developers who want to push unanticipated projects like factory farms, frac sand mines, and big box stores into a community.

**This is not what Minnesotans value.** Minnesotans overwhelmingly support local governments having the right to protect the local community and stop unwanted developments when necessary.

**House File 389 and Senate File 270** could allow developers to sneak in controversial developments if local ordinances haven’t anticipated them. This would apply to every city, township and county in Minnesota. Legislators need to hear from you that Minnesotans value strong local democracy that favors community rights over corporate rights.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) 612.722.6377

LSP member Alan Perish was featured in a statewide newspaper advertising campaign that highlighted the importance of local control.

issue, and LSP mailed a letter to all 1,700 of Minnesota’s townships alerting them to the legislation and urging them to contact lawmakers, which they did in force. And of course LSP members from around the state were contacting legislators and speaking up for local control. When LSP leaders met with Governor Mark Dayton in December to discuss the issue, he renewed his commitment to veto legislation weakening local control, and LSP committed to fighting and stopping it at the Legislature.

### Opposition grows

On March 6, hundreds of LSP members and supporters were at the Capitol following

our annual Family Farm Breakfast (see page 7) to speak up for local control. On March 8, the bill was debated on the floor of the Minnesota House. There was fierce floor opposition and no legislator except the author spoke in favor of the bill (see “Lawmakers speak out for local control” on page 11). Rep. Beard once again tabled the bill before it could be voted on.

County Commissioners also weighed in with strong opposition. Commissioner Steve O’Neil from St. Louis County and Commissioner Rose Thelen from Wright County, both LSP members, circulated a letter opposing the legislation. Thirty-two county commissioners from all corners of the state eventually signed the letter, which summarized the issue nicely: “The fact is that the current law is working and should be left alone. Well-funded corporate special interests are pushing this proposal, which does not benefit counties and local communities in any way.” The

letter was quoted during the House and Senate debate on the issue.

Media picked up on the issue. Both the *Star Tribune* and *Winona Daily News* ran front page stories. *Agri News*, the state’s largest ag weekly, ran an editorial headlined, “Legislation to ban local moratoriums is wrong approach.” The *Star Herald* in Dodge County followed suit with the editorial, “Protecting local control is everybody’s business.” And there was a flurry of letters-to-the-editor around the state. One from Murdock farmer and LSP state policy committee member Jim Falk characterized the issue well: “In Minnesota, we respect the rights of local citizens where they live, work, play and raise their families to help make decisions important to the wellbeing of their communities. Our current law protects the rights of local citizens, but corporate special interests want to change the law.”

Local governments began making their opposition official too. In March, the Redwood County community of Sacred Heart passed a resolution proposed by city councilman and LSP member Chad Kingstrom that opposed this legislation. Wright County passed a similar resolution opposing the bills, as did Litchfield Township in Meeker County.

(For an example of how one Minnesota community is using an interim ordinance to determine what kind of major developments fit best with the area, see the No. 1, 2012, edition of the Land Stewardship Letter, pages 16-17.)

Local Control, see page 11...

On Feb. 29, the Senate version was heard in the Local Government Committee. The hearing lasted for over an hour, with several township officials, a small town mayor, Minnesota Farmers Union and of course, LSP, all testifying in opposition. The lone testimony in support came from the Builders Association of the Twin Cities. One highlight of the hearing came after legislative proponents of the bill kept arguing that the bill does not weaken local control. Thinking that a local government official might be in a better position to answer that question, Sen. Mary Jo McGuire (DFL-St. Paul) asked Mayor Pete Ewals of Jordan what he thought. His reply was: "I definitely feel that this is taking away from local control." Ultimately the bill passed.

When the bill came up on the House Floor for the second time, it passed 76-5. To get it passed, proponents had to remove some of the very worst provisions, but the bill still weakened local control and favored corporate special interests. The next stop for the bill and the last effective chance to stop it was the Senate floor.

LSP ran an advertisement (see page 10) in key areas of the state with this headline: "Which makes a better Minnesota: local control or corporate control?" It featured township officer and LSP member Alan Perish saying, "As a township officer for 25 years, I know local control makes for a better Minnesota. Local governments must have the right to say no to corporate interests when they want to push harmful develop-

ments into our communities. Minnesotans value this. But some state legislators are proposing to weaken these rights."

The growing opposition made a difference and things changed dramatically when the bill came up on the Senate floor on April 3. Before the vote, Sen. Carla Nelson (R-Rochester) offered an amendment that removed all the language limiting the ability of local governments to enact a moratorium. This was a change in position for Sen. Nelson, who previously had voted for the bill in committee. Sen. John Howe (R-Redwing) rose in support of the amendment, which

passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 57 to 6.

What was left in the bill was language placing restrictions on development agreements between municipalities and developers. Sen. Tony Lourey

(DFL-Kerrick) and Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) raised strong concerns with this. Sen. Katie Sieben (DFL-Newport) urged members to vote against the bill.

Even after being amended, the overall bill failed to pass. Bills need a majority of all 67 Senators to pass (34 votes). The vote was 33 "for" and 31 "against," so it died (*for a complete listing of how Senators voted, see www.landstewardshipproject.org*).

An important reason that this fight was successful is that local control, including the power to enact a moratorium, is working and actively being used around the state to protect communities from corporate abuse.

Minnesota is a better place to live because we can work through our township, city and county governments to shape our communities. Local control is about ensuring that development benefits the commu-

nity instead of coming at the expense of that community. □

*Bobby King is an LSP Policy Program organizer who focuses on state and local issues. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or bking@landstewardshipproject.org.*

## Why moratoriums matter

The power to enact a moratorium, also called an "interim ordinance," matters for stewardship of the land and protection of the community from corporate abuse.

For example, communities in southeast Minnesota have been bombarded with outside corporate interests wanting to mine for sand to be used in frac drilling. These mining proposals are much different in scale and scope from the aggregate mining that takes place there now. In response to citizen concerns, several counties have enacted moratoriums on frac sand mining while they study the issue to see if their current ordinances are sufficient.

Here is how the recent anti-local control legislation proposed weakening the power to enact a moratorium:

- Merely applying for a permit would have exempted a proposed development from any future moratorium. All too often neighbors do not get any information about a project until *after* the permit has been applied for. When that happens, a moratorium may be needed to freeze the status quo and create time to assess the situation.
- It would have required a two-thirds vote (a super majority) to enact a moratorium.
- It would have slowed the process for enacting a moratorium by mandating public notice and a hearing before a moratorium can be enacted.

## Lawmakers speak out for local control

On March 8, during debate on the House floor over HF 389, several lawmakers made their views clear about the importance of local control:

- **Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St. Peter):** "To me, members, allowing townships, counties and cities to determine whether a moratorium is appropriate is the essence of local control... As I said here on the floor a few years ago, I trust my township officers, cities and counties to be reasonable in their exercise of local control."
- **Rep. Gene Pelowski (DFL-Winona):** "I rise today to speak for local control..."

We have several counties that have passed moratoriums. We have regional centers that are working on moratoriums. All of them have contacted us and said they do not support House File 389."

- **Rep. Andrew Falk (DFL-Murdock):** "This idea of taking away local control is absolutely wrong. Coming from a rural district, our rural townships, our counties, they value their control. They value the ability to make decisions and I really find it to be an assault on the values and the judgment of those rural elected officials... It's a direct assault on local control. I cannot stand for that."

- **Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Minneapolis):** "... this bill favors corporate interests over local control... This is what this bill does, it makes it easier to mine sand for fracking, it makes it easier for factory farming and usurps local control... Minnesotans value grassroots democracy. Minnesotans value showing up at their local government, city hall, county board or township hall and expressing their opinions and taking care of their land and their water that they feel is so important to their livelihood. And that's exactly what this bill takes away"

## Flawed Farm Bill introduced in Senate

*Severe cuts proposed to conservation; investments lacking for beginning farmer initiatives*

By Adam Warthesen

On April 26, the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee passed its version of the 2012 Farm Bill—also known as the Agricultural Reform, Food, and Jobs Act—by a vote of 16 to 5. The bill, which includes \$23 billion in cuts over the next 10 years, is anticipated to be brought to the Senate floor for a vote yet this summer. Action on a U.S. House Farm Bill this year remains less certain.

What is abundantly clear in review of the bill is that it lacks the investments and reforms needed to propel agriculture forward in a sustainable and responsible matter. By the basic measure of whether this legislation fosters a family farm system of agriculture and provides for adequate stewardship of our nation's farmland and natural resources, the answer is regrettably, no. It actually represents a slippage back from the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill. Members of the Land Stewardship Project tell us more reform, not less, is needed.

### Key examples of where this bill falls short include:

→ \$6.37 billion in cuts to voluntary conservation programs over the next 10 years are unwise and excessive. This is especially true in this time of intense pressure on American farmland with strong crop and livestock prices demanding more from every farmer and every acre.

→ The failure to link conservation compliance to crop insurance benefits is inexcusable. As a result of this failure, federally subsidized crop insurance does not require the same rigor as other farm programs—where farmers are required to maintain healthy soil and water on their land as a condition of receiving public support.

→ Furthermore, the Senate bill will worsen economic disparities in agriculture. The bill fuels a runaway train of federally subsidized crop insurance, which removes risk for large commodity operations and expands their ability to increase land holdings at the expense of beginning farmers. Even as the bill takes some steps forward in the commodity title, it still guarantees revenue protections for massive commodity production, which is a major step backwards.

→ The fact that this bill cuts \$4 billion from programs that help hungry people in need of food assistance is unacceptable. As our communities rebuild from one of the worst economic crises in memory, this in not how our country should respond.

→ The bill also misses an historic opportunity to support thousands of beginning farmers and ranchers wanting to enter agriculture and cuts deeply into the needs of minority farmers. The Senate cut the highly effective Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program by as much as 47 percent annually. This would result in less assistance, training and support for new farmers.

→ The budget of the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farms and Rancher Program was reduced by as much as 73 percent annually.

### A few positives

The Committee did include a “sod saver” provision that aims to protect land which has not been cropped or is in native prairie. While not exactly what sustainable agriculture groups were advocating for, this provision is a step in the right direction. Additionally, the Senate Ag Committee bill included commodity program reforms that better target and improve eligibility requirements for these programs. The most significant of these changes was the ending of direct payments based on historic production practices. Unfortunately, while direct payments are eliminated, a slate of new commodity programs were crafted that provide even more public subsidies for the expanded production of commodity crops.

### Where do we go from here?

LSP, led in this work by our seven-member Federal Farm Policy Committee, is committed to creating long-term reforms in U.S. farm policy. We believe it is critical that we create a Farm Bill that advances stewardship of the land, prosperous family farms and rural communities, and a healthier food system. In the short term, we will work with farmers, citizens, organizational allies and policymakers on changes that can make the 2012 Farm Bill more equitable, accountable and sound for the future. There is still time for change. □

*Adam Warthesen is an LSP organizer who works on federal policy issues. He can be reached at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org. For updates on the 2012 Farm Bill, watch LSP's monthly e-letter, the LIVE-WIRE (see page 31 for details on signing up for LIVE-WIRE), or visit [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).*

## LSP member to Ag Committee: don't forgo conservation

During a late February appearance before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee in Washington, D.C., central Minnesota crop and livestock farmer Darrel Mosel spoke of firsthand experiences and successes he has had with working lands conservation programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Mosel and a handful of farmers from other states were in D.C. to testify about

the importance of CSP and other federal conservation programs being considered for inclusion in the 2012 Farm Bill by the U.S. Senate (see story above).

“I urge members of this committee to maintain a strong funding base for the Conservation Stewardship Program,” said Mosel, a Land Stewardship Project member who operates a 600-acre operation near Gaylord that's both organic and conventional.

“The pressures in agriculture are immense, and I'm concerned that we are losing a diversity of crops and farms that are good for rural communities, the environment and our economy. The Conservation Stewardship Program is part of the answer to helping maintain diversity on the land.”

**Conservation, see page 13...**

Mosel enrolled in CSP in 2009, and receives around \$15,000 a year for the life of a five-year contract to manage existing conservation measures and to add new stewardship practices to the operation.

Minnesota ranks tops in the nation in terms of the number of CSP contracts (2,321) and dollars (\$37 million) obligated to farmers. CSP remains very popular with Minnesota farmers, with nearly 1,600 applying for the program already this year, yet the fate of CSP and all farm conserva-

tion programs in the upcoming Farm Bill is uncertain due to attempts to cut funding.

### Transcript available

For a video transcript of the hearing, "Strengthening Conservation Through the 2012 Farm Bill," including Darrel Mosel's testimony, go to [www.ag.senate.gov/hearings/strengthening-conservation-through-the-2012-farm-bill](http://www.ag.senate.gov/hearings/strengthening-conservation-through-the-2012-farm-bill).

tion programs in the upcoming Farm Bill is uncertain due to attempts to cut funding.

Mosel spoke before the Senate Agriculture Committee about using federal conservation programs to establish contour strips and diverse crop rotations on his farm.

These measures have dramatically decreased soil erosion on his land and helped retain water, which was particularly critical during the drought his area suffered in 2011.

"Without the Conservation Stewardship Program, it may have been more profitable the last couple years to plant my entire farm into one crop like continuous corn. But with the program, I was able to maintain a four-crop rotation, which helps reduce erosion and is good for the land," Mosel told the members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "The temptation is there to just forgo conservation, but CSP helps and in the long-run I think it is better for us all."

With what is typically considered a once-in-a-life-time opportunity, Mosel felt fortunate to testify at the U.S. Senate hearing on a topic near and dear to his livelihood, farming approach, and the well-being of the land and his community.



**Darrel Mosel on his farm near Gaylord, Minn.** "We must constantly be mindful that what we're doing from year-to-year on our farms won't adversely impact the land's ability to provide now and into the future," he says. (photo by Diane Mosel)

"I fundamentally believe we farmers need to be stewards of the land," he said. "We must constantly be mindful that what we're doing from year-to-year on our farms won't adversely impact the land's ability to provide now and into the future." □

## LSP's Finley briefs Congressional offices on beginning farmer issues

Land Stewardship Project Farm Beginnings class facilitator Aimee Finley participated in a special Congressional briefing March 5 in Washington on the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.

Finley, who is also a livestock farmer in the Saint Charles, Minn., area, was one of four panelists who participated in the briefing, which was organized by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, LSP, Center for Rural Affairs and California FarmLink.

The beginning farmer congressional briefing was convened to provide an opportunity for House and Senate offices to learn from experts in the field about the obstacles facing beginning farmers.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act, authored in the House by Rep. Tim Walz (D-Minn.) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.), and in the Senate by Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), addresses those obstacles, focusing on the issues that consistently rank as the greatest challenges for beginning producers. This bill makes effective investments in the next generation of farmers and

ranchers at a cost of just a fraction of 1 percent of USDA's budget.

The bill has 24 House co-sponsors and 13 Senate co-sponsors. LSP and its allies continue to build momentum behind the proposal in hopes of most provisions being incorporated into the overall 2012 Farm Bill (see page 12).

Finley and others spoke about the key aspects of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act and how these measures could help beginning farmers and organizations working with new farmers.

"The future of family farming and ranching in America—and the viability of our nation's food supply—depends upon removing existing obstacles to entry into farming so that more people can start to farm," Finley said at the briefing.

For more information on LSP's work on this issue, contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or [adamw@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:adamw@landstewardshipproject.org).



**While in D.C., Aimee Finley met with Minnesota U.S. Rep. Tim Walz, a lead author of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.** (photo courtesy of National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

# Farm Beginnings

## LSP's Farm Beginnings accepting applications for 2012-2013 sessions

The 2011-2012 edition of the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course recently wrapped up in the Minnesota communities of Rochester and Hutchinson. If you missed out on enrolling in this session, it's not too early to apply for next year's class.

LSP is now accepting applications until Aug. 1 for the 2012-2013 course, which will be held in River Falls, Wis., and Morris, Minn. In 2012, LSP's Farm Beginnings program is marking its 15<sup>th</sup> year of providing firsthand training in low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. The course is designed for people of all ages just getting started in farming, as well as established farmers looking to make changes in their operations. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, enterprise planning, marketing and innovative

production techniques.

Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes, which meet approximately twice-a-month beginning this fall, run until March 2013, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions.

Over the years, more than 550 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program. Farm Beginnings graduates are involved in a wide-range of agricultural enterprises, including grass-based livestock,

organic vegetables, Community Supported Agriculture and specialty products.

Besides Minnesota and Wisconsin, Farm Beginnings classes have been held over the years in Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota. New Farm Beginnings courses have recently been launched in South Dakota and the Hudson Valley of New York.

For application materials or for more information, see [www.farmbeginnings.org](http://www.farmbeginnings.org), or contact Karen Benson at 507-523-3366; [lpse@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lpse@landstewardshipproject.org). □



**Anna Racer, a 2010 Farm Beginnings graduate, works on transplants in her farm's greenhouse. See page 16 for more on Racer's operation. (LSP photo)**

## Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse

Are you a beginning farmer looking to rent or purchase farmland? Or are you an established farmer/landowner who is seeking a beginning farmer to purchase or rent your land, or to work with in a partnership/employee situation? Then consider having your information circulated via LSP's *Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse* ([www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land\\_clearinghouse.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/land_clearinghouse.html)). To obtain a form and for more information, e-mail LSP's Parker Forsell at [parker@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:parker@landstewardshipproject.org), or call 507-523-3366. You can also download the forms from [www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/resources.html#land). Here are the latest listings:

### Land available: Twin Cities area

- Gwen Goretsas and Kelly Fregien have for sale 63+ acres of farmland in Minnesota's Pine County, near the communities of Rock Creek and Rush City. Thirty-five acres is tillable, 15 forested and 5 pastured. It has not been sprayed in 15 years and the tillable acres are currently planted to native grasses. There is a house, barn and garage. The asking price is \$249,000. For more information, see [www.realestate.com/content/listdetail.html?propid=164427880](http://www.realestate.com/content/listdetail.html?propid=164427880). Contact: Brian Witte, 651-674-0440; [bwitte@realestate.com](mailto:bwitte@realestate.com).

- Michael and Carol Hall have for rent 13 acres of tillable and pastured land in Minnesota's Washington County, near the Twin Cities. The land has not been sprayed in over eight years and there is water as well as four-strand, smooth-wire fencing. The price is negotiable. Contact: Michael Hall, 651-323-4661.

- Lori Lindgren has for rent 10 acres of farmland near the Washington County, Minn., community of Scandia, near the Twin Cities. The land has not been sprayed and no house or outbuildings are available. The price is negotiable and Lindgren is open to a possible trade of produce and wisdom. Contact: Lori Lindgren, [lindgrenlori@gmail.com](mailto:lindgrenlori@gmail.com).

### Seeking Land: SE MN/W WI

- Kevin Ballman is seeking to buy tillable and pastured land in southeast Minnesota's Goodhue County or western Wisconsin's Pierce County. He would like a place on which his current operation can continue from the Red Wing, Minn., area. Ballman will consider additional rented land, however he would eventually like to buy a farm of his own. He requires a house and outbuildings. Ballman does custom work (tillage, haying, planting, combining etc.). Contact: Kevin Ballman, 651-385-0321.

### Organic land available: SE MN

- Dede Mraz has for sale 65 acres of certified organic land near the southeast Minnesota community of Hart. It is enrolled in a "high paying" government program until 2014. There is also rental income for hay. Contact: Dede Mraz, 507-993-8417.

### Organic farmer needed: SC MN

- Sheila Burns has a 10-acre organic farm near the south-central Minnesota community of Glencoe and is seeking someone to take over the fruit and vegetable production and maybe help with goats occasionally. The upstairs of her house is being remodeled for separate living quarters for privacy. She would like to find someone who wants to learn organic farming and marketing through farmers' markets, etc. Burns is flexible on terms, expenses and profits, even to the point of discounting the price of the farm when

**Clearinghouse, see page 15...**

### ...Clearinghouse, from page 14

she retires (she is currently 60). Contact: Sheila Burns, 952-201-4709; all.for.goats@gmail.com.

#### **Urban farmstead: St. Paul**

• Mary Rose O'Reilley has an urban farmstead for sale in the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood of Saint Paul. It's a developed permaculture site with raised beds and some 200 species of plant- and tree-life, including apples and blueberries, many native plants and vegetables. The insulated, south-facing porch is great for starting plants in late February. The garden has not been sprayed since around 1915. The asking price is \$225,000, but O'Reilley would also consider a reliable renter. Contact: Mary Rose O'Reilley, 651-699-8452; mroreilley@stthomas.edu.

#### **Organic farm for rent: NM**

• Heather Rowley has for rent 3.23 acres of certified organic farmland in Taos, N. Mex. There is tillable and pastured land, and a house is available. There is a small goat/chicken pen, as well as a finished shed. Water is available, the land is completely fenced and there is a variance for retail businesses in place (it has frontage on two roads). The property and home are available for a long-term lease of \$1,400 per month. Contact: Heather Rowley, 575-770-1218; heather\_rowley@hotmail.com.

#### **Seeking farm position: MN**

• John Beaton is seeking a position on a vegetable farm, either working and living on the farm or living nearby. He is particularly interested in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model of farming, and would like experience working with greenhouse production, composting, whole farm planning and cover cropping. He is willing to relocate to other parts of Minnesota. Beaton has worked for Seeds of Success, which takes over vacant lots in and around Duluth, Minn., and plants them to vegetables. Contact: John Beaton, 1317 E. 2nd St., Apt. #4, Duluth, MN 55805; phone: 218-329-6322; e-mail: beato012@d.umn.edu.

#### **Urban farmstead: Minneapolis**

• An urban farmstead in South Minneapolis is for sale. It consists of .12 acres of land and has not been sprayed in over

16 years. There are three cold frames, a large active compost bin area, 200-square feet of developed garden beds with plenty of sun. Plantings include raspberries, native prairie and woodland plant communities. There is a dirt floor root cellar. The price range is \$155,000 to \$159,000. Contact: ml-2@comcast.net.

#### **Seeking land: Twin Cities area**

• Amy and Tim Reisdorf are seeking to buy 5-20 acres of farmland within a one-hour drive of St. Louis Park, Minn., near the Twin Cities. The Reisdorfs are beginning farmers who would like to raise fruit trees, chickens, goats, vegetables and bees. They would prefer a solid house and require only minimal outbuildings. Their purchase would be primarily in cash and would not be contingent on the sale of their current home. Contact: Amy Reisdorf, 612-825-2761; amymwr@yahoo.com.

#### **Seeking land: CO, WA, OR**

• Christina Ells is seeking to purchase or rent less than 20 acres in Colorado, Washington or Oregon. At least 5 tillable acres and 3 pastured is preferred. No house is required. Contact: Christina Ells, christinaells@gmail.com.

#### **Seeking land: Central, WC MN**

• Ryan Heinen and Bryan Simon are looking to purchase 80 to 250 acres in the central or west-central Minnesota counties of Douglas, Grant, Ottertail, Pope, Stevens, Stearns or Kandiyohi. They want to establish an operation where they can raise pastured poultry and eggs, grass-fed beef, CSA vegetables, pastured pork and native prairie seed. They would prefer property with a house, barn and outbuildings. Contact: Ryan Heinen, 605-439-3501; ryanheinen@hotmail.com.

• Matt Hyde and Sarah Wertz want to rent or purchase 20 to 250 acres of farmland in west-central or south-central Minnesota. They would prefer land that has not been sprayed in at least 10 years, and would like a house, or at least a potential site for building one. They are in the third year of operating a 1.5 acre market farm business that they started from scratch in rural Arizona, and are seeking to relocate to Minnesota to be near their families. Hyde and Wertz are open to various arrangements, including rent-to-own or using sweat equity to eventually take over a farm. Contact: Matt Hyde or Sarah Wertz, rabbitrunfarmAZ@gmail.com; 952-240-4024.

#### **Seeking Land: Southern WI**

• Ryan Erisman and Sarah Ahrens are seeking to rent or purchase approximately 25 acres of land in southern Wisconsin's Dane, Dodge, Green or Jefferson County. They would like at least 10 acres of it to be tillable and 10 acres pastured. They would like a barn or a shed, and only need a house if they are renting. Contact: Ryan Erisman or Sarah Ahrens, 206-755-0089; rjerisman@yahoo.com.

#### **Land Available: SE MN**

• Tracie Fogelson has for sale a 14-acre pasture farm in southeast Minnesota's Dodge County. The property includes a three-bedroom home and a barn and a detached garage. The asking price is \$116,500. Contact: Tracie Fogelson, 507-254-0920; ezdeals@traciefogelson.com.

#### **Garden plots: Twin Cities area**

• Virgil Remus has for rent 20 x 50 garden plots in Minnesota's McCleod County west of the Twin Cities. The plots are available on the edge of the town of Stewart, just off State Highway 212. A total of two acres was plowed up this spring, and bigger plots are available. Water is available. His asking price is \$250 for the season, but Remus is open to negotiation. Contact: Virgil Remus, 320-562-2565 (home); 612-518-8747 (cell); vrremus@ymail.com.

#### **Seeking land: Southern MN**

• Mike and Margie Veihl are seeking to rent or purchase 5 to 20 acres of farmland near the southern Minnesota community of New Ulm. They require a house. Contact: Mike or Margie Veihl, bvf2001@yahoo.com; 715-212-3496.

#### **Land for rent: WC MN**

• Ardie Eckardt has for rent 22 acres of land in west-central Minnesota's Big Stone County, near the community of Odessa. The property has not been sprayed in 40 years and it has extensive perennial and vegetable gardens, grassland, a small greenhouse, a small home and a spring-fed swimming pond. The price is negotiable, depending on length of rental—the owner is looking to cover ownership expenses and find a responsible land steward. The property is available in 2013 and/or 2014. Contact: Ardie Eckardt, eckardt@fedteldirect.net.

# Farm Beginnings

Anna Racer & Peter Skold

## Answering community's call

If you are the sort who likes to be outdoors, self-reliant and working close to the land, what Anna Racer and Peter Skold did for five summers might sound ideal. They worked at a camp in northern Minnesota where they took teenagers into the wilderness for six weeks at a time. But there comes a time when life is pulled in a different direction by the call of the community.

"We were always going on trail or coming off trail and there wasn't much stability," says Anna, 27, while taking a break from greenhouse work on a blustery morning this spring. "We were searching for some kind of community that we could settle down in while still working hard outside and enjoying that aspect of it."

That need for roots has drawn them out of the North Woods to a 40-acre farm within an hour of Minnesota's Twin Cities, where they raise vegetables for three-dozen people. Along the way they've made some important community-building stops: taking college classes on organic agriculture,

apprenticing on farms and spending time with other beginning as well as established farmers via the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings course.

All this has landed them in the midst of a community centered around healthy, local



food, and people interested in producing and consuming that food.

"It's neat because it's a spider web of a community," says Peter, 28. "That's been a huge pull for us. We just went to a brunch where all the people there were young up-and-coming farmers. There were 15 people there."

"We're really excited to be part of that," adds Anna.



CSA farming has provided Anna Racer and Peter Skold the kind of community—with eaters as well as other farmers—they were missing while serving as wilderness guides. "It's neat because it's a spider web of a community," says Skold. "That's been a huge pull for us." (LSP photo)

### Emerging from the woods

This connection with a local community started overseas. Anna was studying Italian at the University of Minnesota five years ago when she worked as a WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) volunteer on an Italian farm. That piqued her interest in farming, and in 2009 she took an organic vegetable production class under U of M horticulture professor Bud Markhart.

Through that class she met Paul Burkhouse, who, along with Chris Burkhouse, owns and operates Foxtail, a pioneering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm in Osceola, Wis. CSA is a system where farmers sell shares in their operation before the growing season. In return, the farm provides a weekly delivery of fresh produce. Of all the models of farming, few are as community-oriented as CSA.

After graduating from college, Anna pursued an internship at Foxtail, where she learned the nuts and bolts of what it takes to raise vegetables for 300 eaters week-in and week-out.

"I realized once I was there that this is what I was looking for," Anna recalls. "I really like the CSA model. I think it's an effective way for farmers and consumers to come together."

Peter came to farming via an even more circuitous route. After getting an undergraduate degree in textile science ("My dream was to design cool outdoor gear."), he enrolled in the nutrition and community health program at the U of M. During that time, he took a class at the U of M that gave him a chance to work at a student organic farm on campus.

"I realized there was a real strong connection between what we were doing in our public health classes and what the student organic farm class was trying to do in terms of giving people some hands-on experience outdoors, growing food," says Peter. "I decided I didn't want to write a grant for a program that would increase someone's healthy serving of food. What I really wanted was to produce that healthy food for people."

Eventually Anna and Peter both interned at A to Z Produce and Bakery in Stockholm, Wis., owned and operated by Ted Fisher and Robbi Bannen. The farm offers CSA shares but also does a "pizza night" and produces baked goods.

The young farmers say that while Foxtail provided the basics of producing lots of CSA shares on a consistent basis, A to Z introduced them to the lifestyle of operating a diverse agricultural enterprise.

While at A to Z, they were given a chance to run their own 1-acre, 23-member CSA on

**Fresh Faces**, see page 17...



neighboring land while helping with pizza night and selling at a local farmers' market. Fisher and Bannen also introduced them to Farm Beginnings, an LSP training course taught by established farmers that focuses on business planning, marketing and goal setting (see page 14). It turned out two other interns at A to Z, Betsy Allister and Andrew Ehrmann, were enrolling in an upcoming class. So during the winter of 2009-2010 the two couples traveled to Winona in southeast Minnesota for twice-a-month classes.

Peter says the class sessions dovetailed nicely with the field experience they had been getting at the U of M, Foxtail and A to Z. The course also forced them to sit down and write a business plan together—the timing was particularly good because they were planning their wedding that winter.

“I think it was a really good process to go through together just to get the base groundwork set as business partners and as a married couple,” says Peter.

And Farm Beginnings' focus on goal setting in some ways was a natural follow-up to the wilderness trips Anna and Peter had planned and led in northern Minnesota.

“A big part of the camp's program is goal setting, following through on our goals, and then setting new goals,” says Peter. “Farm Beginnings helped us go through that goal setting process in a more formal setting.”

### Fast track

After graduating from the class, Anna and Peter's farming plans started to crystallize: they decided they wanted to be on their own land within an hour's commute of the Twin Cities by fall of 2013. That way they would be close to friends and family, they could maintain many of their current CSA members, and they could recruit new members

## Give it a listen

To listen to a Land Stewardship Project podcast featuring Anna Racer and Peter Skold talking about their farm, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2). It's episode 116.

from the Twin Cities region.

Those plans were put on hyper-drive in 2011 when farm Beginnings classmate Betsy Allister learned about a 40-acre farm south of the Twin Cities. The location was ideal in more ways than one: not only would it be close to markets, but there are numerous other beginning farmers living in the region, including Allister and Ehrmann, who farm 20 minutes away in Northfield. In addition, the house is livable and the soil rich.

“We knew how unique this place was,” says Peter. “Our commute to our market has been cut by more than half.”

So last fall they bit the bullet, buying the farm and transferring their CSA operation to just outside the town of Webster. The couple concedes that only after they purchased the farm did they learn just how even more perfect it was for what they had in mind. It turns out it's been certified organic since 2001, and before that it was growing grass while enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. In effect, the land has not been sprayed in over 30 years. A neighbor has agreed to keep raising organic corn and soybeans on the land while Anna and Peter concentrate on raising vegetables on a few acres.

The young farmers express more than a little amazement at how much their farm

• • •  
*“We were searching for some kind of community that we could settle down in while still working hard outside.”*

— Anna Racer

dream has advanced in two short years. Being landowners and running a growing business can be quite a change of pace after tramping around in the wilderness.

“But I think we came into this at the right time for these opportunities,” says Anna.

Their operation, Waxwing Farm ([www.waxwingfarm.com](http://www.waxwingfarm.com)), is selling shares to 40 members this year, with the goal of eventually growing the farm to 100 members. They figure that's the size at which the operation can be self-sufficient (Peter works part-time as a carpenter). They are also selling to a farmers' market. The couple took advantage of the early spring this year to erect a low-cost greenhouse, and they plan on applying for USDA Environmental Quality Incentives

Program funds to put up a season-extending high tunnel.

With their current location, Anna and Peter feel they can take advantage of a key marketing niche: people who live in the Twin Cities region's southern suburbs.

They've been in the area less than a year, but Anna and Peter are already looking at how they can help other young people feel rooted in the community. They are currently mentoring Carleton College students who are interested in getting hands-on experience in the fields.

“We recognized that we learned from so many people and that experiential learning helped us going all the way back to camp,” says Peter. “It's neat now to pay that back ourselves.” □

## More Fresh Faces—Fresh Farming profiles

To read more Farm Beginnings profiles, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/fb/graduates.html).

## LSP's 2012 summer-fall workshops, field days, skills sessions

The Land Stewardship Project has scheduled a set of farm skills workshops and field days for this summer and fall.

Everything from soil health and grazing to vegetable production and marketing will be covered. These events are free for LSP members and open to the public for a \$35 fee.

→ **JULY 21—Field day on producing quality grass-finished beef**, Grass Run Farms, Dorchester, Iowa; Contact: Richard Ness, 320-269-2105; [\[shipproject.org\]\(http://shipproject.org\).](mailto:rness@landsteward-</a></p></div>
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→ **JULY 21—Skills session on raspberries & currants**, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, LSP, 507-523-3366; [parker@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:parker@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **AUG. 3—Beginning farmer troubleshooting field day**, Seven Songs Farm, Kenyon, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, LSP, 507-523-3366; [parker@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:parker@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **AUG. 10—Skills session on value-added processing**, Backyard Grocery, Bayport, Minn.; Contact: Aimee Finley, LSP, 507-523-3366; [aimee@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aimee@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **AUG. 18—Workshop on vegetable disease & weed management**, Prairie Drifter Farm, Litchfield, Minn.; Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-1057; [nicko@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:nicko@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **AUG. 25—Tour of diverse grass-based systems**, Prairie Horizons Farm, Starbuck, Minn.; Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-1057; [nicko@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:nicko@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **SEPT. 5—Vegetable troubleshooting field day**, Bossy Acres, Dayton, Minn.; Contact: Parker Forsell, LSP, 507-523-3366; [parker@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:parker@landstewardshipproject.org).

# Making the farm attractive

*Innovations such as a high-tech root cellar did more than add value to the Fisher-Merritts' vegetables; it helped pave a farming future for their son*

Who would have guessed the bright future of a farm could lie in the dark recesses of a hole in the ground? When John and Jane Fisher-Merritt built a high-tech root cellar in 2000 on their vegetable operation in northeast Minnesota, it soon became clear that the farm could produce more income without expanding its customer base.

"That first year we sold \$35,000 worth of stuff out of that root cellar," recalls Jane. "We were able to make more money from the same group of people by providing food year-round."

That caught the attention of one of their sons, Janaki, who had just graduated from college and had spent several summers working on the farm. He had long had an interest in taking over the operation, called Food Farm, someday, but wasn't so sure if he wanted to be part of a vegetable operation that needed to keep expanding production in order to stay viable. Food Farm had started out in 1994 as a 60-member Community Supported Agriculture operation; today it sells 160 shares during the growing season.

"That root cellar helped me to see there was a way for me to farm," says Janaki, sitting at a round dining room table with his parents on a 16-below winter morning.

A dozen years later, Janaki and his wife Anne Dugan, both 34, are now owners of Food Farm and its equipment. Jane, 63, is a paid employee and John, 68, works on the farm as well. Last fall Janaki and Anne moved into Food Farm's farmstead, and the elder Fisher-Merritts moved into a smaller home/art studio that was built on top of the root cellar. In other words, they have basically wrapped up the passing of the operation to the next generation using planning, open communication and a little luck. But in a sense, the roots of the successful transition lie in the fact that John and Jane have long strived to make farming an attractive endeavor.

"I always figured that because what we were doing was so attractive to me, it's probably going to be attractive to anybody, not just me," says John.

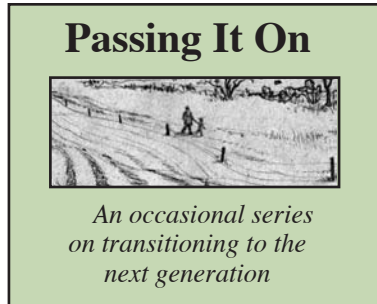
### Something special

For the past four decades, the Fisher-Merritts have strived to make the way

they farm special. They started out raising vegetables in Oregon and in 1975 moved to Minnesota, where they bought a farm in the northeast part of the state. For 12 years, they worked hard to raise vegetables "in the middle of the woods," but were hampered by lack of access to good markets and the fact that they were in a frost pocket of sorts.

"One year we had only 30 days where it was frost-free," recalls Jane.

In 1988 they bought the current location of Food Farm near the community of



Wrenshall. The 200 acres is on better soil and closer to good markets like Duluth. After trying a few marketing strategies, in 1994 they settled on making it a Community Supported Agriculture operation. Also known as CSA, this is a system where eaters buy a share in the production of the farm before the growing season, and in return get a weekly delivery of fresh produce. The Midwestern CSA movement was in its infancy in the early 1990s, but the Fisher-Merritts liked how it made it possible to not have to spend so much time marketing, leaving time to form close relationships with the people they were producing food for.

"We were dead set we were going to make a living from farming and we finally found a mechanism that allowed that," says John. "We paid ourselves \$10,000 that first year. When we made that \$10,000, we thought, 'Hey, this is going to work.'"

Besides its CSA enterprise, the farm also sells produce to area restaurants and the Whole Foods Co-op in Duluth.

The farm steadily grew, became certified organic, and produced three sons. Besides Janaki, there is Ben, who lives nearby, and Jason, who lives in Ohio. Janaki graduated in 1999 from Carleton College with a degree in sociology and anthropology. He had met

Anne at Carleton and they moved to northeast Minnesota (Anne is now a curator at the Duluth Art Institute). Janaki started working on the farm, making it clear he was serious about eventually taking it over.

The Fisher-Merritts agree that for them, it's been quite satisfying to see a community develop around the concept of sustainable agriculture and local food.

"I think even though we were kind of working in a bit of a vacuum we both had the fantasy that we were building a movement, that we were part of something bigger," says Jane. "We've felt like it was becoming a bigger holistic vision all the time, and not something personally we had to preserve. It was like the culture was coming along to preserve it, I think."

Reinforcing that thinking was the fact that over the years Food Farm has had interns and apprentices who later went on to launch their own farming operations, some of them in the immediate vicinity. There was not only an interest in this sort of agriculture, others were using it as a model to replicate elsewhere.

"We had this growing sense that someone will want to do this," says Jane

### A bonus

Nevertheless, the Fisher-Merritts were thrilled when Janaki came back to the farm to stay.

"When it turned out that Janaki did make his decision to be a farmer, it was just a real big bonus for me," says John. "It's not like we're handing off to Janaki something that's a struggle, that's really going to hamper him in some way. It's really an established business that's capable of supporting him and paying for the farm."

Janaki and Anne moved a mile down the road and Janaki began working on the operation during the growing season. During that time, the elder Fisher-Merritts tried to make the farm attractive not only as a viable way to make money on the land, but also as a place where a creative person with a lot of ambition could carve their own niche.

"I've always been opinionated about the way Dad does stuff," says Janaki. "Instead of being territorial, he would say, 'Well, how would you do it?'"

Janaki developed his own weed control system and he got a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant to develop a way of controlling potato bugs using a wood/pond barrier to disrupt the emerging insects. He also upgraded the farm's irrigation system and field equipment.

"We started out so much by the seat of our pants that just paying \$500 for a used

*Attractive, see page 19...*

Troy-Bilt tiller was a big deal,” says Jane.

But in a sense, introducing change on Food Farm was a natural, given the operation’s reputation for innovation. The root cellar that’s been built into the side of a hill on the farm is a prime example of the Fisher-Merritts’ willingness to impose new twists onto the vegetable CSA model. The facility is super-insulated and a computer monitors the environment in the 24 x 33 space (a packing area makes the whole facility 24 x 52). It was a major investment—\$40,000—but a vast improvement over how they stored produce before: in a cornered off section of their home’s basement. Part of the cost of the temperature control system was covered through a Minnesota Department of Agriculture grant. Food Farm members also provided financial assistance in the form of loans and outright cash gifts.

“It seemed like a huge scary deal,” recalls John as he and Jane and Janaki show off the facility, which on this day is full of onions and squash.

But a scary deal that has paid off. It costs around \$200 annually to cool it, and it’s added value to the farm’s produce in a part of the country where the growing season can be preciously short. The facility is being used to add value to what they already grow by allowing them to offer vegetables to the farm’s shareholders—they now offer 90 winter CSA shares annually—as well as sell produce to local restaurants and the Whole Foods Co-op during the off-season. Food Farm has hosted numerous tours, where visitors are impressed at how solid the structure is.

“In a hundred years Janaki’s grandkids will be able to ship vegetables out of that cellar,” says John.

### The transition

In 2007, the Fisher-Merritts began transitioning ownership of the farm to Janaki and Anne. One of the first things they did was sit down and figure out what each party

involved in the transition needed out of the deal. During the off-season, Janaki works for a local tax accountant, so he has the skills to develop various financial what-if scenarios. The key was to develop a plan, that, as Janaki puts it, “makes everybody a little bit vulnerable.” That means the younger couple

example. Although it turned out the attorney they used had not done a farm transfer in a decade, he was still invaluable because he was from the area, says Jane.

Despite the methodical manner in which they made the transfer, the family admits they also benefited from a bit of luck. For example, figuring out housing during a farm transition can be a major source of stress for everyone involved. But when they built the root cellar, John and Jane erected a studio on top of it for Jane, who is an artist. It turns out that with a few modifications the studio was a perfect home for an empty nest couple that still works on the farm. In September 2011, Janaki and Anne moved into the farm’s main house, and John and Jane settled into the smaller studio-home.



The Fisher-Merritts in their high-tech root cellar, which helped them add value to their current vegetable production. “That root cellar helped me to see there was a way for me to farm,” says Janaki. (LSP photo)

• • •  
“I think I actually felt it was special more than these guys did.”  
—Janaki Fisher-Merritt  
• • •

must realize they will need to pay enough for the farm that the older generation can live comfortably, and the older farmers will have to accept less than top dollar.

That requires a certain level of trust, something not always easy to come by, whether the parties involved are relatives or not. But a good relationship had been built up during the years after Janaki returned to the farm. With the help of a Farm Service Agency (FSA) low-interest beginning farmer loan, they were able to set up a contract for deed on a conventional loan. John and Jane have the main mortgage and FSA has the second mortgage.

As part of the agreement, John and Jane agreed to work on the farm for at least five years. In order to start banking up Social Security, Jane has been an employee of the farm for the past six years. John does not receive a salary, but he does get income through land and machinery payments as well as his own Social Security.

In 2010, the farm business and equipment were sold to Janaki; in 2011 the property officially passed hands. Not selling everything at once helped spread out the tax burden for the Fisher-Merritts.

From the beginning, the family turned to professional help, consulting an attorney, for

without expanding the number of acres put under vegetables, for example. But he’s committed to preserving and improving upon what attracted him back to the farm in the first place.

Sure, part of the reason he wanted to operate Food Farm was because he enjoys producing food. But he concedes that a deeper motivation was that he knew it was something quite different. Not only is it one of only a handful of working farms in that part of Minnesota, but it’s a pioneering organic CSA—a product of intense management and innovation.

“I think I actually felt it was special more than these guys did,” Janaki says, gesturing to his parents. “They’ve been so focused on trying to make a living and trying to make it work that I don’t think they were as paranoid about its future. It takes so much time building something like this up, I didn’t want it all to go to waste.” □

### Give it a listen

John and Jane Fisher-Merritt, along with their son Janaki, talk about their farm transition on episode 114 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2).

# Some preventive maintenance

*When Dave and Deb Welsch realized their kids weren't going to take over the farm, they did what they've always done: plan ahead*

On the Internet, you're only as old as you feel—at least until the person you're corresponding with travels from two states away to meet you face-to-face. When Dave and Deb Welsch started communicating via e-mail with Steve and Shelley Lorenz in 2007, a lot of assumptions were made about the age of the parties on both ends of the cyber-conversation.

"We thought they were going to be in their 60s," says Steve.

"And we were thinking of someone in their 20s," counters Deb.

Imagine everyone's surprise when the Welsches turned out to be in their late 40s and the Lorenzes in their late 30s. Why the confusion? Because the correspondence was concerning whether Steve and Shelley wanted to move from southeast Minnesota to southeast Nebraska and work on the Welsch farm, eventually buying Dave and Deb out and taking over the operation. Such a discussion is based on some assumptions about the "established farmers" and the "beginners." The former should be near retirement age and the latter should be young, right?

Five years later, age is not an issue anymore—Steve and Shelley are putting the finishing touches on taking over Dave and Deb's 550-acre organic cropping operation. And the "older" couple, now in their 50s, are considering the next chapter in their lives.

Passing a farm onto the next generation is never easy, but when it's to a non-family member who lives in another state, the challenges can be particularly daunting. The Welsches and the Lorenzes feel that clear communication, clear-cut goals, and the willingness to be flexible on both sides made their transition relatively smooth. In the end, the fact that the veteran was younger and the beginner older than expected also turned out to be a key to success.

### Expansion...now what?

Dave started farming in 1978 by renting land from a relative south of Milford, Neb., just down the road from where his parents, Eugene and Louise Welsch, were farming. Over the years he and Deb built up a thriving crop operation that now produces corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and oats. They also began raising beef for direct-sale to cus-

tomers in the area. In the early 1990s, big changes took place on the farm: the cropping operation became certified organic, they expanded their operation by 225 acres and they added 6,000 chickens to their direct-marketing business.

"We thought, 'Are we going to be able to handle all that?'" Dave recalls.

Questions about handling the increased size and scope of the operation loomed even larger when it became clear certain members of the family were no longer going to be as involved in the farm. Dave's father had been very active in the operation over the years; in particular he had handled the maintenance and upkeep of the equipment, something Dave concedes is his weakness. As he headed into his mid-70s, Eugene was starting to slow down.

"My Mom said I was working Dad too hard, which I was," says Dave.

In addition, their children, Rebecca and Ben, had gone to college. When Dave and Deb asked them about returning to the farm, they said they weren't interested in making production agriculture a career.

"I guess when you realize that your kids aren't coming back, you have a mental shift a little bit to where you say, 'Maybe it won't be a family member that will be farming it down the line,'" says Dave. "We didn't want to just sell it to the highest bidder."

Dave and Deb felt particularly compelled to find someone who would continue to farm their land organically. They were also proud of the direct-marketing business they had built up over the years: they have a customer base of 400 people within 30 miles of the farm. The Welsch farm's diversity and organic nature stands out in a part of Nebraska dominated by large-scale, conventional corn and soybean operations.

"We just knew we wanted someone to farm it organically," says Deb.

### Looking for a farm

Steve and Shelley Lorenz had heard farmers talk about organics while taking the Land Stewardship Project's Farm Begin-

nings course (*see page 14*) in the southeast Minnesota community of Winona during the winter of 2006-2007. They liked organic's emphasis on taking care of the land and learned how an established organic system can have a high profit ratio. They saw it as a way to finally realize their dream of someday owning and operating their own farm.

Steve grew up on a 40-cow conventional dairy farm near Winona and actually operated it for three years after high school.

However, it soon became clear his family was not going to change things on the farm to accommodate a new generation, so Steve got a job in town, where he worked as a

truck mechanic for 15 years. Shelley grew up in Missouri and Illinois and attended the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. From the time she and Steve got together, they had talked about farming someday.

"We just kind of committed to do something," she says, adding that the

Farm Beginnings class helped them to see that there were numerous opportunities in agriculture without going the large-scale, conventional route.

They began searching for situations where they could transition themselves into an operation. Through various networks, they learned of such possibilities in the Midwest, even visiting a couple of farms.

"Things just didn't feel right," says Shelley of those visits/interviews they did. Steve says part of the problem with looking for a farming situation remotely is that it's difficult to get an objective sense of what the operation is like through the standpoint of people who have poured their whole life into an enterprise.

"When I got to some of the places, they just weren't what I had pictured," says Steve. "When a person tries to summarize their operation I think you're trying to put a lot into a short paragraph—you can misrepresent yourself without even trying."

In early 2007 they heard through LSP connections that the Welsches were looking for someone to work on their organic operation, with the possibility of eventually buying it. The two families started e-mailing each other and things seemed to click from the beginning. Both couples share a Christian faith and see family as a priority (Steve and Shelley have two boys—Luke, 12, and Brandon, 10—and twin toddler girls—Cassie and Chelsea).

"And I knew that if Steve grew up on a

## Passing It On



*An occasional series on transitioning to the next generation*

dairy, he knew how to work,” says Dave.

It didn't hurt that the first time the couple visited the Welsches, it was when Dave and his father were working on a car. “Before I knew it, Steve was underneath that car, looking at it,” recalls Dave. “I liked that. One of our strengths is we don't have the same strengths. I like doing spreadsheets and don't make any decisions without making projections, and Steve likes maintaining and running equipment.”

The Lorenzes were also impressed with the Welsches' commitment to “walk-the-talk” on conservation and taking care of the land.

By August 2007, Steve and Shelley had moved into a rented house near the Welsches.

### The original plan

One of the first things the two couples did was jointly enroll in a class at the University of Nebraska called “Returning to the Farm.” The class stressed the importance of communication and developing a long-range plan for making a transition.

What resulted was a plan that would make Steve an employee of the farm for one to two years, drawing a salary which would help he and Shelley eventually buy into the operation, starting with a 120-acre farm owned by Dave's parents. Within five years there would be a 50/50 arrangement where Steve and Shelley would be farming their own ground—which Dave up until that time had been renting from other landlords—and Dave and Deb would be farming the land they owned. The entire operation would still be considered one business unit and by year 10 the Lorenzes would have control of the whole enterprise.

### The new plan

At first, things went pretty much as planned: Steve was a quick learner and the Welsches were impressed with the couple's maturity. They ended up buying the 120-acre farm in 2008 and moving onto it, and Shelley was able to carry her job from Wisconsin

to a satellite branch in Lincoln, Neb.

But three years into the transition, a series of events threw those best laid plans for a bit of a tailspin. For one thing, Steve and Shelley had their twin baby daughters, which forced a decision about her current job. She was commuting to Lincoln each day to work and the new babies would require day care, which would have cost about the same as her salary. The 90-minute commute was also getting to be a grind.

Just as significantly, the intense management of organic cropping was starting to grind away at Dave. In 2010, seemingly endless rains had made weed control in the organic fields particularly frustrating. Steve and Shelley seemed to be catching on quicker than expected, and Dave and Deb

keting beef and chicken business. They cash rent their cropland to the Lorenzes and Dave is now an employee of the young couple's farm business, managing the organic audit trail and the bookkeeping. Perhaps even more importantly, the Welsches are still around as relatively young, energetic mentors.

Steve, who admits he's not a “risk taker,” says he thinks it's particularly important to have the veteran farmer around for advice when the enterprise is as management-intensive as organic cropping.

“I've seen Dave make money at it, but it's different when you jump into it,” he says. “It's not like anything conventional farming-wise I've ever done. The practices can have you beating your head against the wall, so just having a mentor is huge.”

• • •  
“One of our strengths is we don't have the same strengths.”

—Dave Welsch

• • •

### An ounce of prevention

Not being involved in the day-to-day operation of a crop farm has given the Welsches the chance to explore other aspects of agriculture. For the past two years, they've been working on contract with the Center for Rural Affairs and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society promoting organic farming throughout the state. The couple sees talking about an alternative approach to agriculture as an important way to get even more farmers on the land. Dave and Deb are convinced that in their particular case without organics they would not have been able to farm as long as they did. In fact, the Lorenzes have signed an agreement that as long as they are farming the ground, it will remain organic.

But whether it's organic or conventional, each farm is special, says Dave. And making sure what's special about that farm continues into the future requires just as much preventive maintenance as tractors and financial records.

“It's hard to pass on a farm. I think that's true of any farmer. They get pretty attached to the land, whether it be straight fences, the machinery or whatever,” says Dave. “If it's a family member or not, the likelihood of the next generation being successful just increases the sooner you start that transition process.” □



The Welsches and the Lorenzes set up a transition plan, and then accelerated it. “Whether it's a family member or not, the sooner you start making those plans and bringing somebody into the operation, the easier it is to pass that knowledge onto them,” says Dave. (LSP photo)

were on the verge of being debt-free on their farm. Plus, beginning farmer loans through the Farm Service Agency were available at low rates.

“I've been farming for 30 years, so why not try something else?” Dave says. “Situations changed for both our families and we just tried to make adjustments accordingly.”

The couples decided to basically cut the transition timeline in half. Since 2011, Steve and Shelley have done all the cropping on the owned and rented ground. By 2013 the younger couple will have finished purchasing the equipment.

The Welsches still own the home farm where they live plus two others totaling 400 acres, and have maintained their direct-mar-

### Give it a listen

The Welsh and Lorenz families talk about their transition on episode 117 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html?t=2).

## Tales of transition

A series of “Farm Transition Stories” were shared by rural residents in southeast Minnesota during a special Land Stewardship Project event April 14 in Plainview. The gathering, which was sponsored by LSP’s Plainview Area Land Access Committee, featured beginning farmers who have recently gained access to land as well as retiring farmers who are helping beginners get started. The event also highlighted beginning farmers looking for

land in the region.

Bill McMillin, co-chair of the Plainview Area Land Access Committee, says finding ways for these beginning and retiring farmers to connect is key.

“When this happens, everyone wins,” he says. “Beginning farmers have the opportunities they need. The retiring farmers have the satisfaction of knowing that their legacy is being continued, while planning for their own financial security. The community

gains by having another family earning a living from the land and providing another source of locally grown food.”

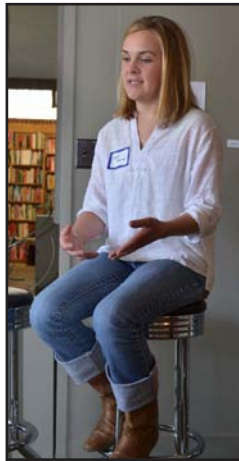
Part of the Land Access Committee’s work is centered around telling the stories of how established and beginning farmers can work together to ensure a new generation is established. The April 14 “Farm Transition Stories” event was the first step in helping relate such stories.

If you have a story to tell or an interest in the issue of helping the next generation of farmers get established, contact LSP’s Karen Stettler at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org, or Bill McMillin at 507-767-3310.

Below are excerpts of what participants in the April 14 meeting had to say. □



“Definitely know people in the area who are farming — don’t just try and do it by yourself. It pays a lot to have experience. More so than having enough money to buy your farm, you need to know what you’re doing with it.”  
—Beginning vegetable farmer Joe Schwen, shown with his wife Rebecca and son Silas.



“You need to keep your mind and options open.” — Sarah Nienow, who is exploring various ways to launch a farming operation.



“Greta and James came in as total strangers. So there is an element of faith here too that you can make something work.” — Phil Dybing, shown with his wife Heidi (middle) and beginning farmer Greta Sikorski. The Dybings recently sold their farm for less than top dollar to Greta and her husband James.



“I haven’t had a whole lot of luck finding land. I’m just trying to get my name out there and see what happens.” — Tom Reay is looking for land to run a grass-based beef and sheep operation on.



“Put business people, bankers and estate planners around you. Especially as you get up there in your 50s, start thinking about what you want to do with this farm when you can’t do the work anymore. I know that sounds like an early time, but it’s a very important time to start thinking about it.” — Arlene Hershey, shown here with her son Eric. Arlene is transitioning her dairy operation to Eric.



“From a beginning farmer’s viewpoint, there are endless opportunities out there.” — Sarah Wicks, shown with her husband Nathan. They are renting farmland in northeast Iowa.

### Give it a listen

To hear excerpts of the “Farm Transitions Stories” meeting, see episode 118 of LSP’s *Ear to the Ground* podcast: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html).

# Spring gatherings at the 'Kitchen' highlight food, skills & community

By Rebecca Terk

A community potluck tradition is steadily building at the "Kitchen," a former cafe in the western Minnesota community of Clinton. The Land Stewardship Project is working with the Big Stone Local Foods Group to make the Kitchen a hub for community based foods activity. As part of that work, this spring two LSP-sponsored events brought people from Big Stone County and the southwest Minnesota region together to share homemade dishes and local food know-how.

The second annual Garden Seed Swap and Potluck Supper was held March 1. Over two-dozen community members brought their extra seeds, plants and other garden paraphernalia to exchange for something new to them. Three tables laden with vegetable, fruit, herb and flower seeds beckoned gardeners of all skill levels, and extra packets and labeling supplies encouraged participants to split packets and take as little or as much as they needed. While much of the seed came from established companies, several varieties available at the swap were

saved by long-time local gardeners. Bette Johnson and Peg Daluge added a professional touch by packaging their saved hollyhock seeds in hand-stamped decorative packets.

Heirloom and organic seed packs were also donated for the event from the Granary

### Big Stone local foods work

For more on LSP's local foods work in Big Stone County, see the No. 4, 2011, edition of the *Land Stewardship Letter* at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-lsl.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/news-lsl.html) (pages 20-21).

A podcast on the Clinton Kitchen project is at [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html). It's episode 108.

Food Co-op's new retail seed rack, which was sourced from Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa. The Granary, which is in the Big Stone County community of Ortonville, is focusing on providing high quality garden seed to encourage consumption of fresh produce. This is a part of LSP's Big Stone Local Foods work, funded through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's Prevention Initiative.

Just over a week later, Big Stone County residents, as well as friends from as far away as Glenwood and Clara City, attended a Wood-Fired Oven Workshop, also at the Clinton Kitchen. Local artist and workshop host Don Sherman shared a PowerPoint presentation about the history and culture behind wood-fired ovens, and the methods and materials used to build these increasingly popular outdoor cooking installations. The purpose of the gathering focused on education, and participants shared their own experiences, made friends and prepared great food with locally-produced ingredients, all the while creating community around the hearth.

A major goal of the workshop was to begin forming a group of local residents interested in acquiring the hands-on skills needed to start constructing a series of ovens in the area—both on private land and, if desired, in public areas as well—with a further goal of connecting with other oven-enthusiasts regionally.

Perhaps you've heard of "crop mobs"—where groups of willing workers converge on a farm to help with larger-scale projects as a learning experience? Keep an eye out for an emerging Big Stone County "wood-fired oven mob" this summer. □

*Rebecca Terk is an LSP organizer working on community food systems in western Minnesota's Big Stone County region. Terk can be contacted at 320-305-9685 or [rebeccat@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:rebeccat@landstewardshipproject.org).*

# Urban ag amendments passed by Minneapolis officials

## Rules open the door for market gardens, hoop houses & raised beds

By Anna Cioffi

On March 22, the Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved "Urban Agriculture Zoning Text Amendments" that, among other things, address market gardening, use of hoop houses and the construction of raised beds. Most importantly, produce grown within city limits can be sold for market, creating more food security within the city, and opening up avenues for food related businesses.

During the past two years, Land Stewardship Project staff and members have been focusing on making urban agriculture a critical player in the community life of Minneapolis. In 2009, the City of Minneapolis decided through recommendations put forth by Homegrown Minneapolis to pursue the development of "a city-wide topical plan on community gardens and urban agriculture."

The passing of these zoning text amendments does much to advance the spread of community gardens and urban farms. For the first time since 1963, people will be allowed to grow food commercially in the city. Having urban agriculture as part of the city zoning plan is a huge step towards making the production and consumption of local food a key part of our communities.

The text amendments will allow the use of hoop houses on residential property while making it possible for market gardeners to sell directly to customers from their sites for 15 days per year. Commercial growing will be allowed on a large-scale at urban farms in industrial districts, and on a smaller scale at market gardens in low-density residential areas. People will also be allowed to grow food commercially in their own backyards, and be able to sell it from their property. In addition, aquaponics will be allowed within the city limits.

These rules are going to open the door for food entrepreneurship in Minneapolis, while renewing the relationship between city land and the food that we're eating.

The city council has indicated that after the first year of implementing these amendments, it will revisit such issues as expanding the number of days market gardeners can sell from their properties.

I'd like to commend all the farmers, gardeners, restaurateurs and other supporters of urban ag who propelled these amendments forward over the past few years. It will be exciting to see this sector of the economy grow and live up to its potential. □

*Anna Cioffi is an organizer for LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program. She can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [annac@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:annac@landstewardshipproject.org).*

## Cultivating a healthy lifestyle

*Raising vegetables in a community plot is just the latest step in one person's battle to live with diabetes*

One can almost hear the longing in Denise Crews' voice when she describes what foods she misses the most since she was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

"The hardest thing to give up was the fried chicken—Popeyes, Kentucky Fried Chicken. Their biscuits. The grease," says Crews as she sits in a coffee shop near downtown Minneapolis one recent spring day.

But the 51-year-old has a new passion these days. It is also centered around food, albeit of the much healthier variety.

"I enjoy gardening," she says. "That was one of the most wonderful experiences to watch these plants grow and then to be able to eat them. Not only were these healthy foods, but the plants smelled and looked good. You should have seen it in August, when they were in full bloom."

Crews is one of around 20 residents of Hope Community in South Minneapolis who are raising vegetables in a communal plot that had been an all but abandoned lot just a few years ago. With the help of Land Stewardship Project organizer Anna Cioffi and under the tutelage of LSP board member and master gardener Rhys Williams, residents have learned how to raise healthy food right where they live on a budget (see sidebar below).

Crews, who is a self-described "city girl" from Washington, D.C., had never gardened before she stepped foot in the Hope Com-

munity plots last year. But she said it has already become a key component of her strategy to live a healthy life despite being afflicted with diabetes.

She was diagnosed with the disease in 2004. Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes, and it occurs when the body cannot properly break down all the sugars and starches in food into glucose, which is the basic fuel for the cells in the body. If left untreated, it can lead to heart disease,



**Replacing high-fat, processed foods in her diet with fresh produce has become a key part of Denise Crews' attempt to control her diabetes. "You have to be aware of what you're doing and eating every day to establish good health," she says. (LSP photo)**

eye problems, nerve damage, amputations, kidney failure, and, in the worst cases, death. The disease is particularly prevalent in African-Americans, as well as Latino and Native American populations.

Crews is African-American, and so unfortunately was no stranger to the ravages

that diabetes can inflict on the body. Relatives had suffered from it, and when she was in her 20s a good friend died from it.

"She was 27. Another friend lost a toe and is blind and she's only 33," Crews says. "In the black community, we tend to take Type 2 diabetes for granted. But it's not just a little bit of extra sugar. It's no joke."

Crews had been a vegetarian for a short time as a teen, and had been quite active in her 20s. But in her 30s she became more sedentary as she focused more on her career in the computer industry. She also suffered from sleep apnea, which left her exhausted during the day and craving sugar and high-fat foods just to stay awake. She ballooned up to 265 pounds and her blood sugar levels rose close to 500 at one point—more than four times what's considered normal. She developed nerve damage and kidney disease as a result.

Crews vowed not to allow the disease to ruin her life.

"I said, 'I'm going to heal myself,'" she recalls.

She researched diabetes on the website of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and also remembered how good she felt when she was eating more fresh, whole foods as a teen.

Crews set about replacing the fried foods and sweets with more fruits, vegetables and lean meats. She also hit the streets and started walking—as much as five miles a day. By 2006 she was off of medication to control her blood sugar, and she's shed more than 40 pounds. Crews says she has more energy and a completely different attitude about her body.

"But even today I am extremely obsessive about monitoring my blood sugar," she says. "It's a disease that doesn't go away. You have to be aware of what you're doing and eating every day to establish good health. That battle's not over for me. It will always be with me."

Crews says that a major impediment to people taking a proactive approach to diabetes is the belief that a healthy lifestyle is unaffordable. Good food is only available at high-end grocery stores or co-ops, and you have to pay for a gym membership to get exercise, goes this way of thinking.

But Crews likes to point out that walking is free, and that she has been able to shop on a budget by frequenting farmers' markets and cooking at home rather than eating out.

"I do it on a budget, and lucky for me there is the farmers' market down on Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis. On average I spend \$20 to \$25 a week on produce at

### Hope Community & LSP

Hope Community is a place-based community development organization that is entrenched in the Phillips Neighborhood, one of the most economically challenged and diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Hope provides 173 units of affordable housing that is home to some 400 people.

Since 2009, the Land Stewardship Project has been working with Hope through an initiative called "Growing Neighborhood

Access to Healthy Food." It's an attempt to build community power and capacity to shape a strong neighborhood-scale system that ensures reliable, affordable and equitable access to healthy food.

LSP's work with Hope Community Garden is a key part of this initiative.

For more information on LSP's work in the Hope Community, contact LSP's Anna Cioffi at 612-722-6377 or [annac@landstewardship-project.org](mailto:annac@landstewardship-project.org).

**Cultivating, see page 25...**



the farmers' market," she says. "During the winter I shop for produce at a combination of different stores, depending on who has the best deals that week."

She recommends that even if you can't start eating healthy food right away, at least get rid of the bad stuff—the greasy, high-fat fast food.

Crews' budget became even tighter when she was laid off last year, making the produce she could raise at Hope Community Garden an even more valuable commodity. With the help of Williams, she learned how

## Give it a listen

Denise Crews talks about diabetes, gardening and a healthy lifestyle on episode 119 of LSP's *Ear to the Ground* podcast: [www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html).

to plant seeds and transplants, care for them and harvest them at their peak of freshness and nutrition. She raised basil, tomatoes, mint, jalapenos, cucumbers, thyme, parsley and collard greens. She worked in the garden one or two times a week, often tying it in with her regular walks through the neighborhood. She found that working the

garden not only produced healthy food, but was good for her mind as well.

"When I got laid off I thought my world was coming to an end," says Crews. "The garden kept my mind off being laid off."

It also gave her the bug for growing food. This spring Crews attended gardening classes put on by LSP and the Minnesota Horticulture Society, and she is already planning this year's harvest.

"I'm definitely taking pictures this year to track all the changes," she says. "Taking the seeds, germinating them and then planting them—it's like watching life begin." □

## Greenhouse skills

Hmong farmers in southeast Minnesota recently toured the greenhouses of Whitewater Gardens near Altura to learn about cultural practices unique to greenhouse production and season extension.

Land Stewardship Project farmer-member Sandy Dietz (*left*), along with her husband, Lonny, and son, Matt, spoke about such issues as construction, humidity, plant varieties, rotations, soil building and the records required for government cost-share programs. Sai Her, shown next to Dietz, built a hoop house in partnership with two other Hmong families this past winter. Along with Dietz and Her, shown are interpreter Mai See Thao (*middle*) and farmer Bau Vang.

The educational tour was part of ongoing work by LSP to address the needs of all farmers in southeast Minnesota's food community. Finding land, stewardship farming practices, product distribution and record-keeping for the area's Hmong farmers are also being addressed with the help of a grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency. (*photo by Caroline van Schaik*)



Keeping farm records—whether for production and management decisions, applying for a loan, or other reason—starts with a field map that reflects planted acreage of each crop. But acreage is hard to come by for vegetable farmers who grow a myriad of crops and think in terms of rows or beds.

In partnership with the Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG), Land Stewardship Project organizers brought southeast Minnesota Hmong farmers together during a recent workshop to tackle that question and more. Participants learned how to translate measured inches into fractions of an acre and to draw out a field map.

Instructor Hli Xyooj, a staff attorney with FLAG and that organization's Hmong community outreach coordinator, also covered basic production and sales records. Later this year, Xyooj will return to the area to review growing season records and more. The goal is to generate decision-making tools and a recorded history so that growers can apply for insurance and loans based on their own numbers.

Partial funding for this work is provided by the USDA's Risk Management Agency. Pictured: (*left to right*) Sai Her, Hli Xyooj and Ai Xiong. Her and Xiong produce vegetables in the Winona, Minn., area. (*photo by Caroline van Schaik*)

## Putting it on paper



# Restoring the resource

### *A healthier soil bank can pay big financial dividends*

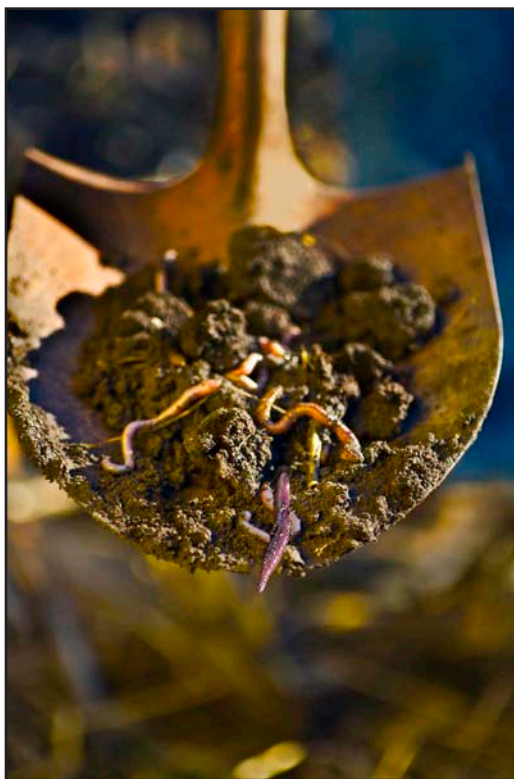
By Julia Ahlers Ness

I coordinate a project in western Minnesota that is based on the idea that producing positive environmental impacts in a watershed can happen without having to remake the entire region's landscape. Scientific studies and on-the-farm experience suggest that just a 10 percent increase in diverse crop rotations, grasses and other perennial plant systems can be enough to meaningfully improve the safety of the water, reduce flood potential, restore wildlife habitat and stimulate a thriving local and regional foods economy. This is especially true if we can target fields that are particularly sensitive to problems like erosion.

A major driver behind the Chippewa 10% Project—a collaboration of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project—is finding ways of making targeted conservation pay economically for farmers. We're researching, among other things, how local food systems and raising perennials for biofuel production could provide market-based incentives for more diversity in the watershed.

But what about the rest of our landscape—those row-cropped areas that may not be especially vulnerable to erosion and other forms of environmental degradation, but are still a key part of a sustainable future? I see clear signs of widespread soil degradation on row-cropped acres across the watershed: poor soil structure, loss of topsoil, poor water infiltration, wind- and

water-caused soil erosion on fields with little slope, and signs of disease and nutrient stress in crops. I'm seeing such problems even in the areas with the "best" soils. When we focus on an initiative like the Chippewa



**Feed them and they will come—the presence of earthworms is a sign that soil is full of organic matter.** (photo by Judy Olausen)

10% Project, are we accepting that the rest of the landscape is some sort of sacrifice zone, an area that will be pushed to produce maximum yields no matter what the long-term impacts on the resource are?

No. Carrying such a strategy to the extreme threatens to create a landscape where acres that have been targeted for conservation are islands awash in a sea of dead soils. Eventually, the environmental degradation on those intensively farmed soils will creep into even the most sustainably managed area, wiping out the positive impacts of all that targeted conservation. Such a strategy is an acceptance that the majority of our soils will be degraded, with a few spots here and there that are preserved.

"When we accept that our soil is a degraded resource, we think all we can do is minimize the degradation," says Jay Fuhrer, the district conservationist for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Burleigh County, N. Dak.

Such minimizing involves utilizing Band-Aid solutions like terraces, grassy waterways and petroleum-based fertilizers to maintain the damaged soil's productivity from year-to-year. These stopgap measures may keep a field producing corn in the near term, but it comes at a cost, both economically and environmentally, and is not sustainable in the long term.

Fuhrer is part of a growing group of natural resource professionals, scientists and farmers who are recognizing that building soil health is the key to long-term sustainability across the agricultural landscape. Fuhrer is working with farmers in North Dakota who are taking a holistic approach to land management and are building soil health utilizing cover crops, minimum tillage, diverse rotations and livestock disturbance. Their focus is not on how to make that soil a kind of "plant stand" for a crop, but how to build a supportive environment for the myriad of soil organisms—bacteria, fungi, nematodes, protozoans and arthropods—that are responsible for the creation and maintenance of healthy soil, and therefore healthy plants.

When I visited Burleigh County last year (see the No. 4, 2011, Land Stewardship Letter, page 25), the excitement among farmers who were proactively building soil health was palpable. It was clear they were no longer accepting the fact that a productive agriculture requires continually adding energy-intensive inputs to an increasingly sick soil. As Fuhrer puts it, once the focus becomes taking a holistic, big-picture view and restoring that base resource, then many

## Soil health workshop Sept. 21; soil field days Sept. 22

The Land Stewardship Project and numerous partners are co-sponsoring a free soil health workshop Sept. 21 in Morris, Minn.

The workshop will be available via video link at various locations. Featured will be presentations by, among others, Jay Fuhrer (see story above) and Kristine Nichols, a soil microbiologist who has been quoted extensively on practical ways to build soil health. In addition, there will be a farmer panel discussion on the economics of soil health.

For more information on the workshop,

contact LSP's Julia Ahlers Ness at 320-269-2105 or [janess@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:janess@landstewardshipproject.org)

### On-farm field days Sept. 22

LSP is organizing two complementary on-farm soil health field days in western and southeast Minnesota on Sept. 22 as follow-ups to the Sept. 21 soils workshop. For more information about the western Minnesota soil health field day, contact Ness. For information about the Southeast Minnesota soil field day, contact Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366 or [caroline@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:caroline@landstewardshipproject.org).

**Soil Health, see page 27...**

of the problems that consume a farmer's thinking, energy and money tend to disappear.

"When you look at it from the approach of restoring the soil and re-building its own biological ability to produce crops, it's a much more positive approach for the farmer," he says. "Instead of just treating the symptoms, you're taking a proactive approach."

### Hitting pay dirt

But increasing soil health on the majority of our intensively-cropped acres faces the same problem that targeting conservation in just 10 percent of a watershed does: what short-term incentives do farmers have for adopting practices that will have a long-term impact on sustainability?

Just as we've made market-based economics a major part of the Chippewa 10% Project, we need to talk about the financial payoffs that can come with building soil health. Such talk of the financials related to healthier soil is key if more farmers are to adopt systems that provide better homes for all those billions of microbes, and in turn a more sustainable environment for all of us.

The pay-offs that can come from healthier soil are starting to catch the attention of "mainstream" agriculture. For example, magazines such as *Successful Farming* and *The Furrow* recently unearthed some nice financials related to higher soil quality:

- ◆ The value of the services provided by soil organisms is estimated to be \$1.5 trillion annually.
- ◆ Organic matter makes up less than 6 percent of the soil, but it controls more than 90 percent of the soil's function.
- ◆ North Dakota farmer Gabe Brown estimates that soil with 1 percent organic matter contains 1,000 pounds of nitrogen and 100 pounds each of phosphorus, potassium and sulfur per acre. At today's fertilizer prices, that makes those organic matter-fueled nutrients worth \$650 per acre, estimates Brown.
- ◆ By improving soil health through cover crops, diverse rotations, livestock disturbance and minimal tillage, Brown says he's increased organic matter levels to around 4 percent in his soils. According to his calculations, that means those top six inches of soil are holding \$2,600 worth of crop nutrients per acre. By the way, farmers like Brown are proving

that cover crops, those plantings that are made after the main cash crop is harvested, can pay off in the near term. The conventional wisdom is that small grains like rye may protect and build the soil, but offer little immediate economic payoff. But when livestock such as cattle are brought into the picture, they can add value to cover crops via grazing.

The connection between higher soil quality and good profits is also being noticed in the financial community. Fuhrer says that his local Farm Credit Services office reports anecdotally that farms that focus on building soil health are more prosperous.

Scientists and farmers say what we know about soil biology and the potential for improving soil quality would fit into a teaspoon. There *is* a lot to learn. For one thing, we need better ways of measuring soil quality and determining if the farm practices we are utilizing are degrading or improving it.

"The days of taking soil tests for N, P and K and looking at it as a chemistry test

are over," says Fuhrer. "We need to take a biology test."

We also need to hear more from farmers and natural resource professionals who have taken concrete, practical steps to improve soil quality, and are seeing real results. As with most innovative farming practices, the best ideas in the area of soil health and economics can be gotten from the people who are on the land every day. That's one reason LSP is co-sponsoring special soil health workshops and field days in September that will feature Jay Fuhrer, among others (see sidebar, page 26).

It's time to not only stop treating our soil like dirt, but to begin treating it like a living, self-sufficient organism that pays dividends long into the future. □

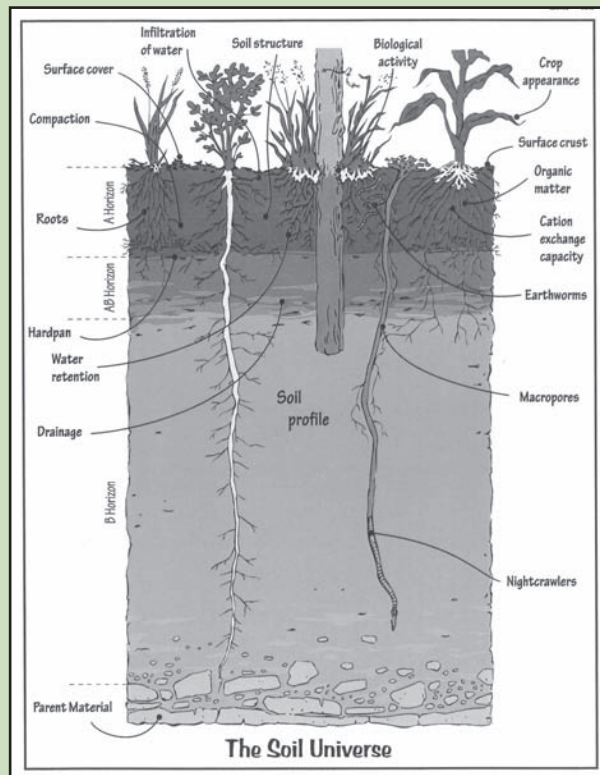
*Julia Ahlers Ness coordinates the Chippewa 10% Project. For more information, contact her at 320-269-2105 or janess@landstewardshipproject.org. More information is also available at <http://chippewa10.org>.*

## Monitoring soil health

→ Monitoring soil quality is a major component of the *Monitoring Tool Box*, a 161-page Land Stewardship Project resource. Developed by the Monitoring Team, a collaboration of farmers, scientists and natural resource professionals, the *Monitoring Tool Box* also provides practical, how-to information on monitoring quality of life issues, farm sustainability and financial data, as well as birds, frogs and toads, streams and pasture vegetation. This is a comprehensive, accessible guide for farmers and others trying to be intentional about why and how they manage their land. Packaged in a three-ring binder, the *Tool Box* was developed in the field over a three-year period and has been tested and refined by crop and livestock producers throughout the Midwest.

To order a copy and for more information, see [www.landstewardshipproject.org/mtb/lsp\\_toolbox.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/mtb/lsp_toolbox.html), or call LSP's Karen Benson or Caroline van Schaik at 507-523-3366.

→ To download a recent NRCS fact sheet on soil health, "Farming in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A practical Approach to Improve Soil Health," see [http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/management/files/21st\\_century\\_soil\\_health\\_tech\\_doc.pdf](http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/management/files/21st_century_soil_health_tech_doc.pdf).





## Turn Here Sweet Corn Organic Farming Works

By Atina Diffley

2012; 335 pages

University of Minnesota Press

www.upress.umn.edu

*Reviewed by Dana Jackson*

Last fall I saw an early review copy of *Turn Here Sweet Corn* lying in the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office. I picked it up and after a few pages, I didn't want to put it down.

The title was familiar. I knew the words were originally on the sign that invited people to turn in to Atina and Martin Diffley's Gardens of Eagan farm stand and buy organic vegetables, especially their famous sweet corn. But I also knew it as the title of a documentary film by Helen De Michiel that became a major organizing tool for LSP's Metro Farm Program in the 1990s.

The award-winning film, *Turn Here Sweet Corn*, focuses on the loss of farmland to suburban development. It features the Diffley farm near Eagan, Minn., south of Minneapolis, which was cleared to build a housing development and school when tax assessments for water and sewer lines forced the family to sell to developers. Five generations of Diffleys had enjoyed a diverse landscape of fields and natural areas with special names like Cottonwood Valley, Cherry Tree Hill and Fox's Grave.

More intensely than the film, Atina Diffley's memoir describes the personal agony of hearing bulldozers tear up the land, field-by-field, until only the market stand and house they lived in are left. They were forced to farm rented parcels, also slated for development, until they found land to buy in Eureka Township to relocate Gardens of Eagan. Her two children, Eliza and Maize, are traumatized as they watch their favorite places destroyed. The whole Diffley clan holds a wake for the land in the clearing where the original Diffley cabin stood. Shortly after the ceremony of remembering and mourning, all the mature oak trees in the clearing were cut down and burned, and this beloved place just disappeared.

The book covers much more of her life than this sad story. She writes in the first person, in the present tense, with a lot of dialogue, and the reader is quickly drawn into her emotionally engaging story. The

first part describes her childhood on a Wisconsin farm and her life in Milwaukee after leaving home at 17. She soon married, but found herself in the same subservient role to her husband that her mother and grandmother had filled in their marriages. After her divorce, she said: "I feel like I've been weeded, yanked out, my roots drying in the sun." She took her baby girl Eliza and her hammer dulcimer and went into voluntary exile in Ireland for four months so she could find herself.

Atina eventually connected with Martin Diffley, who had been growing and selling organic produce at his farm stand and in the Minneapolis Farmers' Market since 1973. Their relationship became a successful partnership in farming and marriage. They produced vegetables on the Diffley land until it was all taken for houses, and then continued on rented land until purchasing the Eureka Township farm five years later. It became a certified organic farm that employed crews of workers and supplied tons of produce to Twin Cities' food co-ops and restaurants each year.

I recommend this book to growers or aspiring growers and marketers of organic produce, and also to produce buyers for groceries, restaurants or institutional kitchens. Diffley's memoir illustrates what organic farming is, what makes it special. We learn about the ingenuity, creativity and patience it requires, the specific practices, yet the flexibility of organic systems. She replays conversations with Martin that reveal his knowledge about transitioning fields to organic, building soil, controlling weeds and building resiliency into the system to survive extreme weather events. Tucked into the narrative is a cornucopia of details about cultivating and marketing vegetables, as well as unique insights about relationships with produce buyers, crew members and the broader community.

But this is no organic farming and marketing textbook. It is beautiful, creative writing, filled with vivid descriptions and metaphors that seem to pour effortlessly out of this passionate author.

One of my favorite paragraphs:

"I am leaning back against the kale

field cottonwood, waiting for there to be enough light to pick. This time alone in the lush moment before dawn is the best part of my day. There is the tenseness of dawn building, as if the sun can't break through the horizon until the birds call it up. It starts with just one voice and quickly passes from branch to branch, a swelling excitement. I feel a vibration in my back, through the skin of the tree trunk. Even the grass under my bare feet seems to be waking up—part of the morning ceremony—a language older than words."

The memoir is a testimony to Atina's close relationship with the land she farms. Whether true or invented, happenings in the natural world that coincide with Atina's experiences dramatize her story. While walking through a brown corn field in November casually shelling an ear of corn and dropping kernels on the ground, a white egret suddenly swoops past, and she realizes that a seed has been planted within her, that she is pregnant. She tells an amazing story about coyotes circling around the house the night they move onto their new farm, then howling and jumping into the air snarling and glaring at the new inhabitants who have usurped their wild place. Whether this is real or magical realism, the imagery flows from the writer's imagination to enhance and beautify the narrative.

Drama and suspense enter the narrative when a company files a permit in 2005 to run an oil pipeline through the Diffley farm on its way from the tar sands in Canada. The proposed route cut a straight line through farmland, including seven Gardens of Eagan certified organic fields. Determined to prevent the loss of another farm, Diffley throws herself into this battle, working with an attorney and enlisting support and publicity from food co-ops, sustainable agriculture organizations and their members.

A brief postscript describes how the Gardens of Eagan business and equipment were sold in 2008 to the Wedge Food Co-op, which now manages it, and explains that the Diffleys now have a consulting business called Organic Works, LLC. I'm sorry the writer didn't provide more details about this part of her life. But now that Atina Diffley has found her writing voice through this engaging memoir, I suspect she will tell more of her story in the future to an eager audience of readers. □

*Dana Jackson recently retired from LSP after a quarter-century of service, during which she served as a board member, associate director and senior staff member.*



## Dirty Work The Story of Elsie's Farm

Directed by Deb Wallwork

2011; 50 minutes

Redeye Video

651-216-4610; redevideo@mac.com

*Reviewed by Brian DeVore*

The first indelible image in *Dirty Work: The Story of Elsie's Farm*, is the smile on Joni Cash's face as she holds up her filthy hands while planting on a dank spring day. It's a fitting way to begin Deb Wallwork's wonderful documentary about a year in the life of an organic vegetable farm in western Wisconsin. In the first few minutes of the film, Cash's sunny attitude, grounded in the practical details of raising food, is a bit of a contrast to her partner Don Robert's more big-picture view of what's happened to our food and farming system.

"We're making food, and we're passionate about it," Cash says with her trademark smile.

"Homo sapiens are done for—without the plant world we're finished," counters Roberts.

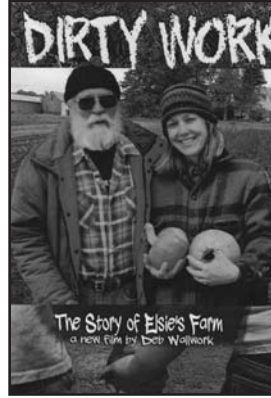
But as the film advances through the seasons, it's clear Roberts isn't as pessimistic as

all that. In fact, the 70-something farmer is taking part in what is arguably one of the most optimistic endeavors there is: planting, caring for and harvesting food crops for the 50 families that belong to the Elsie's Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation. It seems Roberts' optimism grows as high summer approaches and those vegetables planted during the cold spring reach their full glory.

Wallwork knows good images when she sees them, and her cameras dutifully pan gorgeous piles of tomatoes, cabbages and carrots. Food and the land it comes from is the connector here, as several of the CSA members make clear in on-camera interviews. But the people—farmers and eaters alike—who are drawn to that food and the soil it comes from are an important binding agent here as well.

"When you're doing something worthwhile, and you're doing something that has heart, you draw people to it," says Roberts at one point.

It's obvious Cash and Roberts enjoy the



CSA members as well as the young people who work on the farm. The feeling is mutual. "He's inspirational to be around," says one intern, referring to Roberts.

That's important, because Roberts is shadowed by "impermanence"—his own and the farm's. The climax of the film comes when he looks straight into the camera and announces solemnly: "We are really in a financial bind right now. We're trying to get the best ideas in the shortest amount of time." Suddenly, it's clear: as autumn closes in, this may actually be a film about the last year in the life of an organic farm.

But Cash and Roberts know better. Financial hardship may force Elsie's to be sold, but the philosophy that food and land can bring people together, making a tiny corner of the world a better place, will live on. Just as a summer garden is fleeting, so is the life of a farm or even the individual farmer. It's ideals that provide the continuity—along with a little bit of stubborn optimism.

The film's final moments show Cash and Roberts settling in on a downsized farm. The winter snows are deep, but another growing season is around the corner as Roberts repairs a broken wheelbarrow and sums up his willingness to start a new chapter: "Anyway, Don Quixote rides again, right?" □

*Brian DeVore is the editor of the Land Stewardship Letter.*

## Music for the Mountains A Benefit to Stop Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining

Various Artists

Executive Producer: Mark Utley

2011; 21 songs

*Reviewed by Dale Hadler*

On Feb. 12, 2011, a concert to benefit the fight against mountaintop coal removal was held at the historic Southgate House in Newport, Ken. What came out of that was *Music for the Mountains*, a 21-song compilation developed to raise money for the fight against mountaintop removal.

In this collection, artists from Kentucky, Alabama, Ohio, Tennessee and Indiana describe the struggle and lives of the people of one of the most impoverished areas of the United States—the Appalachian mountain

region. The songs describe the horrific toll that coal mining and specifically mountaintop removal take on the region and its people. It describes the health effects such as the cancer cluster depicted in the lyrics from "The Hand of Man," as well as the labor struggles for coal mine safety and worker rights

This disc is a compelling example of how musical storytelling can be used to explain and describe the importance of environmental and social justice — a practice rooted in the union songs of Utah Phillips, the Depression era songs of Woody Guthrie or John Prine's own Kentucky coal mining ballad "Paradise," an account of the destruction by coal mining of western Kentucky's Muhlenberg County and surrounding Green River Basin.

*Music for the Mountains* is part of a musical tradition that helps communicate the impact of many events and issues that are of political, social, environmental and historical importance to American culture. The songs on this disc will definitely contribute new and vibrant material to this tradition and will help enhance public understanding of a practice that permanently damages the land

• • •  
*White Star Holler was my home  
Shared the crops that we had grown  
Shared the water from our well  
Shared the life we loved so well  
Coal men brought the mountain down  
Leaked the poison underground  
Mother, neighbor, friend and son  
Cancer took them everyone*

—"The Hand of Man," by  
Magnolia Mountain

• • •  
and people of Appalachia. This is a practice that has resulted in the complete destruction of at least 500 mountains and 2,000 miles of streams, while causing incalculable health problems. It's a practice few of us understand, but that we all contribute to through our appetite for cheap energy to heat our homes and power our appliances. □

*Dale Hadler is a Land Stewardship Project member. The Music for the Mountains CD is available online at <http://ohiocitizen.org>. The cost is \$15, with proceeds benefiting anti-mountaintop removal efforts.*



LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT

## Membership Update

### Sustaining memberships—supporting family farmers & stewardship of the land for the long haul

By Abby Liesch

This spring, I had the chance to meet with Land Stewardship Project members throughout the state about current and upcoming initiatives. Three new pieces of work are taking shape right now. For one thing, LSP is working to find real and lasting solutions to the challenge of long-term access to land for people who want to farm. We are also identifying corporate power in our lives and meaningful ways to confront it, and promoting a health care system that puts people first. So it's a good time to get member feedback on the direction in which LSP's work is moving in. The discussions were inspiring and I learned a lot from LSP members old and new.

One of the main purposes of the visits was to build a monthly pledge base to support LSP's work now and in the future. Members are the core of all of LSP's work. They are who form our steering committees and board of directors, who lead on issues, who provide training and education through classes and field days, and who support the work financially.

Members are the source of LSP's creativity and power. As a membership-based organization, it's critical that we have the resources coming from our membership to move forward on the work at hand.

One of the best ways to support LSP is through a monthly pledge. Such pledges are exceedingly helpful because they provide the solid foundation of member financial support every month that we can rely on.

When issues arise unexpectedly, or new initiatives that LSP decides to move on are launched, that steady income can go directly to the work—or wherever it's needed the most. Membership support keeps LSP innovative, it helps LSP seize opportunities, and it truly makes us more effective. LSP's Farm Beginnings program is a case in point.

In the late 1980s, LSP members were leading organizing campaigns across the Midwest against life insurance corporations that were foreclosing on family farms. Not only were these corporations kicking people off the land, but once the farms were in their

control, they ripped out the conservation practices that were in place to protect the soil and water so they could rent the land to



**Dairy farmer Martin Jaus drank water out of a tile drainage outlet on his farm recently. The sustainable farming practices LSP members like the Jauses use are protecting our water and land resources for future generations. (photo by Judy Olausen)**

those intent on maximizing commodity crop production no matter what the costs imposed on the community.

As LSP members were organizing and winning key victories, stopping foreclosures and preserving conservation, they also said clearly, "We are going to keep fighting, but we need to know who we are fighting for. We need to get the next generation of farmers started now."

At the time, conventional wisdom said this wasn't possible. Tens of thousands of farmers had just been forced off the land during the Farm Crisis of the 1980s. In fact, there were those who believed that proclaiming there was a future in agriculture and encouraging people to get started farming was setting beginning farmers up to fail.

Yet LSP members were clear that this was a priority. With member support and a lot of ingenuity and hard work, we set forth to train the next generation of farmers through our Farm Beginnings program (see page 14).

Fast-forward to today: Minnesota is one

of a handful of states that can say it has more farmers than it did 10 years ago. LSP's farm training course has become a nationally recognized model and its curriculum is used by community-based organizations in seven states.

Furthermore, LSP played a leading role in the development, passage and implementation of legislation that established the first ever national Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program as part of the 2008 Farm Bill. That federal program is supporting effective community efforts across the country—providing training and education to people who want to farm.

This kind of organizing, from the ground up, is possible because of membership support. We don't always know the path that lies ahead, but when LSP begins a new organizing effort that is mission-oriented and led by members, we can invest in the initial organizing—and not let the opportunity slip away. Monthly pledges provide the bedrock of support from which LSP's work grows.

If your membership is due to renew, or if you are considering a gift to LSP, please consider giving a monthly pledge of \$10, \$20 or \$50 by June 30. It's simple to set up, it reduces mail (no renewal notices) and it's easy to change at any time. Simply attach a voided check or fill out your credit card information using the envelope in the center of this *Land Stewardship Letter*.

Thank you for being a member of LSP. □

*LSP membership associate Abby Liesch can be reached at 612-722-6377 or [aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org).*

### Volunteer for LSP

Donating your time to the Land Stewardship Project is a very valuable gift. Volunteering is a great way to stay connected to the work LSP is doing to build community based food systems, help new farmers get started and shape policies that support family farms and a healthy environment.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact:

→ **Lewiston, Minn.** — Karen Benson, 507-523-3366, [lpse@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:lpse@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **Montevideo, Minn.** — Terry VanDerPol, 320-269-2105, [ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:ttaylor@landstewardshipproject.org).

→ **Twin Cities** — Abby Liesch, 612-722-6377, [aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org). □

# In memory & in honor...

The Land Stewardship Project is grateful to have received the following gifts made in the name of loved ones over the past few months:

## *In memory of Tom Taylor*

- ◆ Dana Jackson
- ◆ Jen Cantine
- ◆ Arden Miller

## *In honor of Carl Johnson*

- ◆ Mary Elise Miller

## *In honor of Dee Steil & her love for gardening*

- ◆ Mary Elise Miller

## *In honor of Valentine Bauer*

- ◆ Mary Elise Miller

## *In memory of Mark & Katie McManus*

- ◆ Richard & Marjorie McManus

## *In memory of Gary Kubly*

- ◆ Pat Kubly
- ◆ Vicki & Keith Poier

For details on donating to the Land Stewardship Project in the name of someone, contact Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377 or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org).

## Brasa benefit for LSP June 17

This Father's Day, tell dad to take a break from the grill and head over to Brasa Minneapolis. On Sunday, June 17, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Brasa will be donating all proceeds from dine-in and carry-out orders to the Land Stewardship Project. Brasa is at 600 East Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55414 ([www.brasa.us](http://www.brasa.us)).

Brasa owner and James Beard Award winning chef Alex Roberts is well known for his Creole-styled dishes and commitment to family farms and stewardship of the land.

"As a chef, I value sustainable family farms for the great tasting food they grow," says Roberts. "As a father, I value them because they nourish my children and care for the land for generations to come. So on Father's Day all the proceeds from sales at Brasa Minneapolis will be donated to LSP, an organization dedicated to advancing sustainable, family farm agriculture."

LSP staff and members will be at the restaurant during the day to talk with people about the organization's work, including new farmer training and education, rural organizing, community-based food systems development and advancing policy that supports family farms and sustainable agriculture.

For more information, contact LSP at 612-722-6377 or e-mail [megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org). □

## Get current with

**LIVE  WIRE**

Sign up for the *LIVE-WIRE* to get monthly e-mail updates from the Land Stewardship Project. You can sign up at [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) or by e-mailing [aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org) and writing in the subject line, "Subscribe LIVE-WIRE." □

## LSP on the social media circuit

LSP is now in more places online. Connect with LSP through *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter*.

Direct any questions about LSP's social media initiatives to Abby Liesch ([aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:aliesch@landstewardshipproject.org))

or Megan Smith ([megans@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:megans@landstewardshipproject.org)).

You can call them at 612-722-6377. □



## Listen in on the voices of the land

The Land Stewardship Project's award-winning *Ear to the Ground* podcast showcases the voices of farmers, eaters, scientists and activists who are working to create a more sustainable food and farming system. We now have almost 120 episodes online and have organized them by category, ranging from "beginning farmers" and "farming with the wild" to "grassroots people power" and "global ag." To listen in, go to [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) and click on the **Podcast** link. □

## Support LSP in your workplace

The Land Stewardship Project is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which is a coalition of 20 environmental organizations in Minnesota that offer workplace giving as an option in making our communities better places to live. Together member organizations of the Minnesota Environmental Fund work to:

- promote the sustainability of our rural communities and family farms;
- protect Minnesotans from health hazards;
- educate citizens and our youth on conservation efforts;
- preserve wilderness areas, parks, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

You can support LSP in your workplace by giving through the Minnesota Environmental Fund.

Options include giving a designated amount through payroll deduction, or a single gift. You may also choose to give to the entire coalition or specify the organization of your choice within the coalition, such as the Land Stewardship Project. If your employer does not provide this opportunity, ask the person in charge of workplace giving to include it. For more information, contact LSP's Mike McMahon at 612-722-6377, or [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org).




**MINNESOTA**  
*Environmental Fund*



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## STEWARDSHIP CALENDAR

→ **JUNE 12**—Event honoring Dana Jackson's service to LSP, sustainable ag & the environment, 6:30 p.m.-10 p.m., Minnesota Humanities Center, Saint Paul; Contact: LSP, 612-722-6377

→ **JUNE 14**—CSA vegetable cooking class with chefs Dick Trotter & Lisa Scribner, St. Paul, Minn.; Contact: Carolyn Enestvedt, 651-645-1996; [carolyn.e@usfamily.net](mailto:carolyn.e@usfamily.net)

→ **JUNE 17**—Fundraiser for LSP at Brasa Restaurant, Minneapolis (see page 31)

→ **JUNE 23**—Cedar Summit Milkapalooza, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., New Prague, Minn.; Contact: 612-819-1924; [www.cedarsummit.com](http://www.cedarsummit.com)

→ **JUNE 24-JULY 1**—Permaculture design certification course, Mondovi, Wis.; Contact: <http://crazyroosterfarm.com>; 715-946-3604

→ **JULY**—LSP Twin Cities summer potluck/cookout/celebration, Minneapolis (details to be announced); Contact: Mike McMahon, 612-722-6377; [mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:mcmahon@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **JULY 11**—SWROC organic crops field day, Lambertton, Minn.; Contact: <http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu>; 507-752-7372

→ **JULY 14**—SFA Festival of Farms, various Minn. locations; Contact: [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org); 320-543-3394

→ **JULY 15**—Workshop on saving labor on the market farm, Rock Spring Farm, Decorah, Iowa; Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html); 715-778-5775

→ **JULY 19**—Organic dairy tour, Flavor Ridge Farm, Altura, Minn.; Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html); 715-778-5775

→ **JULY 20-22**—Seed Savers Conf., featuring Frances Moore Lappé, with LSP's Dana Jackson presenting, Decorah, Iowa; Contact: 563-382-5990; [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)

→ **JULY 21**—LSP Farm Beginnings field day on producing quality grass-finished

beef, Grass Run Farms, Dorchester, Iowa (see page 17)

→ **JULY 21**—LSP Farm Beginnings skills session on raspberries & currants, Marine on St. Croix, Minn.; (see page 17)

→ **JULY 22**—Dinner on the Farm, Common Harvest Farm, Osceola, Wis.; Contact: <http://dinneronthefarm.com/2012-events/>

→ **AUG. 1**—Deadline for 2012-2013 LSP Farm Beginnings course (see page 14)

→ **AUG. 3**—LSP Farm Beginnings beginning farmer troubleshooting field day, Seven Songs Farm, Kenyon, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **AUG. 7**—Organic Dairy Day featuring farmer/author Francis Thicke, WCROC, Morris, Minn.; Contact: Bradley Heins, 320-589-1711; <http://wcroc.cfans.umn.edu>

→ **AUG. 10**—LSP Farm Beginnings skills session on value-added processing, Backyard Grocery, Bayport, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **AUG. 11**—Minnesota Garlic Festival, Hutchinson, Minn.; Contact: [www.mngarlicfest.com](http://www.mngarlicfest.com); 320-543-3394

→ **AUG. 11**—In Her Boots: Sustainable Ag for Women, By Women, La Valle, Wis.; Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html); 715-778-5775

→ **AUG. 12**—Dinner on the Farm, Hidden Stream Farm, Elgin, Minn.; portion of the proceeds benefit LSP (see July 22)

→ **AUG. 16**—Field day on perennial organic fruit production, Blue Fruit Farm, Winona, Minn.; Contact: [www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/fd.html); 715-778-5775

→ **AUG. 18**—LSP Farm Beginnings workshop on vegetable diseases & weeds, Prairie Drifter Farm, Litchfield, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **AUG. 19**—LSP Blufflands Region summer celebration/picnic/pizza oven event, Suncrest Gardens Farm, Cochrane, Wis.; Contact: 507-523-3366; [lpse@landstewardshipproject.org](http://lpse@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **AUG. 19**—Dinner on the Farm, Big River Farms, Marine on St. Croix, Minn. (see

July 22)

→ **AUG. 21-22**—Tri-State Conservation Grazing workshop, Hankinson, N. Dak., [www.ag.ndsu.edu/2012conservationgrazingworkshop](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/2012conservationgrazingworkshop); 651-259-5014

→ **AUG. 25**—LSP Farm Beginnings tour of diverse grass-based systems, Prairie Horizons Farm, Starbuck, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **AUG. 25-26**—BING & CRAFT Young Farmer Gathering, Caledonia, Ill.; Contact: [www.biodynamics.com/bing](http://www.biodynamics.com/bing); 262-649-9212

→ **AUG. 26**—Dinner on the Farm, Laughing Loon Farms, Northfield, Minn. (see July 22)

→ **SEPT. 5**—LSP Farm Beginnings troubleshooting field day, Bossy Acres, Dayton, Minn. (see page 17)

→ **SEPT. 21**—LSP soil health workshop, Morris, Minn., & via video link (see page 26)

→ **SEPT. 22**—LSP soil health field day, southeast & western Minn. (see page 26)

→ **SEPT. 23**—Dinner on the Farm, Riverbend Farm, Delano, Minn. (see July 22)

→ **OCT. 27**—1st 2012-2013 session of Farm Beginnings Morris, Minn., class (see page 14)

→ **NOV. 3**—1st 2012-2013 session of Farm Beginnings River Falls, Wis., class (see page 14)

→ **NOV. 4**—LSP Farm-Art-Bowl Farm Beginnings fundraiser, 5 p.m.-8 p.m., Bryant-Lake Bowl, Minneapolis, Minn.; Contact: Nick Olson, LSP, 320-269-2105; [nicko@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:nicko@landstewardshipproject.org)

→ **DEC. 4**—Wintering strategies on a grass-based dairy, 1 p.m., Bonnie & Vance Haugen farm, Canton, Minn.; Contact: 507-743-8326

→ **DEC. 12-13**—Midwest Value Added Ag Conf., featuring Laura Jackson, John Ikerd & Francis Thicke, La Crosse, Wis.; Contact: 715-579-5098; [www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html](http://www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html)

Check [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org) for the latest on upcoming events.